

Hospitality

An Iconic Establishment

An Interview with
Theodore V. (Teddy) Suric, General Manager, 21 Club



21 Club's iconic Bar Room (above); entrance (below) and entrance lantern (lower left)

EDITORS' NOTE Teddy Suric has held his current post since September 2013. He received his degree in Hospitality Financial Management from Cornell University.

INSTITUTION 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 wine and dined for more than 80 years.



Teddy Suric

times before finding a permanent home on New Year's Eve 1929 at 21 West 52nd Street. We will host a great 90th anniversary party this year.

You have led changes at 21 to make sure it remains current and relevant. Will you highlight the recent changes that have taken place in order to meet the needs of today's guests?

I am entering my sixth year in charge of this great iconic establishment. We have evolved immensely in all categories of the restaurant, I call

it a restaurant, but it is much more with four floors and 10 private dining rooms; it's more a crossover between a hotel and a restaurant. We have improved the culinary aspect with the hiring of chef Sylvain Delpique in 2014, which was important as today's guest is very educated and health oriented when it comes to the foods they consume. We have also worked on the actual property itself with the recent renovation of all of our private rooms, including modernized AV equipment. We have improved and implemented new procedures and protocols to better service our clientele. We modernized from top to bottom without interfering with the true DNA of the restaurant.

How do you define the 21 Club guest and how broad is 21's target market?

The 21 Club guest is very affluent. It is our goal to expand our reach to a younger demographic including taste makers and industry leaders. Over the past five years, we have seen a shift to a younger clientele who appreciate our rich history and ensure that our heritage will continue through the next generation.

How critical is the investment that 21 makes in training to fulfill its commitment to deliver the highest quality service standards?

Training and systems upgrades should never stop in the hospitality industry as it is evolving very quickly today. It is important to stay focused and fresh in all aspects of our business and training is conducted throughout the property on a quarterly basis. We are lucky to have a long-tenured professional staff that is willing to change certain steps of service to better the business. This is accepted more readily since the numbers and covers keep climbing year after year.



Will you discuss the history and heritage of 21 Club and how 21 has evolved over the years?

The 21 Club began as a speakeasy in the 1920s during the years of Prohibition when it was illegal to serve alcohol. It was started by two college students, Jack Kriendler and Charlie Berns, in 1922 in Greenwich Village called "Jack and Charlie's 21," and moved three

21 is a leader in private events. Will you provide an overview of 21's event space and the broad range of its event capabilities?

21 Club has 10 wonderful, renovated private rooms that can host cocktail parties for up to 300 in one room or 1,000 in the entire restaurant as well as sit-down lunches or dinners for up to 180. Our crown jewel is our wine cellar which seats 22 people. It is located in the basement behind the original two-ton door which was used to hide contraband back in the 1930's during Prohibition. It is truly a one-of-a-kind facility and a great culinary experience. Our private events are led by Cynthia Sutherland, our Director of Sales & Marketing, and her team who specialize in putting on outstanding social, corporate and philanthropic events and are always looking to tap into different markets.

What are your key priorities for 21 as you look to the future?

Our key priority is to make sure we don't stray from 21 Club's DNA and what makes it unique, but rather to build off its history and continue to evolve and be strategic in our decisions in order to achieve growth. We are not here to reinvent any wheels, but rather to stay relevant in today's culinary market. We have a great foundation and history to achieve these goals and a great team on our side. ●

