

NEW YORKERS AT ISRAEL'S FLASH POINT BY CRAIG HOROWITZ

APRIL 7

# NEW YORK

How shortstop  
Derek Jeter  
brought  
glamour back  
to Yankees  
baseball

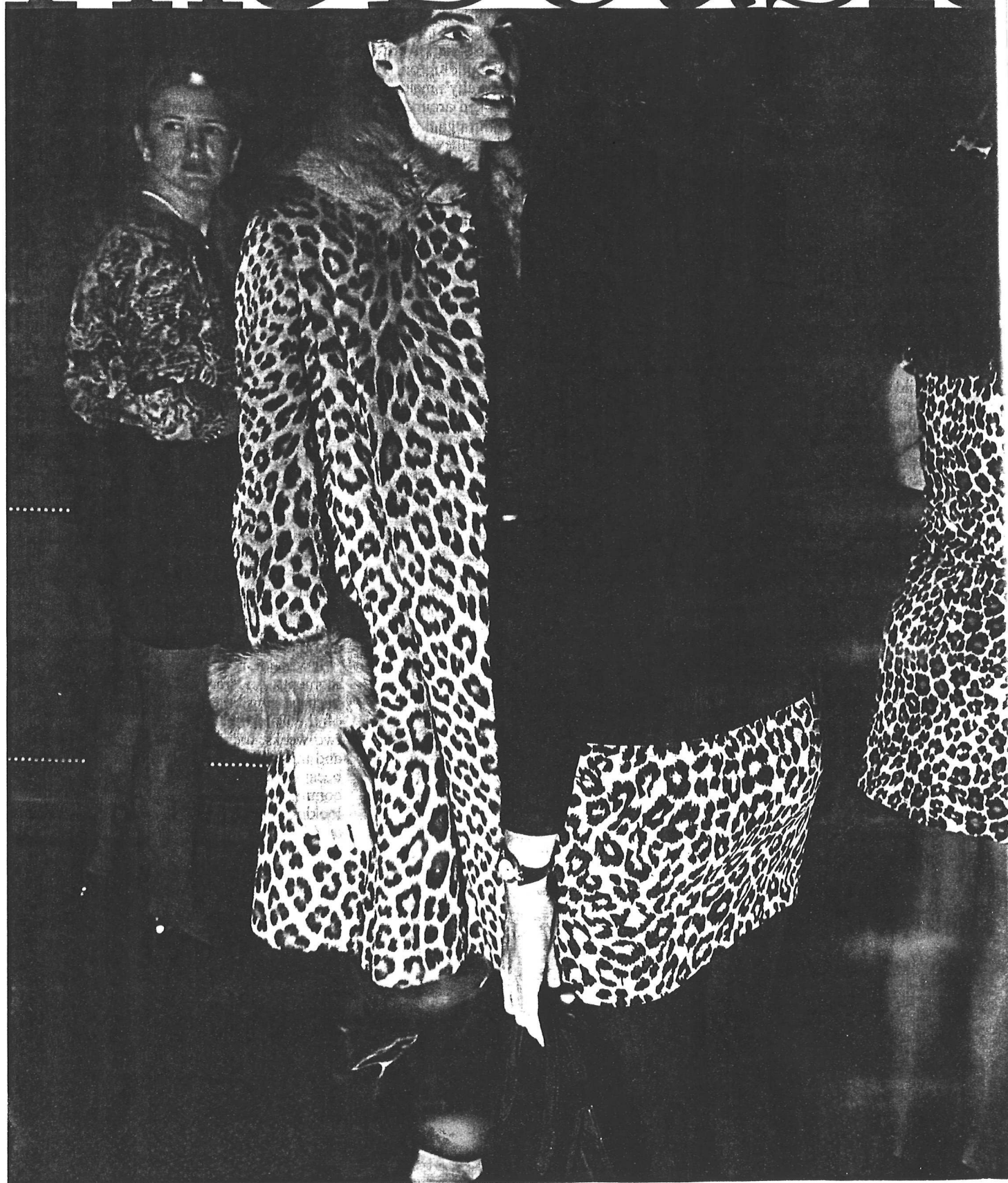
# The Natural

By James Kaplan

\$2.95 (Canada \$3.95)

