



Photos: Dimitri Aspinall for SWAGGER

KINGS OF SWAGGER

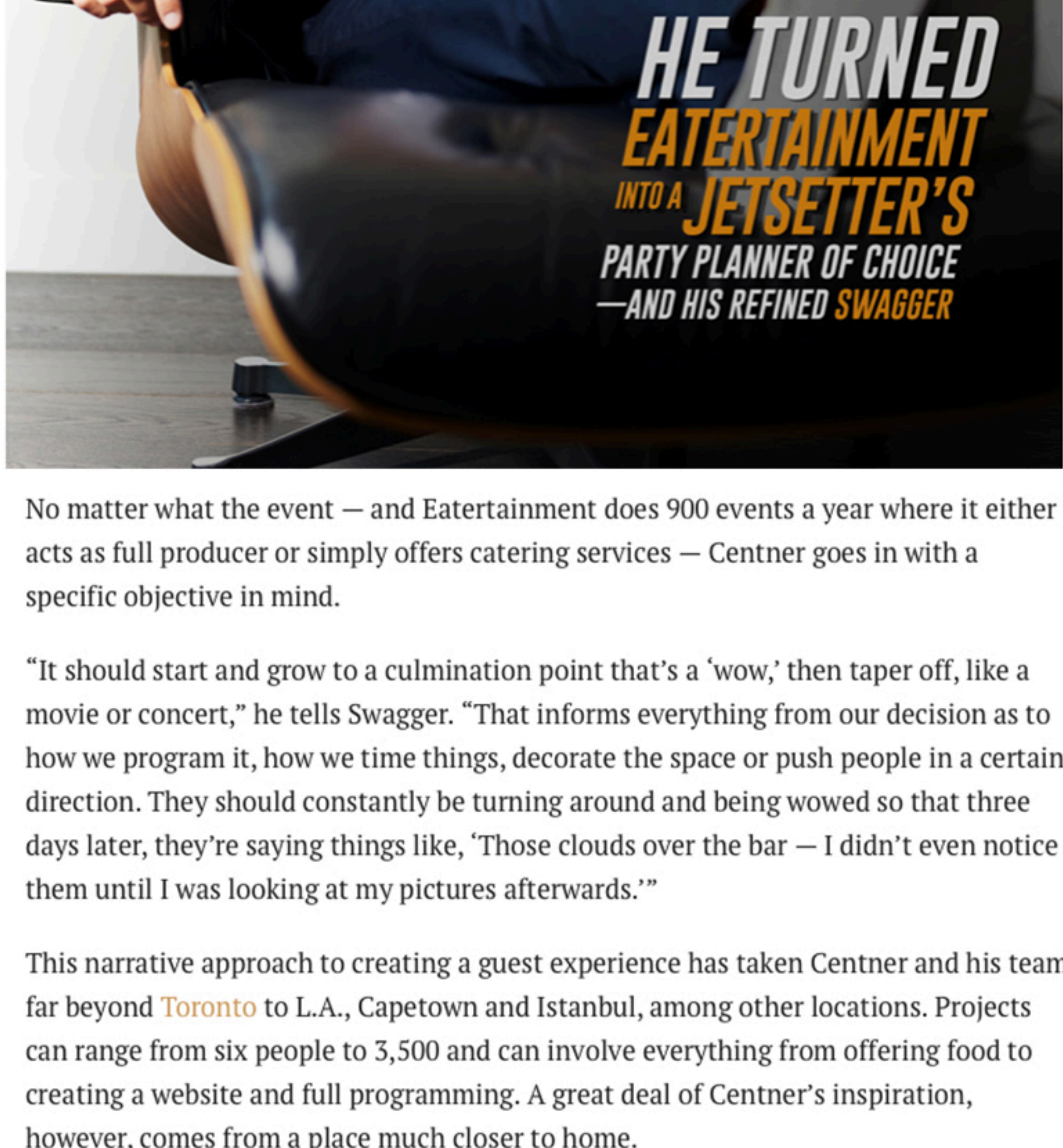
#KingsofSwagger: How Sebastien Centner turned Eatertainment into the Jetsetter's Party Planner of Choice

By [Shane Schick](#)

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It was a private party for more than 350 people in the posh Muskoka district, so of course there was a car valet. But there was also a boat valet. And a *waterplane* valet. Guests needed these options so they could arrive with ease and focus on the 25 foot tall DJ booth wrapped in balloons and the concert featuring Canadian rockers 54-40 later that night.

