



EDITORS' NOTE *Teddy Suric has held his current post since September 2013. Prior to this, he was General Manager and Director of Operations for The Burke Group. He received his degree in Hospitality Financial Management from Cornell University.*

COMPANY BRIEF *From the ornamental jockey figurines to the secret wine cellar, '21' (21club.com) is an American icon. Officially opened on January 1, 1929, '21' is one of America's most famous speakeasies from the Prohibition Era. Designed with its own disappearing bar and a secret wine cellar to hide the illegal liquor from prying eyes, it's a place where celebrities and captains of industry have wined and dined for more than 80 years.*

What has helped this institution stay relevant in New York?

History and consistency. There are not many iconic places left that are 88 years old and still going strong. With my hire three years ago, my task was to create '21' for the 21st Century, between the iconic jockeys and prohibition wine room and the toys in the ceiling of the bar room. We also had to better the food and beverage product, which we are achieving.

How critical are private events to this establishment?

Private dining is a huge part of our operation. We have 10 private dining rooms, which includes our gem, the famous wine cellar, which holds 22 people.

Over the past three years, we have made significant culinary strides and bettered the product with the hiring of Chef Sylvain Delpique.

'21' offers such a high-level feel. How do you make sure it's accessible?

It's a positive challenge because '21' Club was never private, although it was always a mystery as to how to get a table.

What I have done over the past three years is change the whole culinary program, which includes offering a snack menu and different martini programs at the bar, especially

Quintessential New York

An Interview with Theodore "Teddy" Suric, General Manager, '21' Club

in the front bar. Our numbers now reflect this due to the fact that we are introducing these great offerings to a younger crowd who always thought it was a private club but are now discovering it's not, and are loving the history and the feel of '21'.

We are continuing to upgrade and refurbish the entire property year to year. Indeed, with bringing culinary standards up and refurbishing the property, guests are seeing and feeling a difference.

Is the Prohibition Room more for private buyouts?

It's mainly for private events now, and I'm working on something in 2017 to do a Prohibition lounge/bar night, which just might include this gem.

What have you done on the culinary side?

I changed the culinary team when I started. I took the signature items, things like steak tartare, chicken hash, Caesar salad, and the famous '21' burger and made them better.

With the old dishes that we are known for, Chef Delpique also implemented new dishes and specials. We added a carving cart in the main dining room that offers daily specials for two that is going great. We are not trying to reinvent the culinary wheel but rather be consistent and offer great food and quality. Our guests do not mind the price as long as they get what they pay for and find consistency.

We made huge strides also on the social media end of things, particularly from the Open Table perspective. I inherited a 3.7 overall rating on ambiance, service, and food, and we're currently holding a solid 4.7. For the first time *Forbes* has put us in the 2016 All-Star Eateries In New York. Also, '21' went up in the *Zagat* guide and we are also currently among the top-10 frequented restaurants in New York.

Will you talk about building on the bar scene?

I truly believe the sign of a busy bar is a straight line to a busier dining room.

Since implementing a better culinary selection and drink menu in the bar, I am excited to announce, starting in January 2017, the entire lounge will be refurbished.

We have also added light music as part of the backdrop and there is no doubt the bar scene will be great in 2017.



Theodore "Teddy" Suric at the '21' Club bar (left); the iconic '21' Club facade (above)

When you came onboard, did you find the passion still there for service standards?

We currently have nearly 190 employees, some of whom are retiring after 40 years here, so there is no doubt that there is love for '21'. This rarely happens in the hospitality industry anymore.

In my entire hospitality experience, I've never seen a connection like the one between the associates and the guests that walk in here. It's truly a family atmosphere and they are all a huge part of '21's success.

When the opportunity to lead '21' was presented to you, did you know it was the right fit?

I am ecstatic and honored to be the GM at '21' Club. To lead such an iconic property, I was a bit nervous, but that was to be expected.

While it is great to have associates who have been with us for a long period executing things in a certain way, this can sometimes make change more difficult. Even so, our reception has been great and so have the results, so we are all doing something right.

Within hospitality, is the people side of things getting lost with technology?

As I mentioned, at '21', we are not reinventing any wheels but I also understand that we have to evolve with the times. I feel at a place like '21' with over 500 active house accounts people want a live reservationist without being directed to a voice recording or to receive an iPad as a wine list or a menu, etc.

People are constantly glued to the ever-evolving technology and phones, and I believe they want a break when they dine.

In leading '21', can you enjoy the wins or is it always about what's next?

I enjoy the process every time I walk into this establishment. I'm very hands-on and accessible to all – there is no "I" in "team" for me but there is in WIN. The better I do with my leadership, the better my team is at performing and satisfying the guest. I love to get in early and do all my budgets, forecasting, answer all corporate e-mails, and plan for the next quarter, etc., but I also love walking around the property and speaking to and meeting new guests. It's a huge win to be here every day and work with this team. ●