



PRESS KIT

'21' Club introduced by Sanjay Surana

OVERVIEW

A parade of iron jockeys in the concrete jungle? These sturdy figures are perhaps what most intrigue visitors when they first approach the '21' Club in Midtown Manhattan. The statues, all gifts from customers past and present, debuted at the restaurant in the late 1930s when entrepreneur and patron Jay Blan van Urk presented one to commemorate his love of the establishment. Just like that, a tradition was born.

In the intervening years more jockeys have joined. Beyond being keenly celebrated quirks of '21', as it's colloquially known, they are reminders of its rich history, totems that link the past to the present. Today, '21' is an icon, an intrinsic part of the fabric of New York and as current and relevant as other New York edifices like the Empire State Building or the Statue of Liberty. It's not a private club despite the name, though it does retain a familial, clubby ambience. To truly appreciate its significance, one needs to cast a light on its earliest days.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The genesis of '21' dates to the 1920s, the era of Prohibition, when the manufacture and serving of alcohol in the United States was banned. A couple of enterprising university students, Jack Kriendlar and Charlie Berns, opened their first speakeasy in Greenwich Village, before moving it to a permanent home at 21 West 52nd Street. This notorious drinking den opened on New Year's Eve 1929 at the site where it still is today. It was a furtive operation, fronted by the imposing iron gates that remain—but it was successfully raided only once, in 1930. After that, the owners enlisted architects and engineers to create false stairways and walls, a hidden vault to store the collection of vintage wines and secret chutes to dispose of empty bottles.

When Prohibition ended, '21' recast itself as a destination restaurant, quickly attracting guests like Joe DiMaggio (favourite order, Chicken Hash) and Aristotle Onassis, partial to the '21' Burger. Signature menu items like Dungeness crab, oysters, and salmon became sought after by actors, writers, presidents, and other high-profile patrons. A plaque in the Bar Room over Table 30 reads "Bogie's Corner" in recognition of regular Humphrey Bogart (he and Lauren Bacall had their first date there). Other household names that frequented '21' include Ernest Hemingway, Salvador Dalí, and Jackie Gleason. On this website, you'll even find an interactive map, named Celebrity Tables, that highlights where the famous once sat. Films and television shows like Wall Street, All About Eve, The Sweet Smell of Success, and Sex and the City, were shot here, further immortalising '21' on celluloid.

Several works of art were acquired during the Great Depression when customers had difficulty paying their bills and settled their sizeable bar tabs with original Frederic Remington works. Sculptures and paintings by the artist appear throughout '21', a collection estimated to be worth US\$2 million. Many a titan of business has secured a deal at the tables of '21', and it continues to be a place where power brokers and dealmakers spin the wheels of industry over a fine libation or an assured dish.

Rather than rest on its laurels '21' has moved with the times. Now it spreads over three converted townhouses and four floors plus a cellar. In 2011, after extensive renovation, it transformed the lobby into a bar. This Bar '21' and Lounge serves as an entry point into '21's sensibilities, a place that promises the same sense of escape as the Bar Room and Upstairs at '21', but is more affordable and popular with the younger clientele that increasingly ventures through the doors. The bar has also helped to dispel the sense that '21' is a members' club, making it more approachable to a wider audience. In 2014, the culinary programme was revitalised when French chef Sylvain Delpique took the helm at the kitchen, turning the restaurant into a bona fide foodie destination. Fans will still find seven classic dishes on the menu, among them Dover sole, steak tartare, crab cakes, Caesar salad, and the '21' Burger, but equally enticing are Delpique's bright, fresh flavours in dishes like octopus carpaccio with pomegranate, the kind of inventive, bold statement that strikes a chord with contemporary diners.

PEOPLE

Theodore V. Suric, General Manager

Directing the proceedings with a calm, assured demeanour is Theodore V. Suric. He joined as General Manager in 2013 after a storied career with the David Burke Restaurant Group and a seminal five-year spell as Head Captain at Le Cirque 2000, bringing a broad range of experience and skills to the position. Raised in Croatia and a graduate of culinary school in Europe, he has notched up years in the kitchen and front of house. When he first came to New York, he "really aspired to work at '21'". Sometimes dreams do come true.