August is normally supposed to be a slow month for Sebastien Centner, but the CEO of Toronto-based **Eatertainment** said the Muskoka party took seven months of planning and involved building a concert venue on the property of his client (who he wouldn't name). Just two weeks later he was helping a tech client in California with three different parties during a conference, including a closing event where rapper Flo Rida performed.

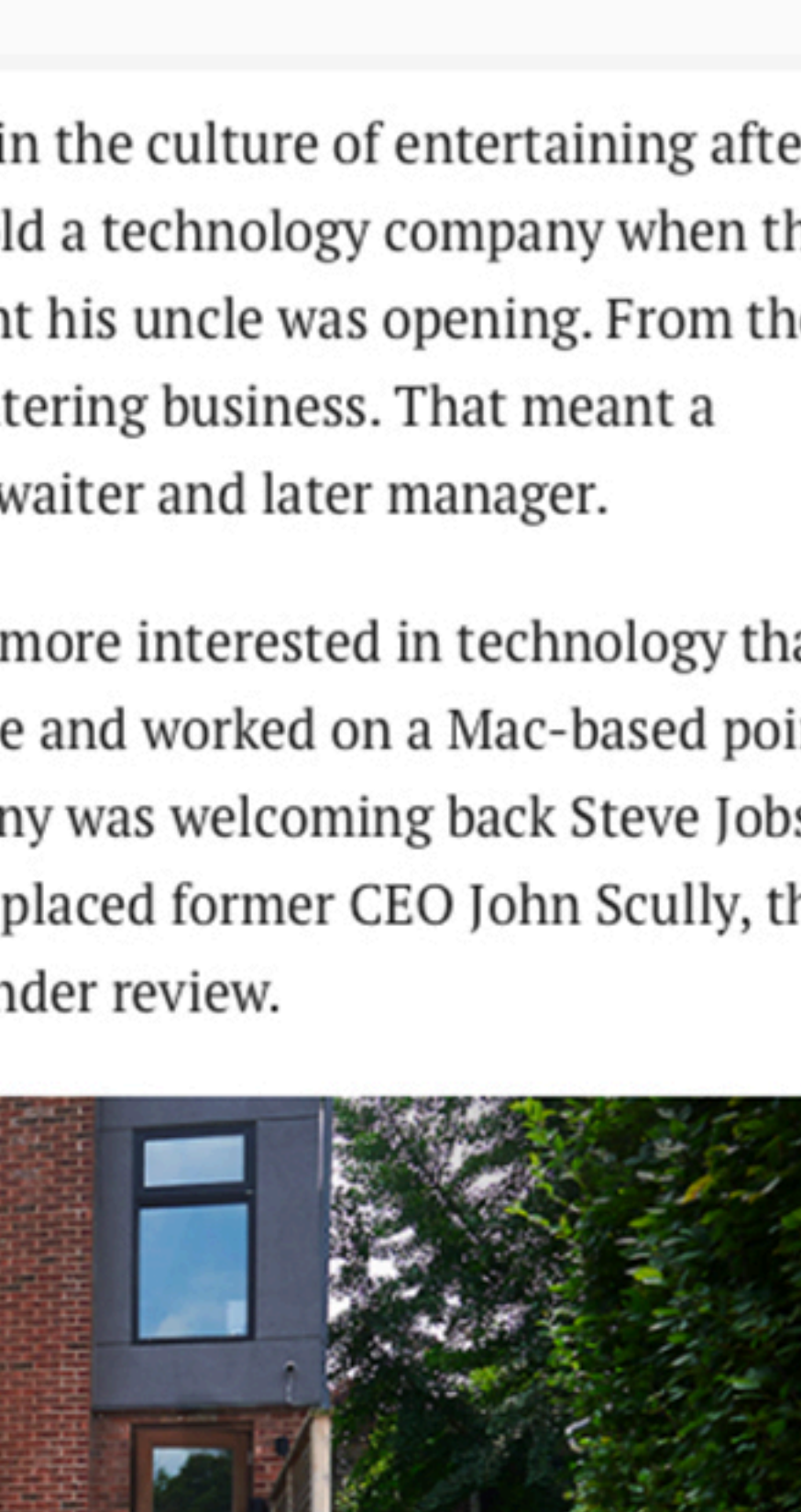
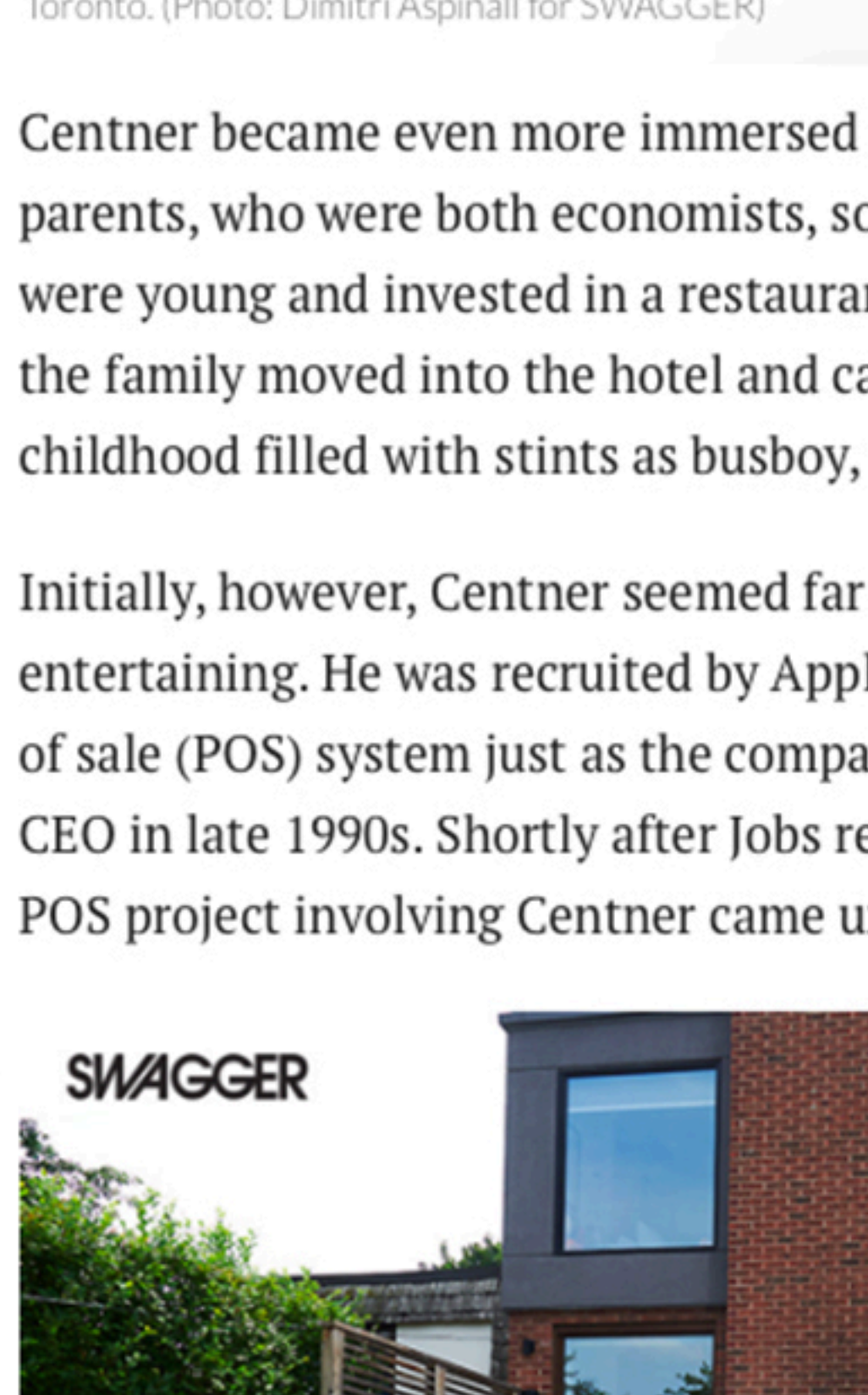


No matter what the event — and Eatertainment does 900 events a year where it either acts as full producer or simply offers catering services — Centner goes in with a specific objective in mind.

"It should start and grow to a culmination point that's a 'wow,' then taper off, like a movie or concert," he tells Swagger. "That informs everything from our decision as to how we program it, how we time things, decorate the space or push people in a certain direction. They should constantly be turning around and being wowed so that three days later, they're saying things like, 'Those clouds over the bar — I didn't even notice them until I was looking at my pictures afterwards.'"

