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New Windows on a New World; Can the Food Ever Match the View?

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IT is high anxiety at Windows on the World. One week remains before the restaurant reopens and the breathtaking panorama from the 107th floor of the World Trade Center competes once again with the chefs' creations.

But for those who remember speeding up in an ear-popping quarter-of-a-mile elevator ride to the multilevel restaurant complex that has been closed since the bombing in February 1993, not much besides the stunning view will be the same. It has become a different world in the 20 years since Windows first opened," said Joseph Baum, the soft-spoken Barnum of the restaurant world, who was in charge of creating Windows I in 1976 and who won, in a hotly contested competition among prominent restaurateurs two years ago, the contract to develop Windows II.

In its heyday, Windows on the World, which officially reopens on June 27, was the highest-grossing restaurant in the country. "At the time it closed, nobody thought it was serious," said David Emil, Mr. Baum's partner in the venture. Whether the food ever matched the view is open to question. But by the 1990's, it was clear that it did not and had become another reason why connoisseurs avoided dining on the top floors of buildings. Its original inventive menu, devised by James Beard among others, had become an expensive listing of dishes one might find in most hotel dining rooms.

"We want to convince people that it's a great restaurant again," Mr. Emil said. With a multicultural team of chefs, the new Windows on the World has taken on a globe-trotting spirit of adventure, if not daring, in its approach to food. The question will be whether this restaurant, facing far more competition than it did 20 years ago, can successfully chart such a course and once again become a magnet for New Yorkers as well as visitors. Mr. Emil, who with Mr. Baum will operate the complex with a 15-year lease from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which owns the World Trade Center, projected annual gross revenue of at least \$30 million. Mr. Baum, who was involved in the management of the original Windows on the World only for the first three years, said that he was fascinated to have an opportunity to redo his own work.

"There are technical reasons for some of the changes we made," he said. "But more important are the changes in people whose tastes are more casual and lighthearted, yet more sophisticated." As before, the spotlight will be on the main restaurant. Its original gilded modern ocean liner elegance, designed by Warren Platner, has been replaced by a more colorful and whimsical design by Hugh Hardy, the new architect. But the restaurant remains a venue for formal dining, jackets still required but neckties now optional. Prices will be slightly higher than they were when the restaurant closed in 1993.

Informality has taken over in an alternative, up-to-the-minute dining option called the Greatest Bar on Earth. It has replaced the more intimate City Lights Bar and Hors d'Oeuvre. The term "bar" does not do the new room justice: it is more like a three-ring circus, with performing chefs at separate stations rolling sushi, shucking oysters and stirring shabu-shabu on stone induction cookers in a stagy space that holds 300 people. The Greatest Bar on Earth is on the same wavelength, albeit on a grander scale, as the new unfettered places opening across the city that appeal to dress-down impulsives, to people who would like something to eat without having to reserve weeks in advance, who prefer to spend less than \$50 a person and who may not be in the mood for a three-course dinner. These customers are younger than the restaurant-goers who came to the original Windows on the World. They often work in the neighborhood, where seven million square feet of office space has been added since 1976,

and increasingly, they also live there, a recent sea change in the downtown area. Mr. Baum and his colleagues hope to tempt this crowd with microbrews on tap, vodkas galore, wines by the glass and an international array of some 25 dishes, including barbecued "hot lips" oysters, Siberian pelmeni, personal pizzas, grilled quail wrapped in vine leaves, tagines in colorful pottery, slabs of charcuterie on a wooden board, grilled jerk pork on skewers and fish and chips piled in a silver basket. "There is a real appetite for variety and discovery today," Mr. Baum said. "And we want people to have fun." This approach has also driven the food concepts for the main restaurant.

When Windows on the World was created, culinary explorers were setting their sights on California and the Louisiana bayou, not Morocco or Brazil. The precious allure of nouvelle cuisine had yet to fade, extra-virgin olive oil and balsamic vinegar were not yet supermarket staples, American foie gras and goat cheese did not exist and no fine restaurant could get away with serving a veal shank unless it was called osso buco. "James Beard was involved in 1976," Mr. Baum said. "What we developed grew out of American tradition, like the Four Seasons restaurant." The Bicentennial was in full swing when Windows first opened. It was time to celebrate America.

And now? "The great dishes of the world," said Michael Whiteman, the president of Joseph Baum & Michael Whiteman, a company in Mr. Baum's complicated business portfolio that serves as consultants to the Windows on the World project. He said the concept, a world view of food, suited today's outlook and had not changed since they presented it when bidding for the contract. The a la carte menu in the main restaurant will feature showpieces like an entire foie gras glazed with Sauternes, Spanish-style squab roasted in a decorative salt crust, whole daurade flamed over fennel, whole duck bigarade bejeweled with glazed kumquats and a whole veal shank pulsing with Mexican seasonings and served en papillote for two.

These will be the head-turning acts that Mr. Baum likes even in well-mannered dining rooms. Dishes will be presented to the table in copper pans or on platters, then taken to the central silver, copper and gold display stand, about the only fixture remaining from the original Windows, where they will be carved. Lobster pot pie, white clam risotto, carpaccio of house-smoked beef and marinated mahi-mahi with Japanese seaweed salad are some other dishes that will likely survive revisions and tastings. The kitchen will do its own smoking and has even installed a charcoal grill.