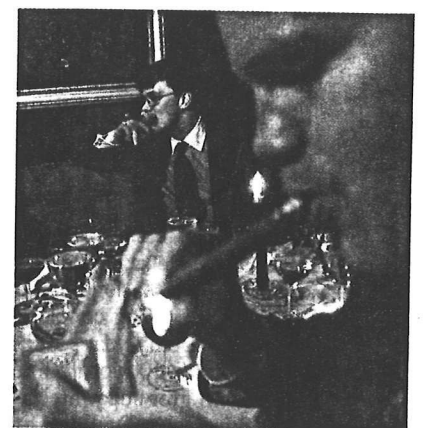


# The Doubles Standard



Most New Yorkers who smoke cigars and down gimlets do it with amused self-consciousness. But at the private club Doubles, there's nothing ironic about it. By Melinda Blau

**Y**OU MAY HAVE TO LOOK twice, but just inside and to the right of the Fifth Avenue entrance to the Sherry Netherland Hotel, a cleverly concealed door blends into the lobby's ochertinted wood paneling. It is marked only by a discreet brass plaque engraved with a double-interlocking-D logo, reminiscent of Gucci's or Cartier's signature mark. Open the door, go down a ruby-red throat of a stairway, and descend to Doubles, a private club that represents the last authentic vestige of New York's café society. ■ On a typical night at Doubles, dark-suited men with women in little black cocktail dresses, couples ranging from their late twenties to their early sixties, dine quietly, often in groups of four or larger. But tonight, the music at Doubles is a few decibels higher, the attire slightly riskier, in keeping with the evening's theme—Lace, Leather & Leopard—geared to Doubles's "juniors." Down the staircase they file, the children and grandchildren of a diminishing breed of socialites whose New York roots run deep, and others who have



Above, night lights. Left, the leopard brigade.

Saba

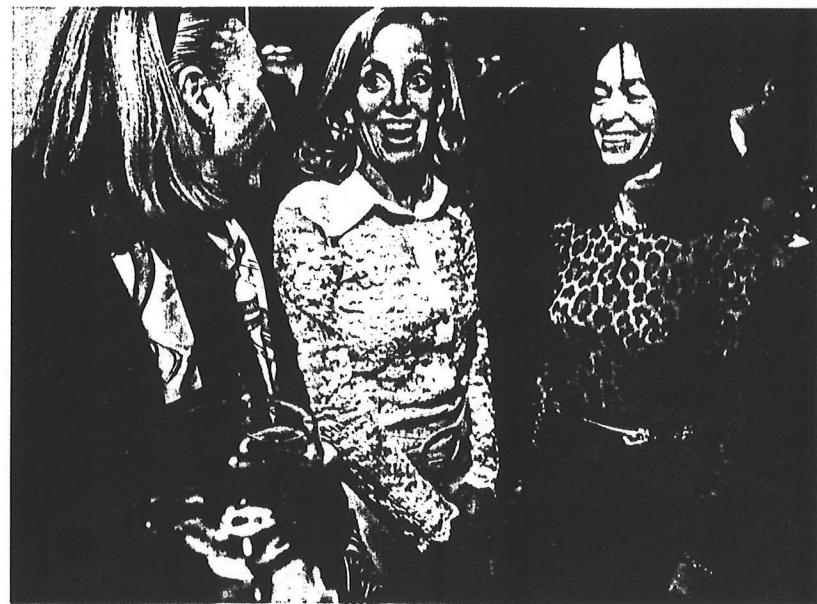
PHOTOGRAPHED BY MARK PETERSON  
FOR NEW YORK

edged their way in over the years—college roommates with good jobs and better connections, friends from work with polished social skills and promising careers. Some arrive in full-drag leopard, others with only a silk scarf or bow tie to acknowledge the theme. Even the famously tasteful chairman of the board, Wendy Carduner—a trim 52-year-old who is indisputably the most influential woman at the helm of a New York club—has forsworn her usual Scaasi in favor of a sheer leopard blouse. “I hope people don’t think I always dress this way,” she says.

