

Gregangelo Herrera Spins Tales Through Velocity Circus

For some, life imitates art. For Gregangelo Herrera '84, his home and his business imitate his art.

For all of his adult life, Gregangelo has made his living as a Whirling Dervish, performing a spinning dance that tells the story of the creation of the universe and all of the spiral galaxies and spinning planets.

Walk inside his home and you'll soon find yourself in a different kind of vortex — one that spins itself into 22 rooms that nearly



defy description. The rooms lead you, like a spiral, to the still heart of his house where you'll find his pyramid bedroom decorated with stars, galaxies and luminescent strings. Sit there, and you feel as if you're in the eye of a hurricane.

Other rooms depict different times of day. His breakfast room is done in dawn themes, and one bedroom, with its green walls and sun mural, depicts the green flash of sunset.

The real magic starts upstairs, past a secret entryway and through a "spinning vortex," where each triangular room holds the works of a variety of artists, set designers and costumers, each of whom work for

Gregangelo's company.

Several national networks have already featured his house, including the Discovery Channel, Bravo and HGTV. "I've had people from Brazil tell me they saw my house on TV there," said Gregangelo.

His house is a regular tour-stop for the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau, which will send journalists and travel writers to Herrera's home to give them a taste of the city.

Gregangelo grew up in that home and eventually bought it from his mother, "who made me pay full market price," he noted with a laugh.

Herrera's success as a businessman as well as an artist is rooted in his philosophy "to follow your dream with passion, say yes, and give back to the community around you." He is the founder and artistic director of Gregangelo & Velocity Arts and Entertainment and of the Velocity Circus — a loose confederation of 275 performers whom Herrera calls upon for public and corporate shows and private parties. His clients have included PeopleSoft, Univision, Warner Brothers, Starbucks and numerous other international companies and non-profits.

Herrera began his career in show business while a student at SI, acting in plays, working in stage crew and performing after school with the Aswan Dancers, — a Mediterranean troupe.

Herrera — who describes himself as half Mexican, half Lebanese and all San Franciscan — learned that the group needed Whirling Dervishes. "I was still young enough that I was whirling for fun, so I agreed to learn."

Over the years, he turned his art into a four-and-a-half minute act, which he has performed in the US, Canada, the Caribbean and India.

Because of his success, both financially and artistically, other performers asked him to help them make the plunge to become full time professionals.

Herrera found himself helping so many performers that "I had a business before I knew I had one," he says. "I have a burning desire to help other artists make a viable living."

His Velocity Circus, which also employs costumers, riggers, singers, dancers and technicians, now performs 250 shows a year. Herrera tries to make each performance different, tailored to the needs of his clients.

Herrera makes it clear that he loves

to entertain people; he also enjoys teaching through his Whirling Dervish dance. "Whether you're a mystic, a poet or a scientist, you understand that spinning is the basic principle of the universe and a very sacred thing. It's what circuses, with their basis in circles, are all about."

Herrera's act tells the story of the creation of the universe, from the birth of galaxies to the creation of the first man and woman. Like all the acts in Velocity Circus, it's meant to be a joyful spectacle for the audience as well as a mystical event for the artist.

Herrera, who is performing in tonight's Teatro Sant' Ignazio fashion show, will be joined by two of his Velocity Circus acts, including the Mystic Pixies — a troupe of young contortionists on their way to an new Cirque du Soleil production in Montreal — and a talented singer.

When his acts aren't performing, he has them create art around his house, "The Gregangelo Museum," which has become a local attraction. These artists work on new designs for each room and on props and costumes for his new shows. During the interview, one of his performers, Darkhia, could be heard hammering copper for a costume. One of two Mongolian "hand-dancers," Darkhia is one of the stars of the Velocity Circus. "Her movement is ethereal, almost beyond human," says Herrera. "It's a joy to be able to help her."

The result makes both for great shows and for a home like none other. "We all work to produce this house the same way we produce a show, with each room an act and a surprise," adds Herrera. "You never know what spectacle the next room will bring."

Youth and artists tour groups are welcomed to view his home and art for a fee, all of which goes to support Children United by Experience International, a non-profit he co-founded with his partner, Jeffrey Ferns, and his sister, Cathy Kelly.

CUE provides art programming, mentors and advocacy for at-risk youth and a performing platform for young emerging artists.

Gregangelo surrounds himself with extraordinary artists and acknowledges his success is inspired by those around him, He loves to tell his team of performers "to elevate those you, to create no obstacles and not to sweat the financial. If you do these three, success happens."



For Gregangelo Herrera, his home is like his circus shows, with each room a surprise act.

