

FEBRUARY 2013

AVENUE

BOOGIE NIGHTS

Through
the ages

by Bob Morris

SECRET ADDRESSES

The ultimate
little
black book

Restaurateur
JOHN DELUCIE
& interior designer
MEG SHARPE

team up to revive the
legendary Bill's

Modern Day GIBSON Girl



written by Suzanne Weinstock Klein
photographed by Keith Major styled by Rory McDonough
hair by Angelo David for Angelo David Haircare
makeup by Julie Tussey for Angelo David Salon / Dior Beauty
models Ryan Mertz + André Watson from Next Model Management

Before the Flappers and the '60s Hippie Chicks, America had the Gibson Girl—independent, spirited and sassy. Created by illustrator Charles Dana Gibson in the 1890s, the Gibson Girl was the early 20th century feminine ideal. In an ode to the era and Gibson's glamorous creatures, we've recreated some of his wickedly funny illustrations from the period with Bill's interior designer Meg Sharpe.



*Social Debts.
As the last guest goes ~ thank heaven!*

“John understands that hospitality goes far beyond physical sustenance,” says celebrity party planner Bronson van Wyck



A great restaurant is a bit like a perfect recipe: a careful melding of food, décor, crowd, service and buzz, and then just a little something extra, all served up in perfect harmony. With the opening of Bill's, John DeLucie once again proves he's the master of this secret sauce.

“John has a gift in knowing what people want out of a dining experience,” says fashion designer Rachel Roy. “He is great at balancing that iconic New York feel with what people are wanting to eat and drink now.”

Bill's was once a raucous Prohibition-era speakeasy that evolved into a New York institution where a drunken night was considered a rite of passage to many. However, the 1890s townhouse has been given a new lease on life, as New York's hot new bar and restaurant, on 54th Street, where even Midtown-averse diners are trekking, to try to snag a table.

A destination for snobbish foodies this most certainly is not. The menu at Bill's, put together by executive chef Jason Hall, is elevated all-American bar and grill cuisine. The real draw is DeLucie's near-magical ability to deliver the most genuinely enjoyable of dining experiences. This is a skill he has developed over many years, working in kitchens around New York City, but particularly during the time he spent as both founding chef and partner alongside *Vanity Fair* editor Graydon Carter, at the nearly mythical Waverly Inn. There, the unpretentious food, warm ambiance, powerhouse crowd and unlisted number made the restaurant one of New York's most lusted-after reservations. The Waverly also elevated DeLucie to celebrity chef status.

When DeLucie parted ways with that establishment and opened The Lion in 2010, with partners Sean Largotta and Mark Amadei, the crowds and hype followed, with an enthusiasm normally reserved for musicians and movie stars. The same mania occurred when he opened Crown the following year, and Bill's this past November. The company is called Crown Hospitality Group. DeLucie insists that celebrities have little to do with the success of his restaurants. But it certainly doesn't hurt that the partners have hosted the biggest names on the planet, including Karl Lagerfeld, Gwyneth Paltrow, Demi Moore and scores

of others. Nor does DeLucie's own growing reputation and charm spoil the brew. “John's personality is key—everyone likes him,” says fashion designer and self-professed fan Nicole Miller. “His unique take on food, interesting but not too strange, coupled with the great ambience he always creates, makes for a winning combination.”

It's actually quite simple, DeLucie humbly asserts. The formula is about putting the customer first, a seemingly obvious approach yet one that is actually rather rare in the ego-driven New York restaurant scene. “We think about what the customer likes, how they want to be greeted, what they want to eat, where they want to sit and how they feel when they walk through the space,” says DeLucie.

DeLucie has a gift for sizing up the clientele in a neighborhood—one in this case heavy on high-powered executives and those aspiring to that position. He then gives them exactly what they want. “In the long run, after the hype dies down, we hope to be a great neighborhood place where you can go get a burger and a beer or drink a fantastic Barolo and eat a gnarly porterhouse steak,” DeLucie says. “Bill's will be the type of place,” he adds, “where the bartender recalls that you prefer Bordeaux and the waiter remembers that you like your steak rare.”

Previous page:
Dress by Oscar de la Renta. Oscar de la Renta, 772 Madison Avenue, 212.288.5810. Earrings by Blair Husain Jewelry, Blair Husain Jewelry, 917.975.6125. Top bracelet Miriam Salat. Miriam Salat, 10 Columbus Circle, 212.459.8920. Bottom bracelet by Jennifer Miller. Jennifer Miller, 972 Lexington Avenue, 212.734.8199.
On André: Black wool tuxedo and belt by Salvatore Ferragamo. Salvatore Ferragamo, 655 5th Avenue, 212.759.3822. Black bow tie by Alexander McQueen. MRPORTER.com. (Worn throughout)

Next page:
Sequins gown by Roberto Cavalli. Roberto Cavalli, 711 Madison Avenue, 212.755.7722.
Fur stole by Edition01. Edition01.com. Ring and earrings by Leviev. Leviev, 700 Madison Ave., 212.763.5300.
On Ryan: Black tuxedo and leather shoes by Giorgio Armani. Giorgio Armani, 760 Madison Avenue, 212.988.9191. Raw edged bow tie by Lanvin. MRPORTER.com. Watch by Hublot. Hublot, 692 Madison Avenue, 212.308.0408. (Worn throughout)



Les Fiancés.