“Oh, look, there’s Mark,” says a blonde in a black top and a leopard mini, leading her husband toward a table set with a pink tablecloth and Villeroy & Boch china, strewn with gold and black Mylar confetti. A woman in a leopard headband table-hops with a camera in hand, calling for her friends’ attention, commanding them to smile. Another in a leopard jumper complains about her real-estate lawyer. A svelte young woman gushes to her Park Avenue double, “I can’t believe you’re a mother now!” They’re young, as racy dressed as they’re ever likely to be, and yet they somehow share the mien and manner of people twice their age.

“I know I must sound like an old fart,” says Nina Ford, 33, an interior designer at New York’s Distinctive Designs, Ltd. “But there’s something nice about dressing up and hearing Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennett,” typical early-evening fare at the club. Ford, who celebrated her 21st and 30th birthdays here (and will soon have her wedding’s rehearsal dinner at the club), says, “Everyone wants to come back here for the major points in their life.”

No one goes to Doubles looking for edge. It’s formal (tie and jacket are mandatory), it’s staid, and it’s predictable. Behind



Allison Rockefeller, Rachel Hovnanian, and chairman Wendy Carduner.

the eight-foot-long concierge desk stands Charles, who’s been there for twenty years and greets each guest by name. And if you’re under 40, you’re likely to run into your mother. But to those who grew up watching their parents don black tie every Saturday night, Doubles’ starchy reserve evokes a time when “refinement and breeding meant something,” as one young member puts it. “Many of us will not live as well as our parents and grandparents,” she says wistfully. “But we can go to Doubles, swish our cognac, and imagine that it’s another era.”

Upward of 250 people crowd the dance floor in the main dining room, chattering, pressing cheeks, delivering kisses in the air. Many of the evening’s guests have known one another for years, schooled, summered, and wintered together, shuttling between New York, Palm Beach, Greenwich, and other society

enclaves. Some—like Tara Rockefeller; Lisa Colgate Green, daughter of John Colgate; and Patty Johnson, daughter of Howard Johnson—have been coming to Doubles since they were kids, snacking on animal crackers while their parents downed martinis. This is their home away from home, their “country club in the city, without any athletic facilities,” as Doubles is often described. Although it’s by no means the only game in town—LeClub, for instance, is also private and is even older—Doubles caters to a more sedate clientele that craves its particular brand of kid-glove treatment. Says Merrill Duemler, 27, an associate designer at Alison Spear, AIA, “It’s the last place where people who have grown up with each other, who travel in certain circles, can congregate in New York.”

By eleven, many abandon the dance floor for the bar to down white wine, champagne, and vodka gimlets, and puff on cigars and cigarettes. Even at this party, considered one of the “wildest” of the year, the majority are at home by midnight.

While the media proclaim that debts, cigars, refined dining, and nightclubs with Victorian-style couches are “back,” at Doubles they never left. Within the club’s ruby velvet walls, there’s no hint of the irony or winking self-consciousness that is part of the game at the slew of cigar clubs springing up around town. “At those other places, they’re reaching, they’re pseudo-conservative,” says Carduner. “We are conservative.”

