

LUNCH WITH LYDIA

## Inside Kramer's mansion (and mind)

Thomas Kramer, the man who has been called everything from wunderkind stock trader to visionary developer to rapist to Nazi to the devil incarnate, is in the kitchen of his Star Island mansion, making open-faced Reuben sandwiches for lunch.

He's hyper-focused on stacking the Swiss cheese atop corned beef and sauerkraut. And you're grateful for this moment, the eye of the storm in an otherwise manic afternoon.

One minute, the guy credited with helping to turn the slum that was South Pointe



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into one of the most coveted condo collections in Florida is screaming with laughter: "This is the panic room. See the guns in there? If something happens I'll come out like John Wayne. Actually, I'll be s----- in my pants waiting for the cops to come. Ha-ha-ha!"

The next he's just screaming.

He's showing you the

storage facility that also serves as a studio for artists he hires to turn his colorful visions into realities, such as the recent addition to his gym: A painting on the ceiling depicting his trainer. She's naked, ripped and holding back a giant, angry bull. Yes, the bull is Kramer. He's a double-Taurus, after all. And he's seeing red right now because put away in storage, along with the brass coffin he special-ordered for himself back when he was "dark and depressed," are three ancient gateways he



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ARTIFACTS OF HIS LIFE: Thomas Kramer in his bedroom.

•TURN TO LUNCH, 11M

LUNCH WITH LYDIA

## A peek inside the mansion, mind of Thomas Kramer

•LUNCH, FROM 1M

picked up on a trip to India. He wants to use those carved doors as frames for big mirrors. In June he asked his staff to make this happen.

"How difficult can it be? Nobody leaves today without a confirmed order that I paid with a credit card for three mirrors," he roars at an assistant.

Then he continues charging across his two-acre property, excitedly putting on a show-and-tell: Here's the guesthouse, where Madonna, Kevin Costner, Eddie Murphy and others have slept. And here's his famed wine cellar, filled with millions of dollars worth of Lafites and Latours. Alas, the hard-partying Kramer has been sober for 20 months.

The slightest whiff of booze, even the really good stuff, makes his stomach turn now, he says. Kramer, TK to his friends and hangers-on, arrived in South Beach in the early 1990s after a successful run on Wall Street. Armed with his stepfather-in-law's cash, he snapped up 80 acres in South Pointe, battling city officials and residents who worried he would edge out low-income families and retirees with his plans of erecting a mini metropolis.

His German accent prompted some to call him a Nazi. And his party exploits, along with accusations of sexual harassment and worse, had some folks saying he was the devil himself. Which is why, in the fall of 1993, when he opened a nightclub at 54 Ocean Dr., he called it Hell and designed it around a theme of the seven deadly sins. The place opened to fanfare and fizzled within three months.

But in 1995, Kramer built the mixed-use office building at 404 Washington Ave. with its landmark, lighted glass-brick tower and China Grill as its star tenant. And a year later he built Portofino Tower, a 48-story residential building on the tip of South Beach. But perhaps he takes a tad too much credit for developing many of the other high-rises that have sprung up since, including Icon and Apogee.

"They are on what originally was his land, which we bought from him when he ran into financial trouble. It wasn't a fire sale," says Jorge Perez, head of the Related Group, which did build Icon and Apogee. "We also came in as partners when he ran into trouble with Portofino. He was a good partner. He's a guy who takes risks. And he had the vision to get all of that land zoned and under one ownership when nobody else saw what South Pointe could become."

STAR ISLAND

Kramer also picked up 18 of the 20 lots on Star Island, rehabbing the rundown millionaire's paradise and building himself a Mediterranean-style crib facing South Pointe. The mosaic in the pool and other touches were the work of the late Wallace Tutt, designer of Gianni Versace's Ocean Drive palazzo and a buddy of Kramer's.

Eventually you find yourself in the dining room, where the long sturdy table features a stripper pole embedded at either end. "After



PATRICK FARRELL/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

POP ART: Thomas Kramer in a guest room at his Star Island home.

some more.

There are lion rugs and bear skin rugs and all manner of taxidermied things. Including a giraffe head, impossibly long neck jutting surreally from a wall above a central staircase. There's a German shepherd sitting at attention near the front door.

"These are just things I buy," Kramer says. "I don't believe in killing animals. And no, that was never my dog. A big dog fits in this big house. But I'm not a good poop collector."

Finally, you've reached his infamous sex lair of a bedroom, where he keeps whips and riding crops near the bed. Also close are his teddy bears, literally his boyhood chums, one of them looking bald and mangy from so many washings. He keeps baby blankets around, too, the kind that have plush animal heads attached to one corner.

He can't stand cold air blowing into his ears, so when he puts his head down on his pillow, he covers the exposed ear with a baby blanket. Can't sleep without it. Even on airplanes.

There's always a baby blanket in his TV room, too, where he takes afternoon naps. "Touch it," he says handing you his downstairs blankie. "Feel it. It's so soft. It's a little goat."

