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TABLES FOR TWO

THE LAMBS CLUB

132 W. 44th St. (212-997-5262)



Madeleines, those enduring symbols of nostalgia, are on the menu at the Lambs Club, and the choice seems appropriate: the three-year-old bar and restaurant, which occupies the ground floor of a landmarked

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building that once housed the theatre club of the same name (Charlie Chaplin, John Wayne, and Lionel Barrymore belonged), feels like a shrine to things past. The opulent chrome-and-crimson dining room is a nineteen-sixties set piece, with leather banquettes and mid-century club chairs, Art Deco light fixtures, and torchiere floor lamps. Framed head shots of several Lambs, as members were known, line the walls. The largely male waitstaff, dressed in formal wear, practices a style of seen-and-not-heard hospitality that went out of vogue with Dover sole—which, as it happens, is available at dinner, for the up-to-date price of sixty-eight dollars.

In general, the food, from the chef and proprietor, Geoffrey Zakarian, is more of the moment, or at least Modern American. Proust might not recognize these madeleines, which are smaller than traditional, laced with heady matsutake mushrooms, as plump and delicate as shellfish. Fresh spaghetti is dressed simply with olive oil, bottarga, and fresh chilis. Slow-cooked (and underseasoned) halibut, on a bed of polenta, comes surrounded by a Stonehenge of crispy frog-leg croquettes, each punctured by a dainty bone, and slices of juicy New York strip get a side of frisée salad, sprinkled brilliantly with shaved beef tongue.

But what the Lambs Club does best befits its throwback vibe: the boozy business lunch. The Mad Man Cosmo—a sweet, woodsy concoction of rum, St. Germain, ginger, and clementine—would sate both Don Draper and Carrie Bradshaw. Classics like the chicken Cobb salad and the Dagwood turkey club are tempting, but order the pastrami sandwich and you'll find a small army of those dapper waiters at your service: one to present the glistening slab of almost baconlike Wagyu beef, one to carve it tableside, and one to assemble it on rye with your choice of condiments (caramelized onions, whole-grain mustard, horseradish aioli, dill-pickle chips). It's a timeless, delicious mess, and a little bit of theatre. •

Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Entrées \$29-\$68.