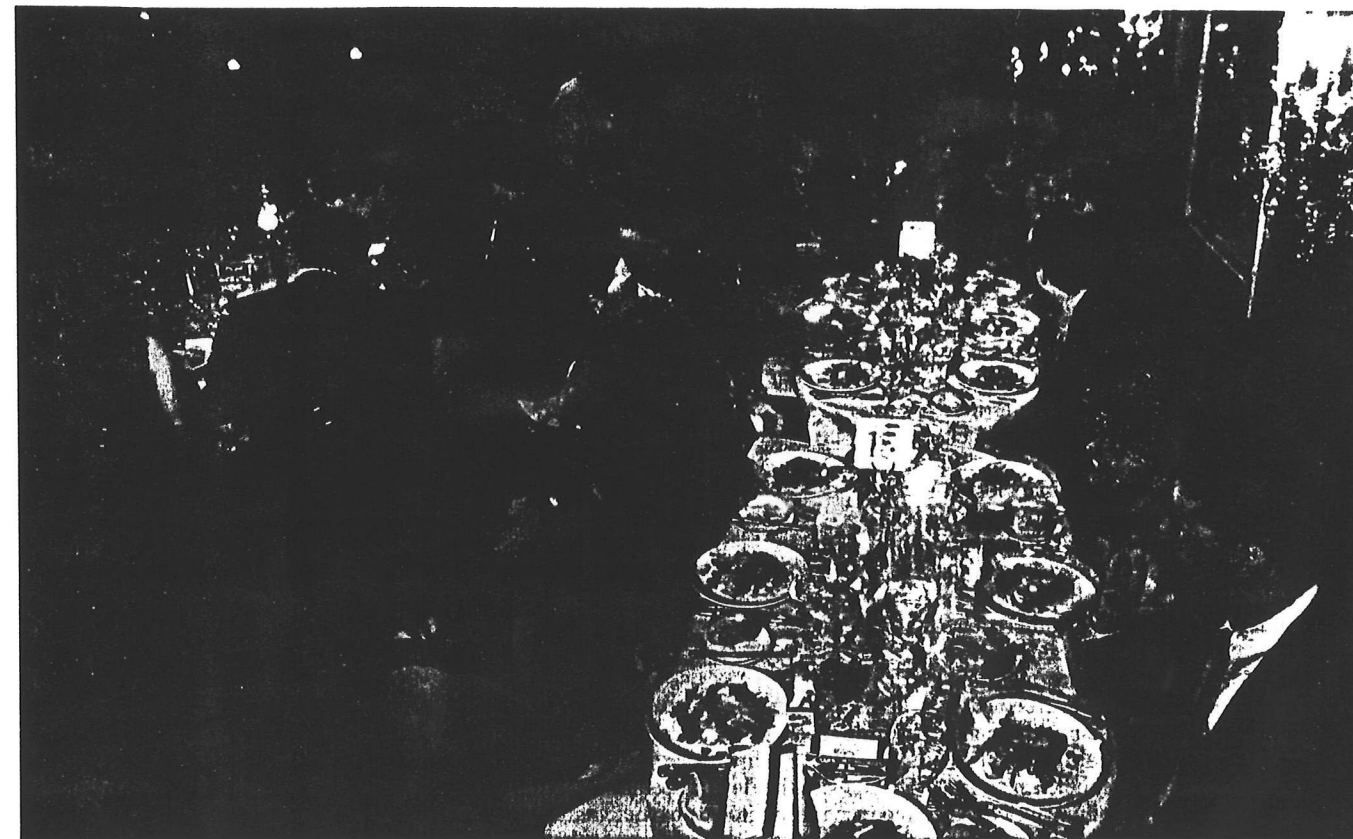
THERE ARE DETRACTORS, OF COURSE. FRANÇOIS MARCHAND, TWENTY-odd years ago the manager at the short-lived private club Raffles and today owner of Le Relais and Le Colonial, says, “I know people sometimes go from my restaurants to Doubles in the evening. But it’s amazing that they go there for lunch. It’s dark, it’s downstairs—a little bit too secluded. That’s not attractive to everyone.”

“The hip young people don’t go there,” insists Slim Hyatt, the former LeClub D.J. whom Peter Duchin calls “the first discotheque artist in New York.” Hyatt worked at Doubles from 1984 to 1995 and considers it odd that Wendy Carduner fired him because—as she put it—she wanted “someone with younger appeal.” Former member Donald Trump scoffs at the suggestion that Doubles is similar to Annabel’s, London’s private international club for socialites: “Give me a break!” And LeClub manager Joseph Olsheski also resents any comparison between the two. “We have the crème de la crème—some of the wealthiest people in New York—and they wouldn’t dream of becoming members of Doubles.”

