



## The Choicest Cut

Aero Studios turns a beloved but shabby New York steakhouse into a wholly modern(e) American restaurant.

MANY MANHATTAN RESTAURANTS THAT BECOME known for their exceptional atmosphere inevitably attract busloads of tourists who photograph themselves at the tables. If Patroon's menu were priced for anyone in a lower income bracket than investment bankers, lawyers and plastic surgeons, the plush, subtle and painstakingly crafted mise-en-scène created by New York's Aero Studios would attract poseurs en masse and dissipate with the first flash of a bulb.

Patroon's two-story midtown building formerly housed Christ Cella, a 1950s' steakhouse distinguished as

much by its beefy patrons and sheer lack of decor as by a mere few things worth saving, like the period bar, wood flooring, a second-floor mural and ceiling light fixtures. Since what's new blends so seamlessly with what little remains of the original venue, less perceptive observers will think that either nothing has changed except the menu or that Aero has built the place entirely from scratch.

The most visible of the restaurant's three owners is Ken Aretsky, who invented the city's first sports bar, Oren & Aretsky, with partner Steve Orenstein in 1978. In the early 1980s Aretsky sold his share in the bar and joined pastry chef Anne Rosenzweig to open Arcadia, which after 13 years of operation has become a local institution. In 1986 Aretsky was hired as the CEO of New York's 21 Club, pioneer of the 20-something-dollar hamburger, which he ran until he was fired in 1995. "My dismissal was a great opportunity," he recalls. "It gave me the freedom to real-

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Opposite: The ground floor dining room opens directly into the kitchen (right). Aero retained the existing wood floor, clad the ceiling with a wood lattice, upholstered the new banquets and existing chairs in mohair velvet and covered the walls in a Fortuny-like cotton fabric. The ceiling fixtures also were salvaged from the original space.

Left: Aero-designed maître d' desk flanks entrance. The walls of the lobby and stairwell are covered in hand-painted paper.

LIGHTING RESTORATION: B&D ANTIQUE LIGHTING  
MAÎTRE D' DESK: MATRIX FURNITURE; ORIENTAL RUG: INNOCENTI; RUG: WAREHOUSE; LEATHER SOFA: BAKER; KNAPP AND TUBBS; WALLPAPER: MAYA RIBARSKY; DRAPERY FABRIC: CHAPMAN MOHAIR; SEATCUSHION: DALIAN FABRIC; WALL UPHOLSTERY: GROVES BROTHERS; MOHAIR VELVET: DESIGNTEK; ARMCHAIR: INNOCENTI; ANN MORRIS ANTIQUES; HOWARD KAPLAN, CONTRACTOR: STONE BUILDERS

PHOTOGRAPH: PETER MAJESKI, ASFO

Patroon evokes the moment in the 1930s when the city's taste for Edwardian interiors coalesced with the modern movement.



in my dream of a new institution in midtown—a classic American place with a twist—something that would be here long after I'm gone."

Aretsky had previously commissioned Aero to design Butterfield 81, a 60-seat American bistro that opened last March on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Whereas Butterfield 81 caters mostly to small groups of local residents, Patroon's 300 seats suit the taste of expense-account types who no-doubt find the mohair velvet-upholstered banquets and clubby, upper-level smoking lounge rather conducive to talk of finance, if not romance. The Dutch word patroon, incidentally, means "the proprietor of a manorial estate, especially in New York..." according to Webster's.

Like much of Aero's work, Patroon evokes the moment in the 1930s when the city's taste for Edwardian interiors coalesced with the modern movement. Not surprisingly, Aero owner Thomas O'Brien and project manager John Sherman found their initial inspiration in the clean lines of Christ Cellar's first-floor mahogany-paneled bar. The designers streamlined the space with the installation of a wood lattice and gold-leaf on the ceiling, chrome-framed wall sconces, and pictures borrowed from an antique bar guide. They installed latticed ceilings in the rest of the dining spaces as well, to establish a grid for the existing light fixtures and to lend order to the building's irregular plan.

The designers improved the entire structure with similarly discreet but significant alterations starting at the street facade. They painted the original yellow brick a glossy hue of brown, and inserted a continuous band of windows on the ground level to echo the rhythm of existing upper-level casements. Aero also matched these windows inside with glazed partitions that define varied spaces. Horizontal wood blinds recall images of the Deco-era supper clubs that the designers used to convey their ideas to the client.

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Opposite: A collection of vintage photographs by the late Daily News sports photographer Charles Hoff hangs in the smoking lounge.

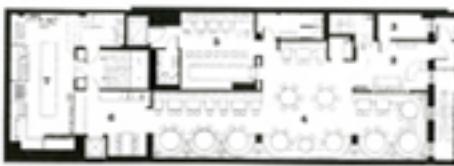
Above: Custom, oak-framed glass partitions with chrome sticking and hardware divide upper-level corridor from smoking lounge and adjacent humidor (not shown). The ceiling lights were designed by Aero Studio.

WALLPAPER: Tracy Andrews Design; PHOTOGRAPHER: James Danziger Gallery; KEITH DEFELICE: CHARLES SCHWARTZ; ALICE: Hudson Venetian Blinds; CAMELBACK CHAIR, TABLE WITH CHROME LEGS: AERO LTD.; CARPETING: Pafferson, Flynn, Martin; CEILING LIGHTS: AERO LTD.



SECOND FLOOR

- 1 ENTRY
- 2 LOBBY
- 3 COAT ROOM
- 4 DENO
- 5 BAR
- 6 CAPTAIN'S ROOM
- 7 KITCHEN
- 8 LOUNGE
- 9 SMOKING ROOM
- 10 HUMIDOR
- 11 AIRPLANE ROOM
- 12 PREP KITCHEN



FIRST FLOOR

- 0 10 20



Patroon's varied dining spaces range in scale from a nook that's literally in the kitchen to a pair of soft and tawny banquet rooms upstairs. One of these contains a black-and-white mural of vintage airplanes photographed in a cloudy sky, a relic left over from the original restaurant. Aero complemented this chalky panorama by swathing the room's other walls in dark brown corduroy, and replacing the old acoustical-tiled ceilings with the new interior's signature wood lattice.

Like most of the objects displayed in Aero's shop and gallery, which adjoin its Solilo design studio, Patroon's mix of custom pieces and newly restored furnishings represents the firm's gift for transforming tired antiques into timeless showpieces, and then juxtaposing them with brand-new things. The mural of vintage airplanes—which visually expands the space better than a mirror ever would—conveys the very image of aerodynamic design that inspired the firm's name and continues to inform its wholly moderne yet contemporary aesthetic.

M. LINDRAY BEERMAN

*Left:* Aero salvaged the existing bar and mural in an upper-level banquet room.

*Above:* The ceiling of the ground-floor bar is embellished with new gold leafing and a mahogany lattice.

**BAR STOOLS:** Shaffer Seating. **CARPETING:** Nokomis. **WALLPAPER:** Maya Romanoff. **WALL UPHOLSTERY FABRIC:** Gretchen Bellinger. **WIRING:** Electra. **ILLUSTRATION:** Elisabeth Whalley. **GOLD LEAF PANEL:** Nancy Lorenz.