Back in the bedroom, things are decidedly less tender. There's a sign on the door alerting visitors to 24-hour surveillance cameras. He takes his dates to the sign and makes them read it out loud, he says.

"If I don't show this to you I get accused of invasion of privacy. But with the cameras on you can't f--- with me and say what we did was not consensual."

Kramer, 54, likes to entertain girls by the limo-full. Group gropes back at 5 Star Island? Why not? But his reputation goes far beyond that of a high-spirited playboy.

Just a sampling: In 1999, he was charged in London with raping his secretary.

He claimed it was consensual sex. Six days before trial, she decided not to testify and Kramer walked. In 2007, Kramer was arrested while at a party at New York's Rainbow Room after a 13-year-old boy came out of the restroom saying Kramer had fondled him. Several

case was dismissed. But imagine the chagrin of long-time friend Ivana Trump, who was Kramer's date to the party and had to find her own way home that night.

Just a couple of weeks after that arrest, Kramer was served with a civil suit filed by Abigail Adams Brzezinski, who claimed he grabbed her right breast during a Halloween party at Lincoln Road's Quattro restaurant. The case went before a jury and ended recently in a mistrial.

"The lawyer for the woman inappropriately inferred to the jury that Mr. Kramer had made an offer to settle the matter for a substantial amount of money. Totally false," says attorney Richard Sharpstein, who represented Kramer.

"He has had the misfortune of coming into contact with more than the normal share of gold-diggers, women who take advantage of a chance meeting or a short relationship and try to cash in as so-called victims," Sharpstein says. "I can tell you that I have represented Mr. Kramer for about two decades on quite a few matters, and he's never lost a legal case or been convicted on any of the allegations."

Right. But what girl in her right mind would read a sign warning that the evening's antics will be taped — and still march into Kramer's chambers?

"If you have a problem with it, then don't come in here," Kramer says. "There's the door. Bye-bye. I don't need you to stay. I have enough other girls. That's

why the whirlpool has four or five seats."

But you'll give him points for having the sense of humor to send his overnight guests home with parting gifts, namely, T-shirts that read "Good girls go to heaven. Bad girls go to 5 Star Island." On the back: "And all I got was this lousy T-shirt."

But he would give up the party if only his ex-wife would take him back, he says. "I would marry her again tomorrow. She left me for a guy 10 centimeters shorter and 10 years younger," Kramer says in a suddenly sober tone.

He and Cathrine Burda (her father's family runs a German publishing empire) were married in 1988 and divorced in 1996. They have a daughter, Joya, 19, living in a separate apartment on the premises with Daddy while she attends Miami-Dade College. Cathrine remains a friend and is a regular houseguest, Kramer says.

THE STEP-DAD

One of the best and worst things that came out of their marriage was Kramer's tight friendship and business association with Burda's stepfather, Siegfried Otto.

In 1991, Otto gave Kramer \$145 million to invest in South Beach. But by 1995, the two were entering into a settlement agreement in which Kramer paid back an initial \$20 million and was to make subsequent payments. In 1996, Kramer sued in Switzerland to get out of the agreement, saying the money was intended as a gift.

The court ruled against Kramer, and Otto's heirs (he

died in 1997) sought to make the judgment stick in the United States. They eventually succeeded. Kramer appealed. The case rages on, but Kramer says he's finally close to winning.

"It has been 17 long years. But guess who is now my crown witness? Otto's son, stating that every word I am saying is true," Kramer says. But the legal wrangling and the frozen assets that came with it took their toll.

"I came close to losing this house. About four or five years ago there was supposed to be an auction on the courthouse steps at 9 o'clock. My neighbors were already standing around when my lawyer managed at the last minute to get the court to release \$4.6 million in funds so that I could pay my taxes. Everything was already out of my house and in containers going to Abu Dhabi."

Twenty months ago, before Kramer went to Mexico for a week of rehab involving the hallucinogenic drug Ibogaine, he was at his most self-destructive, he says.

"I was ready to go. I was thinking, 'I'm never going to win this big case. Everything is against me. My wife is never coming back to me...' But I went to Mexico and the first thing that happens during the treatment is that I see myself falling out of my

mother's womb. Then I'm having all these conflicts with my grandfather, who died 30 years ago and never gave me any recognition. You go through all of the bad experiences in your life. When you come out, you're cured of your issues. And I can't touch alcohol anymore. I'm clean and healthier than I have ever been. And I wake up wanting to hug and kiss the whole world."

Does this mean he might give up the party altogether? "Now I do more quality partying. I remember everyone that I'm with, for one thing."

Knocking around his 29,000-square-foot property on those days when there's no one else around — but for his 18 staffers, that is — does it get lonely?

"Why do you think I have so many dinner parties? I need a woman who is a real partner, not someone who is only demanding from me. Someone to share not only the fun but also the responsibilities. Now it's all on me. I run the company. I'm the PR guy. I run my daughter's education, make sure the tutor comes, make sure the dog trainer teaches her puppy not to poop in the house. If I find the right partner, I'll even be the housewife. I'll organize you the best dinner parties."