Almost every aspect of the project is brand new. Milton Glaser, its graphic designer the first time around, came up with new dinnerware and worked with Carrie Robbins, a costume designer, to devise 36 different jazzy outfits for the waiters, captains, runners, parking valets, concierges and busboys. Some of the vests are printed with the same urban street maps as one of the carpets. Even the kitchen organization was changed. Instead of a hierarchy directed by one executive chef, typical in hotels as well as the old Windows, Mr. Baum set up a team system led by Georges Masraff, who was born in Cairo, worked in Italy and France, and who for five years was the executive chef at Tavern on the Green.

Philippe Feret, until recently the chef at Cafe Centro in the Met Life Building, is in charge of the main restaurant. Mark Murphy, who worked at Layla in TriBeCa, is the chef for the Greatest Bar on Earth and will also be the chef for the Cellar in the Sky, which has been relocated to have a view. It will open in the fall for prix-fixe dinners that will include wine. Patrick Woodside, the pastry chef, has worked at some of London's finest hotels and restaurants. The chef for banquets will be Frederic Kieffer, who has been a caterer for the Museum of Natural History and Tentation, a catering firm. The rooms for banquets, now expanded by a third, opened last month to accommodate affairs that had already been booked,

As eclectic as the food may be, Mr. Masraff said he would avoid what he called the "mishmash" effect. "You won't find rabbit bastilla with guacamole inside," he said. "Everything may not be 100 percent authentic, but it will have an integrity that respects the original."

Except perhaps for the golden lemon tart created by Albert Kumin, the original pastry chef, everything on the menu is new. At the informal daylong tastings over the last few weeks on the 106th floor, the chefs presented plates of food in no particular order but often as side-by-side presentations with a single element changed. Did the

assembled group prefer the smoked salmon on top of the smoked potato salad or alongside? Did the morel and asparagus ravioli need the asparagus puree underneath? Did the chefs nail the lobster pot pie with version No. 4?

The wine cellar came readymade and will combine old and new. It still holds 20,000 bottles, some vintages as rare as 1928, from the original cellar. After the bombing, the wines were moved into a special temperature-controlled storage area that Inhilco, the company that had been running the restaurant complex and which owned the wine, had built on a lower level in the building.

"I have to hand it to them for taking good care of the wine," said Kevin Zraly, who originally ran the wine program when he was 25 and who is back replenishing the stock. He is working with Andrea Immer, 29, one of only three women in the United States who are master sommeliers; she is the beverage director.

Now, the phones are ringing and requests for reservations are pouring in, mostly from people who live and work in the New York area. "When Windows first opened it was a great restaurant for New Yorkers," Mr. Baum said. "When tourists came, they came mostly because New Yorkers were proud to bring them here. We want Windows to be a great restaurant for New Yorkers again."

Hours, Prices and Particulars

THE complex of dining rooms on the 106th and 107th floors of One World Trade Center combines restaurants, lounges, bars and rooms for private parties. Windows on the World Restaurant on the 107th floor has 240 seats. It will be open for dinner Monday through Thursday, 5 P.M. to 10:30 P.M.; Friday and Saturday to 11:30 P.M., and Sunday to 10 P.M. The menu's main courses will be around \$25.

A buffet lunch will be served on Saturdays, noon to 3 P.M. and on Sundays, 11 A.M. to 3 P.M. It will be \$32.50 a person; \$16.25 for those younger than 12. At lunch, Monday through Friday, the restaurant will operate as a private club but with limited reservations available to the public, 11:30 A.M. to 2 P.M.

Jackets are required for men. Reservations are recommended and can be made six weeks in advance: (212) 524-7011. The Greatest Bar on Earth, on the 107th floor, seats 160 but has a capacity of nearly 300. It will be open Monday through Thursday, 4 P.M. to 1 A.M.; Friday to 2 A.M.; Saturday, 11 A.M. to 2 A.M., and Sunday, noon to 11 P.M. Reservations are accepted only for Sunday brunch, served noon to 4 P.M. Food prices on the a la carte menu will start at 75 cents for a clam on the half-shell and go to \$22 for giant shrimp in shredded phyllo. Sunday brunch is a la carte, with main dishes \$13 to \$22. For reservations, (212) 524-7011.

There will be live music starting at 10 P.M., with dancing Thursday through Saturday. On those days after 10 P.M., a music charge of \$10 a person will be added at tables, \$5 at the bar. Jackets are not required. The Skybox, a smoking lounge, will be open Monday through Thursday, 7 P.M. to 1 A.M.; Friday to 2 A.M.; Saturday, 11 A.M. to 2 A.M., and Sunday, noon to 11 P.M.

The Cellar in the Sky, a restaurant that has seating for 60, will serve five-course prix-fixe dinners, including wine, for around \$100 a person, beginning in September. Windows on the World has six banquet rooms. For a seated dinner on the 107th floor, the Pinnacle Suite holds 350, the Liberty Suite 150, the Hudson Suite 120 and the Manhattan Suite 40. On the 106th floor, the grand ballroom can accommodate 700 people and the Horizon Suite 200. For information, (212) 524-7033.

Membership in the Club at Windows on the World costs \$500; annual dues are \$750. Benefits include free breakfast, access to the restaurants at lunch and many special events. Before the bombing, parking was available, free, in the World Trade Center's underground garage. Now that underground parking is no longer open to the public, Windows on the World provides valet parking, for \$15, at the West Street entrance. Parking at garages costs about \$20 for three hours before 6 P.M., and a flat fee of about \$10 after 6. On-street parking is difficult to find. FLORENCE FABRICANT