This narrative approach to creating a guest experience has taken Centner and his team far beyond **Toronto** to L.A., Capetown and Istanbul, among other locations. Projects can range from six people to 3,500 and can involve everything from offering food to creating a website and full programming. A great deal of Centner's inspiration, however, comes from a place much closer to home.

"My mother was the ultimate entertainer — she was always throwing birthday parties, going away parties, everything she could," he recalled. There's a slogan we took from her, which was, 'Our door only opens inward.' That was part of the culture I grew up with."



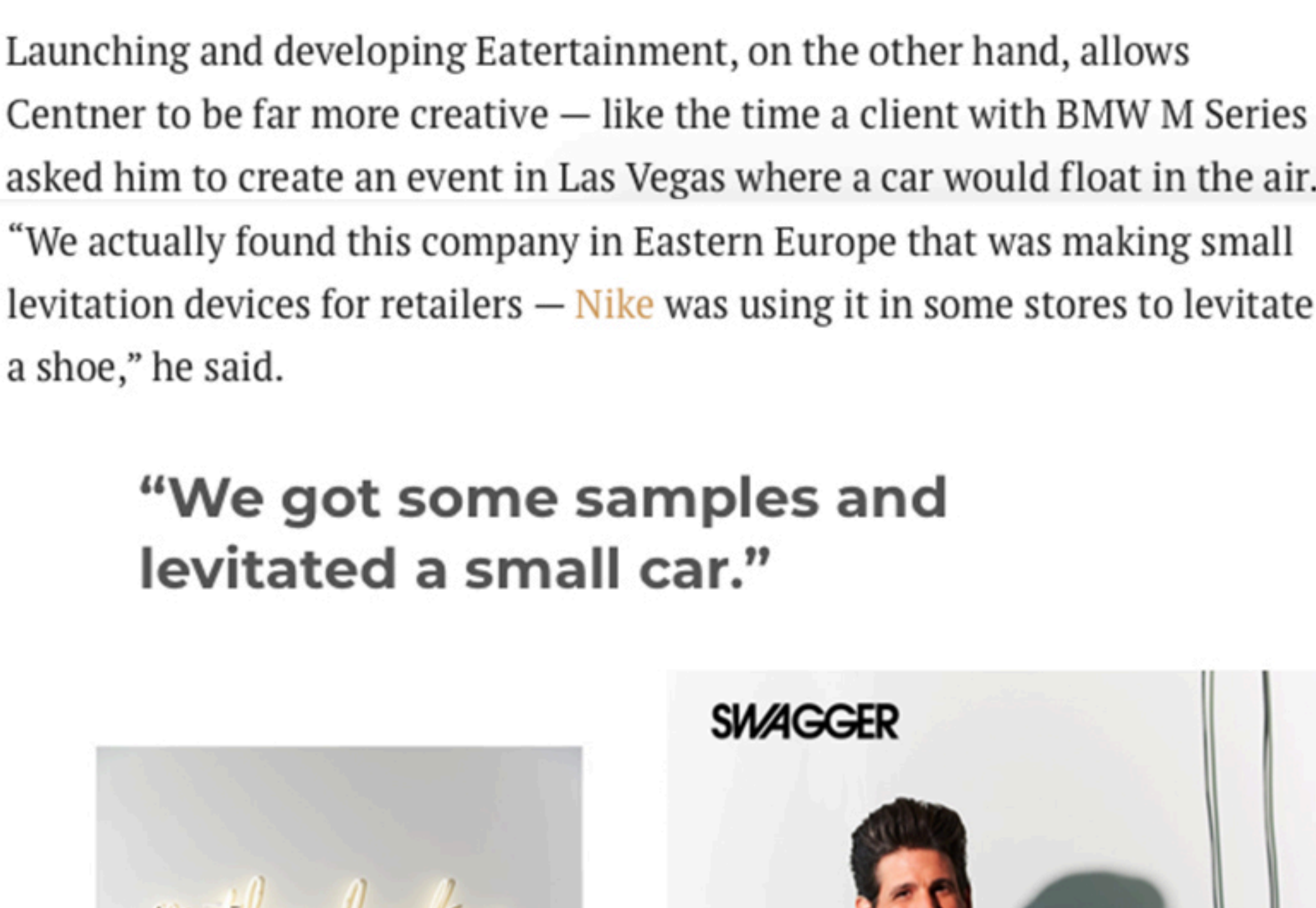
Power Couple, Sebastien and Sheila Centner in their open concept kitchen/living space of their home in Toronto. (Photo: Dimitri Aspinall for SWAGGER)



