

## The New York Times

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# *Robin Leach, 76, 'Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous' Host, Dies*

By [Neil Genzlinger](#)

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Robin Leach, who became a symbol of unapologetic opulence as host of the popular syndicated television show “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous” in the 1980s and '90s, died on Friday in Las Vegas. He was 76.

John Katsilometes, a columnist at The Las Vegas Review-Journal, where Mr. Leach was also a columnist, announced the death on Twitter. He said Mr. Leach had had a stroke in November and another on Monday.

With his distinctive, British-accented voice and exuberant, exclamation-point delivery, Mr. Leach was widely recognized and just as widely parodied during the initial run of the show, from 1984 to 1995, and long after. But he rebelled at the perception that he himself was as rich as the people whose lavish homes and lives he was bringing to his audiences.

“Everyone thinks I make what Oprah does, or Cosby,” he told The New York Times in 1990, “but I don’t, because we’re in syndication.”

“Lifestyles” seemed omnipresent on television for years, on at all hours of the day or night on one station or another. The show featured celebrities, business moguls and others with extreme wealth, and its success resulted in spinoff shows like “Runaway With the Rich and Famous.”

Mr. Leach was often criticized, especially during economic downturns, for glorifying extravagance and serving up softball questions to his interview subjects. But he was unapologetic.

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“Everybody makes a mistake thinking America resents wealth and resents what I’m doing,” he told The Boston Globe in 1987. He viewed the show as embodying the values of a capitalist society.

“No one would watch ‘Lifestyles of the Poor and Unknown,’ ” he said.

Robin Douglas Leach was born on Aug. 29, 1941, in London and grew up in nearby Harrow. He worked as a reporter for The Daily Mail before moving to the United States in 1963 “with either \$145 or \$156 in his pocket,” The Boston Globe said in a 1987 profile, depending on which version of the story he told.

He sold children’s shoes briefly at Lord & Taylor in New York before getting a job with The Daily News. He founded Go Magazine, a music publication, in the mid-1960s, and sold it a few years later at a considerable profit.

Mr. Leach worked for The National Star and CNN and on the early episodes of “Entertainment Tonight” before coming up with “Lifestyles” with the producer Alfred Masini. What Mr. Leach called “personality journalism” had begun to emerge in the 1970s, he said, but the 1980s really set the stage for “Lifestyles.”

“It took Jimmy Carter to exit the White House to really get things going,” he told The Globe. “Because the Reagans brought in an aura of wealth. Jimmy Carter was too ordinary. So, when Reagan came in, it was time for a show about wealth and success.”

“Lifestyles” did segments on countless wealthy people — Donald J. Trump appeared repeatedly — with Mr. Leach propelling the show along with that signature voice. (He said that the impressionist Rich Little once described it as “just south of Howard Cosell in terms of arrogance, and just north of the adenoids.”)



Mr. Leach in Las Vegas in 2014. His famous signoff was “Champagne wishes and caviar dreams.”

Alex Federowicz for The New York Times

“Sure, I speak fast and loud,” he said in a 1986 interview with *The Globe*. “But hear this: In the course of an hour, I deliver twice as much audio information and visual images as any other show on television. I’m fast and loud on purpose. I cram 10 pounds of caviar into an eight-pound pack.”

Caviar was part of Mr. Leach’s DNA, as it were: His famous signoff on the show was “Champagne wishes and caviar dreams.”

He was constantly accosted by fans — and their children — wanting to try out their Robin Leach impersonation on him. But what really irked him was when someone would mangle his catchphrase as “Champagne dreams and caviar wishes.”

Mr. Leach said he rarely had trouble persuading the rich and famous to come on his show.

“People know I’ll be sensational, not scandalous,” he said. “There’s a fine-line difference. Sensational means titillating the viewer. Scandalous means being condemned by the viewer for making unfair, uncouth revelations.”

Mr. Leach generally took the many parodies of him and his show in stride. Among the more memorable Leach impersonations in the 1980s and ’90s was Dana Carvey’s on “Saturday Night Live.” Last year, when Mr. Carvey and Jon Lovitz performed together in Las Vegas, Mr. Leach had a chance to review Mr. Carvey’s version of him.

“If I really do sound like Dana’s brilliant impression — ‘I’m Robin Leach, I’m yelling, and I don’t know why!’ — then I deserve the ridicule,” Mr. Leach wrote in *The Review-Journal*, echoing a line from Mr. Carvey’s bit. “Fortunately, that’s only behind a mic and not in everyday life!”

Mr. Carvey said Mr. Leach was always a willing target.

“Robin Leach thankfully loved my impression of him,” he said by email. “Over the years he would catch my act in Vegas, and I always made a point to do him directly to him. He would laugh uproariously and then heckle me in his distinctive booming voice: ‘If you’re gonna do me I should get paid!’ He was fun to talk to — incredibly charming and smart.”

In the mid-1990s “Lifestyles” took on a co-host and became “Lifestyles With Robin Leach and Shari Belafonte” for a final season. (Ms. Belafonte’s father is the singer Harry Belafonte.)

Mr. Leach also appeared in or voiced commercials, wrote cookbooks, hosted the call-in show “Talking Food” on the Food Network, and more.

His marriage to Judith Desser, in 1968, ended in divorce in 1977. His survivors include three sons, Steven, Gregg and Rick, and several grandchildren.

In the summer of 2016, during the presidential campaign, Mr. Leach was interviewed by Poppy Harlow on CNN about Mr. Trump, his frequent “Lifestyles” guest. He saw laudable intentions in Mr. Trump’s presidential bid.

“It’s not a case of megalomania or self-obsession,” he said. “This is a man who wants to get things done. And in the past he’s always gotten things done. So this presidential bid, this desire to serve America, is really at the heart of what he’s all about.”

Ms. Harlow noted that he sounded like a Trump supporter and asked if he would vote for him.

“I’m an Englishman, Poppy,” he reminded her. “So I can’t vote.”

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