The redoubtable Mrs. Carduner—which is how her staff refers to her—is quick to admit that Doubles isn’t for everyone, especially those who don’t want to put on a tie. “People say to me, ‘The world has changed—where were you?’ And that’s the point. We’re boring, straight, and square by today’s standards—but that’s what the people who come here want.”

The original stainless-steel dance floor is gone now, in favor of more traditional wood. In the bar, trompe l’oeil adorns the walls—paintings of Italian themes, deliberately evoking the feel of a palazzo. “In the early days, people were looking for fresh,” says Wendy’s husband, Andrew, a successful entrepreneur who is consulted on virtually every club decision. “Now the club looks like the establishment that it is.”

IN THE BEGINNING—1976—DOUBLES ROSE, RED AND RADIANTLY modern, out of the ashes of the ill-fated Raffles. Princess Martha Kropotkin speculates that real-estate and retail magnate Joe Norban, the social wannabe who bankrolled the venture with a million and a half dollars, opened Doubles to spite his cronies at



The basics of Doubles: Dinner, dress, and decorum.

El Morocco, for decades the unchallenged center of the *haut monde*: “He was a member and investor at El Morocco, but he wanted a special title on the board.” When they wouldn’t give it to him, he decided to rent the empty space where Raffles had been six years earlier. Norban hired cutting-edge designer Valerian Rybar to do the interior, wisely declined to use the Sherry Netherland’s kitchen, and asked daughter Wendy to oversee construction. No one remembers who named the club Doubles—only that it was inspired by the short-lived backgammon craze of the times.

William Norwich, who dishes for the New York *Observer* and *Vogue*, recalls Doubles as “deeply glamorous. Around that time, Mrs. Vreeland was often photographed in her red living room, which popularized the color. It just seemed like the hottest thing. You’d find that Doubles ashtray—stolen late at night, thrown with abandon into a Gucci purse—in everyone’s first apartment . . . if they were of a certain set.”

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The club never would have worked, says Kropotkin, had Norban not shrewdly stepped aside. She explains, “He was a tough guy, extremely wealthy, very generous, but you know how New York is.” She is emphatic on one point: “Earl Blackwell, not Norban, was responsible for all the members that counted.”

The late Mr. Blackwell (not to be confused with Mr. Blackwell of “Best and Worst Dressed” fame), a graceful southern gentleman who never made it as an actor but won accolades for his masterly schmoozing, founded the *Celebrity Register*. “If anyone from Hollywood was in town, Earl knew it,” Kropotkin explains. “He knew all the social people, too. In the days of Elsa Maxwell, it was a big cachet to have a celebrity at your party.”

Between them, the ubiquitous Blackwell and his sidekick, Eugenia Sheppard, the social arbiter who wrote “Inside Fashion” for the *Post*, wielded tremendous power in New York. Black-

well’s founding 40—which included society-page regulars like William B. Meyer, Norma Dana, Porter Ijams, Pat Buckley, Pat Patterson, Nan Kempner, Francis J. Kellogg, Nelson Doubleday, Oakleigh Thorne, the Duchess d’Uzes in Paris, and Lady Rothermere—each invited twenty of their most influential friends. Six months before the opening, Sheppard sealed the club’s image by reporting, “Doubles will be as hard to get into as Fort Knox.”

“If Earl had said, ‘I want you to join the American Prison Association,’ I would have,” says charter member Nancy Holmes, who now writes for *Worth* magazine. “It meant I was still in the loop.”

Blackwell curried younger members as well. Bachelor-about-town Chappy Morris, a private investor, now 47, had just graduated from Tufts when David Mortimer recruited him. Initial

membership was only \$150 for the younger set—no interview required. “Before it opened, the buzz was incredible,” Morris says. “Other people were just dying to get in.” He tells the possibly apocryphal tale of some up-and-comer who offered a Doubles secretary a fur coat to approve his application.