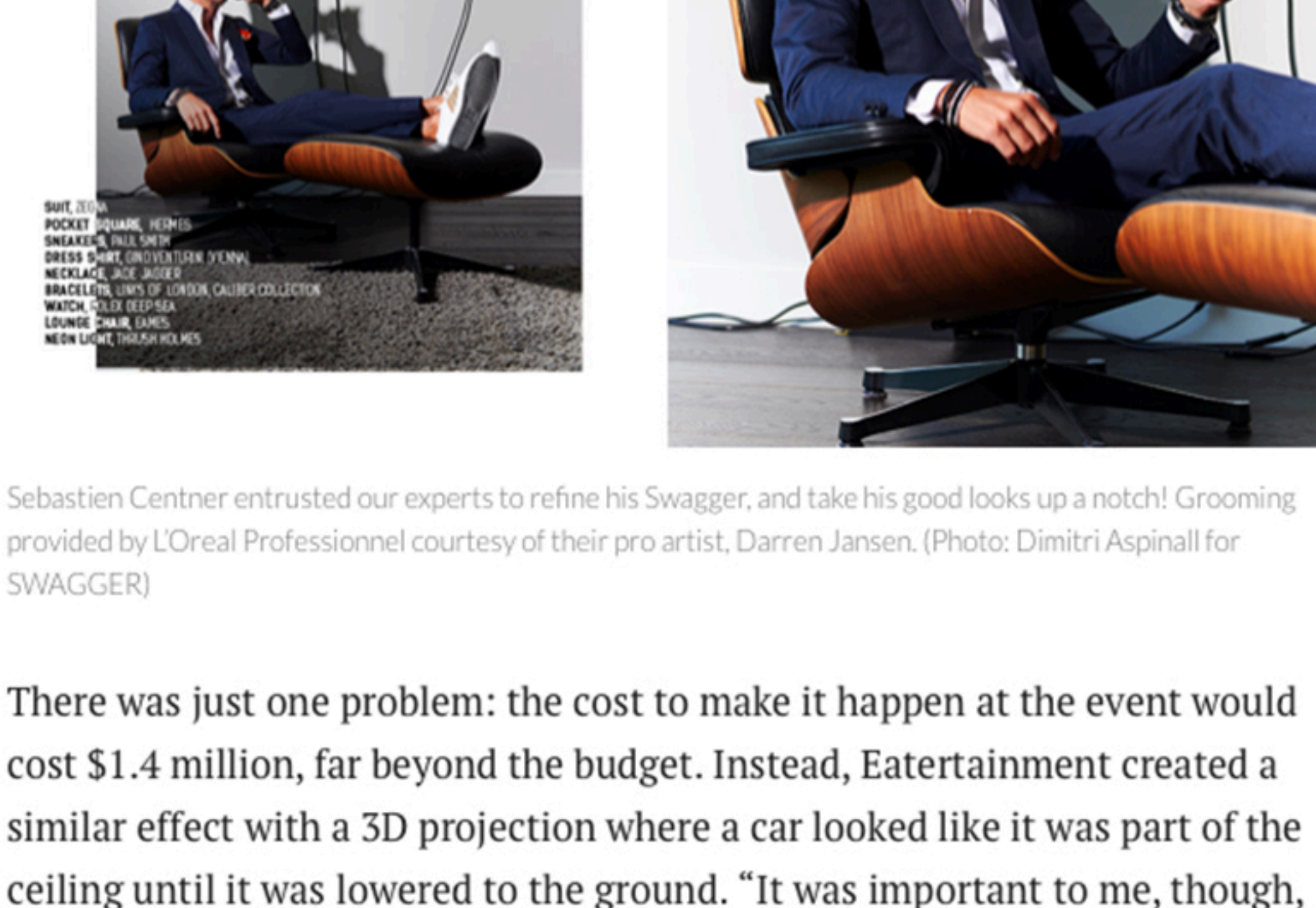
Power Couple, Sebastien and Sheila Centner in their open concept kitchen/living space of their home in Toronto. (Photo: Dimitri Aspinall for SWAGGER)

Centner became even more immersed in the culture of entertaining after his parents, who were both economists, sold a technology company when they were young and invested in a restaurant his uncle was opening. From there, the family moved into the hotel and catering business. That meant a childhood filled with stints as busboy, waiter and later manager.

