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Supper Club's Delightful Cuisine

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Lucy Komisar

A Morocco-inspired décor, a soulful singer of standards and blues, and a choice of superb Latin and Japanese cuisine produce the excitement of Michel Bittan's new 201 Supper Club.

The style and panache of elegant dining combine with tuneful cabaret to make this the place to go in Englewood, on the New Jersey side of the George Washington Bridge to Manhattan. You walk into a dimly lit room of maroon-covered tables and are greeted by the soft strumming of a recorded Spanish guitar. On one side is a long bar, on the other, separated by gauze curtains, are private nooks brightened by small cut-glass Moroccan lanterns. As you sip a delicious white Sangria at the bar or share a bottle of good French or American wine at a table, you relax in the artfully created setting.

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The Latin cuisine is prepared by Andrew DiCataldo, who spent nine years as a chef at the popular New York restaurant, "Patria." DiCataldo, who is Italian, lived in Colombia and Miami, then after culinary school worked in Spanish restaurants. Sushi is prepared by a Japanese chief. Michel Bittan's decisions about this complex are very personal. He was born in Casablanca and lived and worked in Europe. He designed the rooms himself to create a combination Moroccan and European feel. The bar is backed by three tiers of lit arches. "I saw it in a magazine and I liked it," he says. The menu choices? "There are three kinds of food everybody eats: Italian, Chinese, and Spanish," he explains. Why Sushi? He had the best market research: "I have three little kids 10, 12 and 14. Whenever I take them to a restaurant, one wants to eat sushi!"

Bittan has a history that helped inspire this restaurant. After his father died in 1963, his mother decided to leave Morocco and take the family of six children to Israel. He explained, "It was a turbulent time for the Jews in Morocco after the '56 war and Sinai Campaign." They spent seven months in a Jewish immigration transit camp in Marseilles. In Israel, he served in the army and ran a disco in Tel Aviv, then traveled around Europe, working in clubs in France, Belgium, and Spain. He came to the U.S. in 1973 and soon opened the New York club "Mr. Laffs" with Mets



201 Supper Club owner Michel Bittan far right, with friends. In the center is Bruno Jamais who owns BrunoJamais restaurant/club in Manhattan. Bruno Jamais and Michel Bittan have also just opened Cafe B restaurant on East 65th Street in Manhattan. Photo credit: manhattansociety.com

baseball player Art Shamsky and the Yankees' Phil Lentz.

He jokes about how his identity has changed as he's moved around the world: "In Morocco they called us Jews; in France they called us Africans; in Israel they called us Moroccans, here they call us French."

His love of dining and music translates into cabaret in the supper club and a disco upstairs. Soon after my companion and I arrive, so does Bobby Curtis, with his backup keyboard player and drums, to entertain us with the kind of melodic mood music that never goes out of fashion: "A Foggy night in London town," "Have I told you lately that I love you?" and "The way you look tonight." This is music at a sophisticated level where you can hear yourself speak.

Bittan was out of the restaurant and music business for a while. He worked in fashion (Sassoon Jeans and then Guess Jeans) and still deals in real estate (hotels and medical centers). He arrived in Englewood in 1996 and set up the Solaia Italian restaurant next door to the Bergen Performing Arts Center, on whose board he serves. But he wasn't satisfied. He decided the city needed an upscale restaurant. And, "There was no space in the area where you could have a party for more than a few people." So he created Club 201, with a supper club on the ground floor and a large disco above it. The disco, with comfortable Moroccan-style couches, has a DJ and colorful light shows as well as an arcade room. Bittan adds, "I give all charities the space free. Last week we raised money for hurricane [relief] and for a book fair."

On the night I visited the Supper Club, patrons were having a smashing time. "I love it, I love the atmosphere," said Daryl Richardson, a pressman for a Wall Street newspaper. "Curtis is not so overwhelming, he blends in." His companion Carla nodded, "The ambience is great."

At another table, two couples, including a dentist, doctor, and real estate agent, agreed. One said they liked getting cabaret for the same money as a restaurant meal. Another echoed, "Bobby Curtis is great. The atmosphere is fabulous, lively. It brings new life to Englewood." Think Mediterranean coast, with a hint of Las Vegas, on the Hudson.

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