

# The Secret Passages of the Stars



Where there is a VIP, as a security expert says, there is “always a way” — a way to get a world leader or a former wife of Tom Cruise, as the case may be, from one place to another place safely, securely... and sometimes secretly. **“There are tunnels and other safe-entry [or] exit-specific devices,” says Tony Schiena, an action-film actor (*Locked Down*) and real-life covert-ops expert who runs the security firm Multi Operational Security Agency Intelligence Company (MOSAIC). “There are also the obvious: back and side entrances, loading bays.”**

As the celebrity-watching world learned this week, the list of A-list end-arounds also now includes a subterranean passageway that Katie Holmes reportedly used to walk from her Manhattan apartment to her local Whole Foods, and a series of tunnels that would’ve led Jack Nicholson, Warren Beatty, Kirk Douglas, and James Caan from their Los Angeles homes to Hugh Hefner’s nearby Playboy Mansion.

Just as there is “always a way,” it has always been this way. From the beginning of castle-building time, hidden doors, staircases and rooms have been part of the blueprint for the high-profile homebuilder. When times changed, so did the manner in which things were kept low-profile. In the 1930s and 1940s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt essentially had his own private subway line to New York City’s fabled Waldorf Astoria: It ran right up to the hotel’s basement. (Other officials took advantage of the track as well, though of late it has been described as a “long-abandoned” stop.)

These days, basketball star Kobe Bryant sees Roosevelt’s train and raises him a helicopter: when playing, the Los Angeles Lakers fixture avoids prying

eyes and freeway traffic by taking a chopper ride from his home in Orange County, California, to downtown L.A.'s Staples Center.

Old-fashioned tunnels never go out of style. Once upon a time, screen star Errol Flynn (*The Adventures of Robin Hood*) reportedly traveled by one so he could go discreetly from work at the former Warner Hollywood Studio in West Hollywood to the across-the-street bar at the Formosa Café.

In the 1950s, infamous mob boss Mickey Cohen (last played on screen by Sean Penn in *Gangster Squad*) did the perp walk from his cell to a courtroom via L.A.'s underground walkway system that still connects its downtown government buildings. The 1970s apparently saw the beginning of work on the Playboy Mansion tunnels. (Playboy.com, which broke the story, said the tunnels were closed off in 1989, when Hefner married his second wife, Kimberly Conrad.) And at the celeb-frequented Los Angeles International Airport, tunnels were baked into the design (and eventually used by coach and first-class passengers alike).

While travel by tunnel, secret subway or helicopter is as cool as it can be clandestine, most of the out-of-the-way-passageways that stars rely on don't require anything more elaborate than a lot of advance work to avoid the likes of tabloid photographers and autograph hounds.

"When we have a high-profile security client who is interested in going to a venue, we will first reach out to our contact at the venue—be that a restaurant, concert [hall], a bar, or even a courthouse," Louis Perry, owner of Los Angeles-based Kadima Security Services, says via email. "We will let them know that we are going to be arriving with the celebrity and create a strategy in cooperation with the team at the venue, to ensure that the experience is positive, smooth, and safe for everyone."

Everyone perhaps but the paparazzi. They're not thrilled when a Cameron Diaz slips into a Los Angeles courtroom via a private entrance, a Jennifer Hudson does the same in Chicago, a post-arrest Hugh Grant arrives at the highest-profile talk-show appearance of his career (at the *Tonight Show's* old Burbank, California, soundstage) without making a scene, or a produce-shopping Holmes flies under the radar until exiting the store.

Sometimes, the stars do their own on-the-sly, crowd control, whether it's Tom Hanks signing into a hotel under the pseudonym Johnny Madrid, or singer Gloria Estefan opening a posh, Florida resort — the Costa d'Este — complete with a "secret" check-in area for fellow bold-faced names.

**For the celebrity who doesn't double as an international head of state, some of the VIP measures undertaken on her behalf "may be more of a perk than a security measure," Schiena says. "[But] I would say better safe than sorry."**