

Haute Boite: The Darby

ELLE's exclusive tour of the retro supper club that is lighting up New York nightlife

By [Suzanne Weinstock](#) | November 16, 2010 11:30 a.m.

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"The fashion industry gets it more," Richie Akiva says about The Darby, a supper club opening at 246 West 14th Street in New York City this week. "The Darby brings all the elements together—fashion, music, dining, glamour. And if anyone's going to get it before everyone else, it's going to be the fashion industry."

Fashion is no doubt having a lovefest with old-school glamour right now, and The Darby hits all the right notes. Supper clubs are the descendents of speakeasies: the glamorous, decadent celebration of Prohibition in the 1920s and 30s—champagne, entertainment, dancing, and classic American cuisine. New York's famous Rainbow Room, Copacabana, and El Morocco were gems during the golden age of supper clubs, but the culture declined in the 1960s. Fashion is now embracing that era with gusto.

"The timing in New York was perfect, and we decided to bring a culture back to the city that has been lost," Akiva says. Long before its opening, the fashion crowd was already throwing parties there. Narciso Rodriguez and Marchesa held Fashion Week events in September (Marchesa also outfitted the performers and hostesses).



Photo: Kelly Stuart

[Exclusive Slideshow: Inside the Darby](#)

Mad Men led the way for designers to obsess over all things '50s and '60s. The full-skirted, ladylike fall 2010 collections from Louis Vuitton and Prada were in the editorials of every magazine and are now flying out of stores. Hourglass cocktail dresses, pencil skirts, and full skirts of longer lengths, pumps, furs, top-handle bags, and cardigans are all right on trend. The Darby will inspire you to bring out those looks you've been investing in.

"Unless you're going to a charity event, you don't really get dressed up anymore," Akiva says about New York nightlife. "You used to want to go out and get dressed. It's not special anymore, and that's what we're trying to bring back." There won't be a dress code, but the intention is to create an environment where you'll feel out of place if you don't dress up.

"It's supposed to be a sophisticated, sexy night out. It's a restaurant with some entertainment and excitement for a mature audience," Sartiano says. Akiva and Sartiano say their ventures are maturing as they do. They started with nightclub 10AK then moved on to Butter, a restaurant with a DJ in the dining room and a Monday-night party that continues to attract celebrities every week. The Darby is the boys' fantasy of grown-up nightlife. "We wanted to bring it back to what it used to be. You went out and you had dinner and you saw a show—like what you see in the movies and what our parents did," Akiva says.

The Darby preserves much of the Victorian elegance of the nightclub Nell's, which was in the space from 1986 until 2004. "Nell's was really infamous," Akiva says. "I snuck in here when I was 16. I came in and I saw Mick Jagger and Eddie Murphy and Stevie Wonder and this one and that one at each table." The shell of the room is original, but a metal cage now encases the space, and modern chandeliers have replaced Nell's beaded ones. "It would become too gimmicky if you just made it a 1950s place, so we tried to modernize that feeling so people will respect it now," Akiva explains.

Each night, diners will be fed by Food Network star and Butter chef Alexandra Guarnaschelli and entertained by members of The Darby's rotating house band. The music could be cabaret, soul, or funk. Fronting the band most nights will be Marchesa-clad cabaret performer Lady Rizo or singer Ron Grant. And occasionally a superstar like Alicia Keys or Chris Rock will get thrown in. Akiva fantasizes about having Stevie Wonder come in and perform a night of his classics, while Sartiano would prefer an acoustic Eddie Vedder set. Both rattle off names like Wayne Newton, Frankie Valli, and Tina Turner as part of their wish list. Special performances with always be unannounced.

"If you're here having dinner one night, you might get lucky," Akiva says.

Every night will be a flurry of activity that might just give diners whiplash. There will be the action in the kitchen, performers onstage, oysters and clams being shucked at the raw bar, and cocktail mixing at the bar that involves fire, hot ice, and smoke. Not to mention the glamorous getups of the other diners, according to Sartiano. "There's definitely going to be a distinct fashion sense to the place and the way that people dress." Hopefully, The Darby will quench New Yorkers' thirst for the glamour of a bygone era that still feels right today.

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