

# Inside Hefner's Hutch: Life As a Playboy Bunny



PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIM PETROS

Carina fluffs up Brandy's tail

by Laura Goldman

It seems the idea of having grown women wait tables in rabbit ears and cottontails would be greeted with the same public approval as the Edsel. Who would have thought an underdressed pseudo-bunny could generate such mystique, popularity, envy, rejection, acceptance and mass male hormonal activity?

Hugh Hefner of course, that great manipulator of the male libido. He had originally wanted employees of his Chicago Playboy Club to wear shortie nightgowns, perhaps to complement his perennial pajamas. His associates persuaded him to use the Playboy Rabbit identification, and the Bunny was born. Since that fateful day in 1960, the costume, complete with cottontail, rabbit ears, cuffs and collar, has multiplied like, well, rabbits. Over 25,000 women have squeezed into them and table-hopped at 13 Clubs here and abroad.

In the early '50s, Playboy legitimized sex, bringing skin magazines out of sleazy adult bookstores and into supermarket checkout stands. Hefner's cottontailed corps carried this emancipation a step further. Unlike ordinary cocktail waitresses, Bunnies appeared to be the walking, talking embodiment of the quintessential Playboy centerfold. They continue to be a type of American geisha, beautiful and pampering.

But hey, isn't this musty, sexist stereotype a bit outmoded in these

enlightened times? With women making their mark as doctors, scientists and lawyers, why would some still opt to don bunny suits and wait tables for a living? There are reasons, one of which is the fantastic salary. Beginning income from \$250-\$300 a week (part-time) can eventually soar to \$600. But it's not just the wages that are enticing; there is the prestige, the opportunity to be a part of something that has held the public's fascination and curiosity for 21 years.

## Bunny Tales

Brandy, Carina and Nicole are three Bunnies employed by the Los Angeles Playboy Club, a springboard for former Bunnies Lynn Moody (*Roots*), Maria Richwine (*The Buddy Holly Story*), the late Dorothy Stratten and a host of models and Playmates. The three live in the South Bay, are blond, attractive and could easily blend in with the beach crowd along the Strand. Brandy, 25, of Manhattan Beach, became a Bunny two years ago; Playa del Rey roommates Carina, 22, and Nicole, 23, both started working almost a year and a half ago.

These women were not drawn to the Playboy Club by a lifelong desire to wear rabbit ears. "My older sister was a Bunny," Brandy says. "That's when I thought about becoming one too." Carina's story is similar; a girlfriend was a Bunny. Nicole just needed a job. The women attended an extensive two-week

training school for prospective Bunnies, in which they were taught bartending, how to deal with customers (especially men), how to walk in the regulation high-heeled pumps, and the infamous Bunny Dip — an unnatural but preventative backward bend used whenever the Bunny places food or drink on a table.

Next the applicants were fitted for costumes. "I felt like I wasn't dressed," Nicole recalls. The Bunnies' biggest complaint was not the brief costume, however. It's the shoes that take some getting used to; the women would prefer an open-toed style. It's not that Hefner finds something sensual and forbidden about the toe-mashing pumps; a health law prohibits employees from wearing comfortable open-toed shoes in restaurants.

After the Bunnies-to-be hobbled out of training school, some christened with ersatz Bunny names to avoid duplicates, they were put to work in the Club. Bunnies are not hired merely to wait tables — there are Door Bunnies who welcome keyholders, Camera Bunnies who snap patron's photos, Gift Shop Bunnies and Customer Service Bunnies. Many of the Bunnies do promotional and charity work.

Since the Bunny is synonymous with sexual attractiveness, being accepted as one would surely be an ego-booster. "It was a relief," says Nicole. Carina adds,



Hugh Hefner with a bevy of Bunnies, including Marina del Rey's own Gretchen, at his left