

Ta-boo: The main point of interest is not whether Joseph Kennedy and Gloria Swanson ever barricaded themselves in the ladies room at Ta-boo, as rumor suggests, but what table they sat at afterward. Would they have dared cavort at the coveted Table Number One, by the front window that opens onto Worth Avenue? Or did they request a more private table in the Fireplace Room?

Truth is, there isn't an uninteresting spot in any of the five distinct dining areas that together seat more than 150 - the Gazebo Room in back is cozy, the Courtyard airy, and the Bistro Room is right in the center of things with a hardwood floor that converts to a dance floor at 10:30 p.m. every Friday and Saturday.

Since opening in 1941, Ta-boo has undergone some ownership changes, but it has always been a haven for the wealthy and well known: the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Frank Sinatra, JFK, Oprah, Celine Dion and Ozzy Osbourne (Ozzy Osbourne?) all have dined here. It's also a haven for the wealthy and not well known, though we won't bother printing their names - you won't recognize them. Point is that Ta-boo after 60 years is still a scene to see and be seen in.

Nancy Simmons (formerly Sharigan) and Franklyn DeMarco, proprietors since 1990, have retained the clubby, cozy yet chic atmosphere, with plush British colonial patterns, antique wood paneling, leafy trellises and lush tropical touches. The effervescent bar in the front of the restaurant is still one of the best spots in the country, as Food and Wine magazine wrote, "to drink, laugh and meet women." It's also one of about 1,000 places where the bloody mary supposedly was created, at the request of Barbara Hutton, who needed a soothing drink after a night of partying.

Another attraction of Ta-boo is the broadly appealing menu of eclectic American bistro fare. Chef Appolino Mojarro, who has been here seven years, is adept at putting out informal fare like top-notch burgers and individual pizzas, but is even more impressive at composing elegant dinner specials such as whole Dover sole meuniere or grilled salmon with Tahitian vanilla-lime beurre blanc. Roast prime rib of aged angus beef is a big hit with the carnivores, while those with more delicate tastes favor choosing from one of many giant entree salads - warm grilled chicken with pears, crumbled Gorgonzola cheese and orange-walnut vinaigrette is one of the most popular. And people have come to expect unparalleled consistency here. As manager Richard Whitaker points out: "You can enjoy our veal Milanese, come back three years later, order it again, and it will taste exactly the same."

So will the champagne and caviar, which, of course, is well-stocked at Ta-boo. We'd expect nothing less of a legend.