



An American Tour: 109



New York City's 21 Club

The 21 Club, often simply 21, is an American traditional cuisine restaurant and former prohibition-era speakeasy, located at 21 West 52nd Street in New York City.

The first version of the club opened in Greenwich Village in 1922, run by cousins Jack Kreindler and Charlie Berns. It was originally a small speakeasy known as the Red Head. In 1925, the location was moved to a basement on Washington Place and its name was changed to Frontón. The following year it moved uptown to 42 West 49th Street, changed its name to the Puncheon Club, and became much more exclusive. In 1929, to make way for the construction of Rockefeller Center, the club moved to its current location and changed its name to "Jack and Charlie's 21".

Although raided by police numerous times during Prohibition, the two were never caught. As soon as a raid began, a system of levers was used to tip the shelves of the bar, sweeping the liquor bottles through a chute and into the city's sewers. The bar also included a secret wine cellar, which was accessed through a hidden door in a brick wall which opened into the basement of the building next door. Though still used as a wine cellar today, part of the vault has been remodeled to allow guests to dine in private. 21 also stored the private wine collections of such celebrities as Presidents John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, and Gerald Ford; Joan Crawford; Elizabeth Taylor; Hugh Carey; Ernest Hemingway; Ivan Boesky; The Nordstrom Sisters; Frank Sinatra; Al Jolson; Gloria Vanderbilt; Sophia Loren; Mae West; Zsa Zsa Gabor; Aristotle Onassis; Gene Kelly; Gloria Swanson; Judy Garland; Sammy Davis, Jr.; and Marilyn Monroe.

At Christmas time the regulars received silk scarves decorated with a motif of various unique club insignia. Each scarf is numbered and has the Jockey logo and also features the famous railings associated with the building. Siggie Nordstrom had a collection of several dozen of these she'd received through the years. 21 Club scarves have a large following among scarf collectors.

Every President since Franklin Delano Roosevelt except for George W. Bush has dined at 21 (although Bush's wife and daughters have), and the restaurant has been frequented by so many celebrities that many of them have favorite tables. In 1995, 21 became part of Orient-Express Hotels Ltd. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/21_Club]