Many of Suric's team have worked at '21' for decades, creating a living connection to its history. They act as guides to help visitors experience and understand the restaurant, describing the significance of a toy hanging in the Bar Room, or the origins of a piece of art. They contemporise the past and trace its evolution to the modern day. And, best of all, they are mind-readers, with the ability to pick up on a guest's interest and then share a little story about the trinket hanging above the table or an image displayed on the back of the menu. Or, for the oenophile guest, they also offer tours of the secret wine cellar.

Laszlo Istvan, Waiter

Waiter Laszlo Istvan was born and raised in Hungary. Arriving in the United States in his early thirties, he barely spoke English, moving around the country before settling in New York where he worked in a number of top hotels and restaurants. Since joining '21' in 1987, he has become known for his sharp memory for customers, and can detail with precision every regular guest's favourite dish and the preferred method of its preparation. During his three decades at '21', Istvan has served every visiting US President including Carter, Ford, Reagan, Clinton, Bush Sr. and Bush Jr. His greater claim to fame is his cameo in the television show, *Sex and the City*; to this day, guests come in asking for the waiter from the programme. When asked why he has been here for so long, Istvan simply answers, "It's a beautiful place."

FEATURES

Beyond the constant stream of individuals who keep '21' humming, private dining plays an important role at the restaurant. Its 10 exclusive rooms include the unique Prohibition-era Wine Cellar, accessible by a flight of back stairs from the kitchen and a door disguised as a brick wall. With corporate dining a key part of the operation, '21' inhabits the space that bridges business and social realms.

Jockeys continue to be added to the collection, including a newcomer in 2015, when, for the first time in 37 years, a horse won the esteemed Triple Crown race series. The jockeys, mostly wearing the colours of the stables that they represent, are now as inextricably tied to the

neighbourhood as '21' itself; in 2015, when they were removed for eight weeks for their first major refurbishment in the restaurant's history, local residents were up in arms, concerned that the beloved symbols of the street were disappearing and taking a slice of New York's history with them. These compact cast iron statues, many holding iron rings that were used as hitching posts to tether horses or to hook lanterns, are a part of the city's personality.

The restaurant's interiors are equally iconic, reflecting the building's history, while maintaining a contemporary edge. The main floor is rich in textures—the Bar Room has dark wood floors and wood panelling, deep red leather banettes, and an oversized mahogany bar. The ceiling peeks out from above the canopy of toys and gifts. The red-and-white chequered tablecloths are a feature that date to the restaurant's early days. Upstairs at '21' is more formal, with white tablecloths and large murals that depict quintessential New York scenes. Bar '21' and Lounge, by the entrance, has a black marble bar, wood-panelled walls enlivened by classic Frederic Remington paintings, red leather bar stools and a fireplace. Private dining rooms feature a selection of styles ranging from soft palettes with crystal accents to rich wood paneling.

Simply put, there really is a little magic in every visit to '21'. Even as you book a table you feel set to embark on something thrilling and truly special. Then, once you arrive, and pass through the iron gates, you shuttle back in time. Within moments of being welcomed and shown to a bustling bar, or a seat by the fireplace, the sensations of ease and excitement take over. Yes, there is an air of formality here – and rightfully so – as men must wear jackets, but there is also an easy-going feel. After all, the Bar Room's ceiling is hung with a haphazard array of toys and paraphernalia donated by patrons (like a model PT-109 Patrol Torpedo from JFK, a replica of the one he commanded during World War II, a smashed tennis racquet from John McEnroe, and a microphone from Jimmy Fallon of the *Tonight Show*). Think of these as an unofficial—and reverse—loyalty programme, tokens that clients give to the restaurant!

'21' offers an extraordinary kind of historic, hallowed, yet effortlessly accessible, New York experience of a type that's disappearing in this increasingly generic world. Anyone can follow in the footsteps of the celebrity, sporting, business and political elite of the US and beyond, sit where they have sat, and enjoy the same menu, service and ambience.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY & ENVIRONMENT

Support of the community is part of '21's DNA. In 1938, on a frigid, damp, winter day, Kriendler stepped outside and noticed a lone cornet player at the end of the block, on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 52nd Street. Kriendler invited him in for a bowl of soup, and in return, as a show of gratitude, the cornet player brought in other Salvation Army Band members with the offer to play Christmas carols for diners. Kriendler and Berns promised to pass a hat around for a collection if the band played, and from that simple act another tradition was born. Even today, the fourth-generation descendant of one of the 1938 band plays with today's Salvation Army ensemble, and on average guests at '21' donate \$55,000 during each year's passing of the hat.