

GREATER NEW YORK

What's Old Is New at Some Restaurants

The retro trend is hot, with spots offering throwbacks including steak tartare and the Gibson cocktail



A Katz's pastrami sandwich.

Katz's Aims To Spread Deli Abroad

By CHARLES PASSY

For 129 years, Katz's Delicatessen has served New Yorkers hefty portions of classic Jewish-style fare.

Now, it is looking to broaden its customer base and deliver pastrami to Pakistan and corned beef to Colombia, among other global locales.

The deli, a fixture on Manhattan's Lower East Side, is launching a world-wide shipping service in the coming months as part of a growth plan. Already announced: Katz's expansion into Brooklyn with a 400-square-foot outpost that is part of the DeKalb Market Hall, a food hall slated to open in early June.

Katz's move into shipping isn't entirely new. As far back as the World War II era, the restaurant encouraged its patrons to "send a salami to your boy in the Army," a phrase that became forever associated with the establishment.

But it wasn't until the '90s that Katz's began shipping in earnest throughout the U.S., with mail orders growing to 10,000 to 12,000 annually, according to owner Jake Dell, who took over the business from family members.

Mr. Dell plans to expand the shipping side of the business by sending its corned beef, pastrami and other favorite menu items to Canada and Mexico by the end of the year and to other countries starting in 2018.

"There's a limit to the number of people you can fit under one roof, but there's no limit to the number of pastramis that you can ship," he said.

By CHARLES PASSY

To step into the Grill is to enter a time warp. At the new Manhattan restaurant, situated in the space that formerly housed the famed Four Seasons, every detail is about honoring the past. At the bar, patrons wile away the time by sipping classic drinks such as the Gibson, a martini variation.

In the dining room, waiters deliver some of the signature dishes, such as prime rib and a mushroom omelet, via old-school trolleys that can double as cooking or prep stations.

Even the music that is played over the sound system evokes yesteryear. How about a little Connie Francis to go with that Dover sole?

The Grill is hardly the only recently opened dining spot in New York City to look to the past. If anything, the retro-chic trend is in full force, with restaurants emphasizing old-school favorites that range from chicken-fried steak to steak tartare.

Some restaurant-industry insiders and observers see the trend as a reaction to the political and social unrest of our era: The more turbulent the times, the more consumers will seek out the comfort of the classic and familiar.

"Nostalgia is always a very strong pull," said chef John DeLucie, who is behind the reopening of the Empire Diner, a restaurant in the Manhattan neighborhood of Chelsea that, in its newest incarnation, offers plenty of beloved American fare, including chicken-fried steak.

But some proprietors insist it isn't just about nostalgia for nostalgia's sake. In the case of the Grill, the decision to take an old-school approach largely stemmed from its landmark physical space



The bar at the Grill, a restaurant that recently opened in a space that formerly was home to the famed Four Seasons. Poireaux (leeks), below left, are served at French restaurant Le Coucou. A duck press, below right, shown at the Grill. Both restaurants are in Manhattan.



itself—a high-ceiling dining spot that originally opened in the late '50s and spoke to the "Mad Men" era of power dining in Manhattan.

The Major Food Group, which developed the Grill and retro-inspired concepts including the Italian-themed Carbone and Parm, says the menu is simply intended to echo the theme of the design.

Other restaurants are putting their own spin on the throwback theme.

At the 2017 James Beard Award-winning Le Coucou in Manhattan's SoHo neighborhood, the focus is on classic French cuisine, with nearly forgotten favorites such as quenelle de brochet, a seafood dish made with pike, grabbing diners' attention.



At Benjamin Steakhouse Prime in Midtown, a menu highlight is another oldie-but-goodie—namely, steak tartare.

And at Harold's Meat + Three in west SoHo, the entire establishment is a riff on the meat-and-three-sides cafeteria-style restaurants that are a staple throughout the Southern U.S. In other words, this is a high-end res-

taurant that makes it a point of pride to serve meatloaf.

Not that these restaurants are always old-school in the strictest sense. Some are putting contemporary touches on those classic dishes or adding new-school items to their menus. As chef and owner Harold Moore of Harold's Meat + Three noted: "We do have macaroni and cheese, but we also have quinoa salad."

And the prices aren't necessarily a throwback, either. At the Grill, many entrees top \$50—and the prime rib goes for \$62. Even that meatloaf at Harold's Meat + Three runs \$28.

Still, diners seem to be embracing the trend. Since the Grill opened a little more than a week ago, the place generally has been packed. "So far, the response has been incredible," said Jeff Zalaznick, one of Major Food Group's partners.