

NEW YORK

and the cornflake-crusted crab cakes. The evening scene is overcooked, but lunch at bar No. 2 (the blue-green one) is better. • 9 W. 57th St. (212-829-0812). (M-E)

Bukhara Grill

At the second branch of a popular midtown restaurant and the fourth Indian kitchen to colonize its raita-ridden block, one whiff is pungent proof that they don't stint on the spices, which permeate the clay-oven specialties, the myriad vegetarian dishes, and everything on the sixteen-course \$13.95 lunch buffet. • 230 E. 58th St. (212-339-0090). (M)

★ Guastavino's

The fab English import in the spectacularly restored space under the Queensboro Bridge has rechristened itself "an American brasserie," and you can almost hear the midwestern twang in chef (and transplanted Indian) Daniel Orr's dishes like fried green tomatoes with Wabash Cannonball goat cheese, chicken and dumplings, and pear-huckleberry pandowdy. Upstairs, at Club Guastavino, Orr has kept his French accent and the \$65 three-course prix fixe menu. • 409 E. 59th St. (212-980-2455). (M-E)

The Manhattan Ocean Club

Savor your seafood in an elegant dining room decorated with Picasso ceramics. A pictorial menu features a dozen or so smiley-faced fish. Preparations range from classic (Dover sole meunière) to creative (grouper with roasted pineapple and black peppercorns). Or have the chef prepare your fish any way you like. • 57 W. 58th St. (212-371-7777). (E)

★ March

Expanded seating and a rooftop terrace aren't the only welcome additions to this ultraromantic Sutton Place townhouse. Wayne Nish has shed his obsession with Japan and embraced what he calls "New York cuisine," luxed up with a little more cream and butter. A typical tasting menu begins in a truffled, buttery haze of vegetable fricassee, then segues into Muscat-scented lobster and moist chicken in spiced-mulled pear cider, before climaxing in rustic lamb shoulder with fennel purée. • 405 E. 58th St. (212-754-6272). (E)

★ Norma's

Anyone who equates French toast or biscuits with Mom and unconditional love might agree that the Parker Meridien's spiffy Norma's, with its exuberant all-day breakfast, is worthy of an award. Pancakes by a mom on Prozac. Complimentary fruit-smoothie shots and a duo of croissants oozing smoked-salmon-flecked scrambled eggs. If there really can be too much of a good thing, then breakfast here ought to be against the law. • 118 W. 57th St. (212-708-7460). (M)

ONEc.p.s.

Alan Stillman, along with executive chef David Burke and designer Adam Tihany, has rewired the Plaza's Edwardian Room. Tihany has colored the oaken walls caramel and put huge scarlet lampshades on the chandeliers, and the irrepressible Burke has concocted a whimsical menu that includes a foie gras-spiked burger and a rack of lamb accompanied by shepherd's pie. The mosaic floors and ceiling remain untouched, and the view of Central Park is as grand as ever. • 1 Central Pl. So. (212-583-1111). (E)

★ Shelly's New York

The latest Shelly Fireman production inhabits an old Automat space, ergo the "Horn & Hardart" creamed spinach and macaroni and cheese. Only the assimilative Fireman (of Brooklyn Diner fame) would offer towering shellfish platters and stone crabs flown in daily from Joe's in Miami Beach alongside miso-glazed halibut, chicken schnitzel, and a 50-ounce porterhouse steak cooked "Brooklyn style" and make it all work. • 104 W. 57th St. (212-245-2422). (M-E)