Initially, however, Centner seemed far more interested in technology than entertaining. He was recruited by Apple and worked on a Mac-based point of sale (POS) system just as the company was welcoming back Steve Jobs as CEO in late 1990s. Shortly after Jobs replaced former CEO John Scully, the POS project involving Centner came under review.



Sebastien Centner's home is literally built for entertaining, seen here setup for entertaining in his backyard. (Photo: Dimitri Aspinall for SWAGGER)



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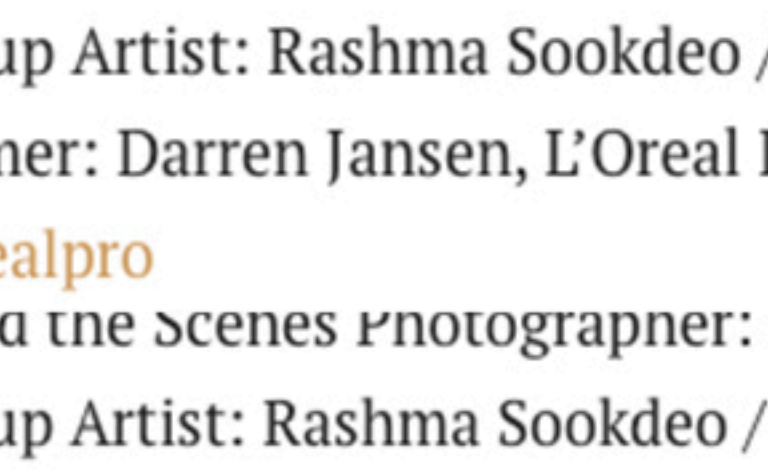
"I remember he asked how many units we thought we were going to sell," he said. "We might have said 50,000, or 100,000. Literally, the number he was looking for was more like 10 million. He said, 'Okay, we're cutting that program.'"

Suddenly finding himself adrift, Sebastien Centner returned to help the family business with marketing.

"I realized pretty quickly I didn't love the **restaurant** business," he said. "It just feels tedious do the same thing night after night. It's like Groundhog Day to me."

Launching and developing Eatertainment, on the other hand, allows Centner to be far more creative — like the time a client with BMW M Series asked him to create an event in Las Vegas where a car would float in the air. "We actually found this company in Eastern Europe that was making small levitation devices for retailers — **Nike** was using it in some stores to levitate a shoe," he said.

"We got some samples and levitated a small car."



Sebastien Centner entrusted our experts to refine his Swagger, and take his good looks up a notch! Grooming provided by L'Oreal Professionnel courtesy of their pro artist, Darren Jansen. (Photo: Dimitri Aspinall for SWAGGER)

There was just one problem: the cost to make it happen at the event would cost \$1.4 million, far beyond the budget. Instead, Eatertainment created a similar effect with a 3D projection where a car looked like it was part of the ceiling until it was lowered to the ground. "It was important to me, though, that we showed we were willing to figure it out, that we were going to find a way to make it possible, no matter how challenging the request," he said.

As Eatertainment grows, Centner doesn't just respond to client's whims but pursues his own ideas with equal passion — and in a surprisingly hands-on way. He recalled a recent event where he had imagined a four foot long service tray fashioned out of a plank of oak with spikes based on eight-inch dowels coming out, which had little cones where **canapes** floated inside.

"I'm not that handy — but with the help of a drill and some wood and after building a prototype of the tray, we did it," he said. "I'm not doing it to save a couple hundred bucks. I do it because when that tray floats through the room, that gives me a high. It brings that spirit of celebration, and celebrating is the essence of what we do."

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Credits:

Photographer: Dimitri Aspinall / [@dimitri.aspinall](#)
 Creative/Editorial Director & Producer: Steven Branco / [@chiefswaggerofficer](#)

Wardrobe Stylist: Bismark Adomako / [@mr_adomako](#)
 Photographer's Assistant: Rauwshan Mahanaim / [@rauwshan](#)

Production Assistant: Edward Fung / [@dapperchapsto](#)
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