She: we are too poor to marry.

He: but I am worth a million. Bah Fove!

She: True, but if you were worth two million, we would be so much better off than those who have only one.

"Bill's will be the type of place where the bartender recalls that you prefer Bordeaux and the waiter remembers that you like your steak rare," says DeLucie



From left to right:
On Mark Amadei: Tuxedo by Yves Saint Laurent. Black dress shirt by Dolce & Gabbana. MRPORTER.com. Bow tie by Charvet, Bergdorf Goodman, 754 Fifth Avenue, 212.753.7300. Watch, Rolex. (His own)

On Meg Sharpe: Dress by Robin Brouillette, 25 PARK, 1296 Third Avenue, 212.585.2525. Earrings and ring by Graff, Graff, 710 Madison Avenue, 212.355.9292.

On John DeLucie: Tuxedo by Hugo Boss Red Label, Bloomingdale's, 1000 Third Avenue, 212.705.2000. Bow tie by Alexander McQueen, MRPORTER.com.

*Editor's note: For all die-hard Gibson fans out there we took the liberty of changing this caption to suit our story. Sorry!



Holding all the Cards:

Mark Amadei, Meg Sharpe and John DeLucie

"Designers like to design, so they come back with 'designs,' and we didn't want it designed!" says DeLucie. "We wanted it to be a comfortable, lovely place to go eat a hamburger."



"John understands that hospitality goes far beyond physical sustenance," says celebrity party planner Bronson van Wyck, who has hosted numerous events at DeLucie's restaurants. "You're cocooned from the second you walk in the door by a world created just to please you," Van Wyck says. "And it's a wonderful world: warm and inviting, covered in velvet that's worn until it glistens; brass that looks like it hasn't been polished since the last war; and the best restaurant lighting in New York City."

Décor plays a key role in establishing the tone at each of DeLucie's character-rich restaurants, set inside landmark buildings from the turn of the 20th century—and Bill's is no exception.

ing the city's top design firms but could not find anyone to capture their vision of the West Village space. "Designers like to design, so they come back with 'designs,' and we didn't want it designed!" says DeLucie. "We wanted it to be a comfortable, lovely place to go eat a hamburger."

In frustration, DeLucie, Largotta and Amadei turned to their friend Sharpe, who threw together some tear sheets to help with their next meeting, and the guys were so blown away they decided to look no further. After a bit of cajoling, Sharpe agreed to design The Lion as a side project to her day job (she has started her own firm, Meg Sharpe Interiors), and the rest is history. The four have become a self-described "dysfunctional family" who travel the world together and lovingly fight over decorating each restaurant, all in the interest of making the space the best it can be.

With Bill's, Sharpe was tasked with doing justice to the building's heritage and charm while updating it for a modern clientele. The final result of the Bill's renovation is a warm and comfortable three-story space that feels like it never could have existed any other way. "The biggest compliment you can ever get in terms of doing a place like this is that no one can figure out exactly what you did," says Amadei.

The narrow stairs creak atmospherically as you ascend them, and the walls are adorned with an eclectic mix of art, mirrors, maps and just a touch of taxidermy, including a billy goat nicknamed Bill, who keeps watch over the room from a corner booth.

It's John DeLucie's fanciful, fantastic world, and there's nowhere diners would rather be. ♦

Meg Sharpe, one of New York's hottest up-and-coming interior designers, is therefore a key part of the team. Born and raised in San Francisco, Sharpe was a professional ballerina until a car accident altered her path in life. After studying history of art at the University of York in the United Kingdom, and receiving a master's degree in design at the University of California-Los Angeles, she landed a coveted job with design icon Kelly Wearstler. However, Sharpe had dreams of New York, and a "dream job" in international store development at Ralph Lauren finally got her there.

"I thought it was very *Sex and the City* of me, but I would go to dinner on my own and check out cool spots," Sharpe remembers. One of those restaurants happened to be a (now closed) West Village restaurant called Charles owned by Sean Largotta. Largotta befriended her, and it wasn't long before she became fast friends with Amadei and DeLucie as well.

Soon after, when DeLucie and his partners set out to open The Lion, they hit an early snag. They were interview-

On Meg Sharpe, right: Black and white rose print gown by Naeem Khan. Special order only, 212.575.1173. Earrings by Jack Vartanian. Jack Vartanian, 996 Madison Avenue, 212.988.2881. Bracelet and ring by Miriam Salat.



Eight minutes after one.