Tao Asian Bistro

The team behind Rue 57 has transformed the old

Takeout

Back Into the Cold

In the early eighties, after an influential and high-calorie summer vacation in Italy, 19-year-old Jon Snyder left college to start Ciao Bella, the little gelato company that could. Burned out after nearly six years spent cold-calling chefs and custom-blending flavors, he sold the brand to a new owner who eventually gave it a national identity and a coveted slot on just about every dessert menu in town. Snyder went off to do other things, like earn an M.B.A. at Columbia and trade equities on Wall Street. But the Bronx-born grandson of Carvel franchisees couldn't get the butterfat out of his system, and everywhere he looked, his past life called to him. "Everybody was always saying they love Ciao Bella. Every restaurant, it's Ciao Bella." New York, he decided, was ready for another premium ice cream—especially since Ciao Bella had moved its production facilities to New Jersey. "I was always proud of the fact that it was a Manhattan business," says Snyder. And since his noncompete clause expired years ago, there was nothing to stop him from importing a batch freezer from Bologna, sourcing the best local ingredients, and opening **Il Laboratorio del Gelato** in a storefront next door to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, guaranteeing him a steady stream of nostalgic visitors. Although he expects to do mostly wholesale restaurant business, he's also opened a small café serving coffee, shakes, twelve flavors a day, and toppings like homemade hot fudge and fresh berry coulis. In times like these, even M.B.A.'s need something to fall back on. (95 Orchard Street; 212-343-9922.)

R.R.



Palace movie house into a place where the indecisive can share spicy lobster roll with black caviar, Shanghai-style soup dumplings, \$10-an-ounce Kobe beef with wasabi, and Peking duck. Book the "sky box," a private room where the projectionist's booth used to be, and gaze down on the sixteen-foot Buddha, keeping the peace. • 42 E. 58th St. (212-888-2288). (M)

Above 60th Street, East Side

The Boathouse in Central Park

Claim a table by a flowery umbrella on the pondside deck and give thanks to Frederick Olmsted and generations of park champions for preserving this precious greenery. The American menu leans toward fresh seafood like pan-roasted monkfish with spring onions and garlic confit, and seared wild striped bass. • E. 72nd St. and Park Drive N. (212-517-2233). (M-E)

★ Café Boulud

Most chefs have one menu to worry about. At Daniel Boulud's beige-on-beige bistro, Andrew Carmellini has four. For "Le Voyage," he globe-trots from Vietnam to New Orleans. Mixing and matching is encouraged, so there's no reason why you can't begin with fresh- and smoked-salmon latkes from "La Saison," segue into potato-crusted sea bass from "La Tradition," and conclude with a warm fig tart from the menu called "Le Potager," nirvana for the vegetarian gourmet. • 20 East 76th Street (212-772-2600). (E)

★ Café Sabarsky

Museum Mile is full of museum cafés, but none quite like this elegant evocation of a Viennese-style kaffeehaus at Ronald Lauder's Neue Galerie New York. The artistic sensibility permeates the café, with its reproductions of Josef Hoffmann sconces, Adolf Loos bentwood chairs, and Otto Wagner fabrics. And the theme continues with tortes (Sacher and Linzer), Bavarian ham for breakfast, cod strudel for lunch—and Friday nights only, dinner service until 9 P.M. • 1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-288-0665). (M)

★ Fred's at Barneys New York

Normally, the stuff served in department-store eateries is the gastronomic equivalent of the final clearance bin. Not so here. The menu's an amalgam of au courant Italian (lovely pasta), guilt-ridden dietetic (chicken soup rendered fatless), and size-6-bedamned deli (chicken livers and pot roast to plotz from). The airy new ninth-floor location features a serpentine granite bar, leather chairs, and, unlike the old subterranean space, daylight. • 660 Madison Ave., nr. 61st St. (212-833-2200). (M-E)

Haru Sake Bar

Very fresh sushi, sashimi, tempura, plus Japanese fusion fare, and an expanded selection of sake and sake cocktails are the draw at this popular uptown branch of the Japanese mini-chain. Take-out service too. • 1327 Third Ave., at 76th St. (212-452-1028). (M)

Isle of Capri

Three steps away from the hustle and bustle of Grand Central, here's a cozy Italian spot. After 45 years, serving specialities like porchetta, porcini and trippa alla Calabrese. • 110 E. 42nd St. (212-223-9430). (M)

★ Jojo

This is where it all began. The menu features gerichten first stuns with fresh herbs, citrus, and essences, vegetable-based soups, and more. The once-staid restaurant has been completely reimagined. The delo remake of the reigning wisdom is a chocolate cake—specifically, a chocolate cake. • 5656). (E)

Kai

Downstairs at the Japanese restaurant, the menu of the dish is \$55. The ingredient in

AUGUST 19, 2002

