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GENTLEMEN'S QUARTERLY

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OF THE
MALE
DRUDGE
BY BILL PRINCE

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Crawford
fends off
Piers
Morgan

Peter
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DIARY

New York shows its stomach for the upturn - with a little help from London's finest: Le Caprice opens its doors on the Upper East Side, Monkey Bar works its midtown magic, Marlon Abela unveils his art at A Voce and Sienna Miller burns up the boards on Broadway

BY BILL PRINCE

I'd not known much about my titular host at the Sir Charles Lamb pub in London's Islington until a trip to New York last month shed some light. My first morning was spent on a tour of next year's big midtown hotel opening, the Chatwal, named for the family who brought you the city's Time and Dream hotels. In contrast, and befitting its storied past, the Chatwal (housed in the former Lambs Club on West 44th Street, whose founders named it in honour of the 19th-century English essayist) will be a sumptuous, turn-of-the-last-century-style affair designed tiles-to-taps by one of the industry's reigning superstars, Thierry Despont.

Despont keeps a much less ornate, though no less spectacular, design office in Tribeca, where he serves his guests the best coffee in the city. But it's the 1904 building's original architect, Stanford White (1853-1906) who lives on in New York social lore, forever remembered for his untimely demise at the hands of a jealous husband. The girl involved was Evelyn Nesbit, a model and chorus girl who claimed she'd been seduced by White when she was 16 (and White 47) in the architect's 24th Street loft. His subsequent murder secured his place in the annals of New York philanderers and saw Nesbit named America's first It girl.

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Nesbit died in 1967, shortly before that era's It girl, Edie Sedgwick, began filming *Ciao! Manhattan*, the underground movie that helped her become, albeit largely posthumously (she was dead four years later), Andy Warhol's only true superstar. Today's It girl Sienna Miller played Sedgwick in *Factory Girl*, and while I was in town she made her Broadway debut moments from the Lambs Club as the eponymous antiheroine of Patrick Marber's *After Miss Julie*, remodelled from Strindberg's earlier draft on the destructive force of decadence. It may be damning with faint praise to say Sienna stole the show in what was, after all, a three-hander (with Jonny Lee Miller and Marin Ireland), but her performance was impressive nonetheless.

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Sienna aside, if you're looking for the modern-day American It girl, you might want to start in



Made over in Manhattan

Le Caprice New York sees the St James's institution gain instant 'power room' status stateside

some of the city's top restaurants. For starters (sorry), there's April Bloomfield, originally of the Spotted Pig, late of the sadly defunct John Dory, but now back in the thick of things at the Breslin, in the Ace Hotel. It's a neighbourhood joint with a robust no-reservations policy and a cool demimonde. A guest menu presented by one of Bloomfield's mentors, Fergus Henderson, on the night I visited promised - and delivered - much.

Uptown, in every sense, is Missy Robbins, who has taken her precise Italian cooking to the Time Warner Center for a second helping of A Voce. I've not visited its midtown sibling, but if its counterpart at Columbus Circle is anything to go by, it, too, is unmissable. Both are owned by Marlon Abela, responsible for two of London's best restaurants, Umu and the Greenhouse, and the all-new Morton's Club in Mayfair. It's Abela's art you notice on the walls as you enter A Voce - particularly an iridescent Frank Stella - and for once the cooking stands up to its creative company.

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Whether it's prime real estate like the Time Warner Center or gleaming new condominiums in previously untouchable locales - as with Daniel Boulud's impish tribute to beer and sausages, DBGB, on the Bowery - you soon get used to eating in all manner of social settings in New York. But the acme for most chefs remains the hotel dining room, the highlight of which last autumn was the debut of Le Caprice

New York, housed in a simulacrum of its original site in St James's - albeit "polarised" with a stunning décor of white floor and black walls - at the Pierre Hotel.

It's been a long time coming - four years in fact, ever since Richard Caring took over the business - but debuting on the Upper East Side at this newly refurbished, Taj Hotels-managed property guarantees Le Caprice New York instant "power room" status. It deserves it. LCNY, as it will surely become known, has kept much of its insider-ish charm: in addition to a canopied entrance, there's a secret side door for use by the Pierre's 80 residents - known as "the owners" - and the regular menu (it also offers Sunday brunch) eschews traditional American food-speak for an instantly recognisable list of Caprice classics.

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Sixteen blocks north, the Mark Hotel's recent refurbishment announces itself with a less-than-coy Jacques Grange-designed lobby that resolves into beautifully restrained rooms and - imminently - both the return of its fabled bar and a brand-new dining room overseen by New York's answer to Gordon Ramsay (albeit without all the swearsy kitchen politics), Jean-Georges Vongerichten. In the absence of which - and in a characteristic display of his infinite charm - the Mark's GM, James Sherwin, hosted a small dinner at Vongerichten's flagship room at the Trump hotel across the park. It was a powerhouse display of fusion cooking (likely to be turned down a notch or two at the Mark) in what seems to remain - even in these straitened times - an upscale neighbourhood diner for young Upper West Siders.

Another, judging from the volume if not the crowd, is the recently opened Monkey Bar. Much has been written about Jeremy King and Chris Corbin's first foray stateside, most of it about the jewel-box dining room and attending star-power. But when I visited, the bar was in another borough scenewise - midtown rowdies celebrating the Dow's first peek above 10,000 since Lehman Brothers fell. Judging from the furore, New York may not be quite back, but neither is it shouting last orders just yet... 