

Go on and Talk, It's Encouraged



Philip Greenberg for The New York Times

The Double Seven, a new bar in the meatpacking district, was designed by Dodd Mitchell. Its parent club, Lotus, is across the street.

By VICTORIA DE SILVERIO
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IF you want to shake your bottom, "fine, it's legal," said Mark Baker, an owner of the Double Seven, the newest lounge in the meatpacking district, the club epicenter of Manhattan. "You can grind, sure, but our bar is just not designed for dancing."

Shocking words coming from a night-life impresario who is also an owner of one of downtown's top drink-and-dance nightclubs, the legendary Lotus, which five years ago helped to jump-start the meatpacking district's makeover into club land's Disney World. As the offspring of Lotus, the Double Seven inherits the glamour pedigree and, with it, expectations that it will be the next big thing. Though smaller and quieter, the Double Seven is not straying far from its parent. It sits right across from Lotus, on a stretch of cobblestone street.

Since the club opened in late August, it has drawn the requisite word-of-mouth buzz, gossip items and camera-magnet celebrities, though Mr. Baker claims that the Double Seven's grown-up mantra is to keep the crowd small and the noise low. "Being able to have a conversation has been absolutely neglected in New York night life," he said.

He and his associates (David Rabin, Will Regan, Jeffrey Jah and Monika Chiang) see the Double Seven as "the anti-Lotus," a sophisticated, controlled environment that appeals to clubgoers who are too old to dance on banquettes or who just want to take the night off the dance floor.

But first they had to create the place. Packing the bar with models, actors and socialites was routine. Having had a hand in almost every night life venture in New York - Tunnel, Danceteria, Buddha Bar - coveted guests are on their speed dial. "We have a permanent guest list of about 4,000 people," said Mr. Rabin, who admitted that enforcing the Double Seven's strict 90-person capacity may cause problems. "What will happen when Mick Jagger's in town and we are full? Well, that's a tough one."

Mr. Baker added, "Our crowd is the glamour and the glitz, but they are also a bit 'been there, done that.' "

A new look was needed. The owners put up a \$1.1 million budget and called on Dodd Mitchell, a Los Angeles designer whose success with the boîtes Dolce and Chi make him a go-to guy in club design. Besides Mr. Mitchell, the owners hired an obsessive mixologist and a 205-year-old chocolatier.

Though he recently renovated the Hotel Roosevelt in Hollywood, Mr. Mitchell was edgy about taking on the Double Seven, his first New York project. "New York is much more classy than L.A," he said, "where what people care about is Lindsay Lohan's handbag, not style, architecture or a sense of permanence."

Mr. Mitchell finds inspiration in many places. "It was 4 in the morning, and I was watching this Spanish channel," he said. "And I don't speak Spanish. But on the screen was a beautiful girl dancing in a dress with beads moving up and moving down." This led him to the bar's centerpiece, a wall of light made with 600 amber glass teardrops against a smoked mirror.

The owners spent more than \$100,000 on Italian crocodile-embossed leather that covers comfortable banquettes and wraps around the bar counter. Acoustic foam blocks in brown suede on the ceiling keep the din to a minimum, and thick leather drapes separate the two rooms of the bar.

Bathed in the flattering light of the wall sculpture, a gaggle of long-limbed pre-Fashion Week beauties piled into the banquettes on a recent Saturday night. Mr. Rabin looked on nervously as one of them climbed out of her seat, almost sticking her stiletto into the pricey leather. A man with his hair tied in a small knot at the nape stroked his pale girlfriend's long hair as she checked her voice mail and sipped a Pimm's Rangoon, one of the bar's 13 cocktails created by the cult hero of old-school libation, Sasha Petraske of Milk & Honey.

Like other details in the club, the effort behind making a perfect cocktail is concealed. Mr. Petraske agreed to work with the Double Seven only if his exacting yet minimal recipes were meticulously followed. So each day, for about six hours, someone squeezes juice from pineapples, apples and other fruits, and crushes, grates and molds cubes of ice. "A cocktail is like a cappuccino," Mr. Petraske said. "They are very simple to make, yet no one does it right."

A gorgeous waitress, her body poured into the Double Seven uniform of a form-fitting black dress adorned with a black leather corset, placed two cocktails on a table, along with two pieces of chocolate made by Debaube & Gallais. Each drink was paired with a different cocoa confection.

"You know, this place picked a mood and delivered on every angle," said Kim Bates, a marketing strategist in her early 30's, "with the drinks, the design, the uniforms - which, by the way, should be for sale because I want one - and the mood they chose is decadence."

Glancing down at her black Jimmy Choos, her friend Julia Metcalf, an architect, agreed. "Yeah, and you won't leave with sticky stuff on your shoes."

The Double Seven

418 West 14th Street (Ninth Avenue); (212) 981-9099.

GETTING IN Arrive early: capacity is limited even for friends of the owners.

DRESS CODE Something classy.

D.J. PICKS "Apparently Nothin' " by Young Disciples; "Time Stands Still" by Cut Copy.

SIGHTINGS Benicio Del Toro, Kate Hudson, Scarlett Johansson.

SIGNATURE DRINK Gold Rush (bourbon, lemon juice, honey and hot water, over ice, with a honey ganache), \$16.