

Opening Act

The centerpiece of the BET Awards weekend was an opulent pre-party for 350 at Drago Centro.

LOS ANGELES Like the show they celebrated, the flurry of parties around the Black Entertainment Television Awards on June 28 was both haunted and energized by the memory of the late Michael Jackson. BET's artists and colleagues reveled and remembered the King of Pop at many of the more than two dozen bashes around town, which kicked off on June 24 and included a tribute to Keri Hilson (who went on to win for best new artist) at a private dinner hosted by Timbaland and Polow Da Don, produced by New York-based MVD Inc.

With budget concerns limiting BET's post-party to an internal wrap bash at Mihaus, revelers leaving the show spread out among six parties, including Interscope Geffen A&M Records' "Crème of the Crop" dinner at Mr. Chow in Beverly Hills; artist/producer Ryan Leslie's bash at Les Deux in Hollywood; and Jamie Foxx's celebration at Guys & Dolls in L.A.

But the weekend's centerpiece was BET's lush pre-party on June 27, which was hosted by the network's new president and C.E.O., Debra L. Lee, and designed by Washington-based André

Wells in collaboration with Lee's special assistant, Bobette Gillette, and BET's director of special events, Sarah Storrs.

The setting was the cavernous office floor above downtown L.A.'s Drago Centro restaurant, which became a sumptuous nightclub space in hues of crimson, fuchsia, and gray. After cocktails and hors d'oeuvres in the earth-toned restaurant downstairs, about 350 guests entered beneath a lavish ruby velvet curtain that hinted at the next evening's proceedings onstage. A dozen clear, black, and red chandeliers sparkled above a partyscape of contrasting textures—shimmery gray tablecloths, faux croc-covered chairs, and velvety banquettes and pillows. Roses hung suspended in clear glass floor vases, and mixed with pink peonies and fuchsia orchids on tables, which were set with crimson glass chargers and red-rimmed goblets.

As guests were nibbling on braised lamb with truffled mashed potatoes and lobster, award show host Jamie Foxx grabbed a microphone, spoke a few words about Jackson, and began



BET C.E.O. and president Debra Lee hosted a pre-party for 350 guests on the eve of the awards.

"Pre" gobos and crimson flowers decked Drago Centro restaurant.



singing "I Wanna Rock With You." Minutes later, Tyrese and Wyclef Jean joined him, and soon everyone in the room was on his or her feet.

"They were just so excited to be celebrating the life of Michael Jackson in that spontaneous way," said Shauna Bain Smith, Wells's media manager. "There were no egos. It was a united, collective celebration."

—Irene Lacher

BET Awards Pre-Party

Design, Production Events by André Wells

Flowers Eric Buterbaugh

Lighting, Sound

Entertainment Lighting Services (ELS)

Rentals Resource One

Inc., Chameleon Chair

Collection, Classic Party

Rentals

Rentals, Additional Design

Rivre Works Inc.

Venue, Catering Drago

Centro

Video Firefly LA