Mark Gilbertson, an aging alum of Lawrenceville and Rollins, now a fund-raising consultant, recalls walking through the club while it was under construction: “When Doubles finally opened, it had a lot of glamour. You were young, but you felt important, because they called you by name, knew what you liked. You could sign.” The joke on the circuit, Gilbertson remembers, was that a good evening, one where you hit ‘21’ and Doubles, was “a sixty-four”—an obscure backgammon reference.

In many ways, Doubles was very much like the competition of the time, sleek, dimly lit discos like L’Interdit, Il Mio, and Shep-

pard's, where the glitterati enjoyed their fifteen minutes of fame. But Doubles, born in the spirit of El Morocco, intentionally distinguished itself as a private club. It courted women members, paid attention to food and wine as well as ambience, threw parties for members' children, and offered a buffet lunch while other clubs slept. And although a string of high-profile managers and maître d's ran the club in its early years, Doubles had—and still has—the unique imprint of a (strong) woman's touch: that of Wendy Norban Carduner, whose role became increasingly important as her father took a backseat to the Beautiful People.

Fashionellas mingled with financiers at the dawn of Doubles, says the actress and socialite Arlene Dahl, who held a private party at the club when she opened in *Applause*: "Doubles quickly became a haven for celebrities who didn't want to be bothered by the press or by obnoxious people. Jane Russell, Jane Powell, and Dick Moore always came when they were in town." Divorced advertising legend Bill Free, 67, the man who gave us Fresca and the "I'm Barbara—fly me" campaign, joined shortly after the club opened. Those were the days when illustrious nonmembers like Ted Kennedy were politely turned away at the door. "If I were trying to bed some young thing, I might take her there to impress her," says Free.

The seventies ended with a whimper at Doubles, which was suddenly challenged by a new generation of arena-size dance clubs. Baroque was out; high-tech was in. *Dress code* became an oxymoron. "There was an awful lot of resentment," Holmes remembers, "about men not being able to wear Nehru jackets." Andrew Carduner, who married Wendy in 1979, concedes, "There were growing pains. After the P.R. is finished, after the freebies are given, people have to keep coming on their own. You have to build a clientele, and that's when Doubles started to falter. It hadn't connected. It was just another place on the list. It didn't have a personality."

Enter, in full force, the Carduners, determined to rejuvenate the family club, to make it an extension of their own well-appointed living room. Wendy became chairman of the board in



You might see your prep-school roommate at Doubles. You might also see your mother.

so made Doubles an acceptable venue for members' birthday parties, anniversaries, even wedding receptions. "To have such events at that kind of club was once unheard of," says Holmes.

"Wendy knew all of us," Daisy Soros points out, explaining how Doubles became the venue of choice. "She is one of us."

To keep young revelers happy, Wendy lured Slim Hyatt, who had done the circuit by 1984—LeClub, L'Interdit, Sheppard's, and Raffles—and knew all the regulars. "In those days," recalls Chappy Morris, "we went to Studio 54 and to the other downtown clubs like Xenon and Danceteria, too, but Doubles was the only uptown club. And because I was a member, it was always easy to get in. You certainly wouldn't have called it a 'drug scene' like some of the other places. I assume it existed there, but I never saw it, so people must have been very discreet."

The Reagan years, in Nancy Holmes's eyes, were "the most glamorous times" at Doubles, home to an urbane cadre of members who played croquet in Central Park. "All the top players from Palm Beach and Newport were there. We'd play, go home

## "The mainstay of Doubles are the New York Wasps who are cheap as nails and think SoHo is a place in London."

and change, and then go back to the club and party all night," she recalls. And at the annual Croquet Ball, spearheaded by the late Jack Osborne, Holmes reminisces, "we'd set up a course in the main dining room, complete with fake grass and wickets. Whoever got the ball through would win a prize. We didn't have a private croquet club, but we had Doubles."

If Doubles was in flux during the eighties, the city itself was also changing. "The Old Guard slowly started accepting people from the outside," observes socialite Norma Dana. In the elegant and energetic Mrs. Carduner, who had a far softer edge than her father, the Establishment found an unexpected compatriot. "We loved Wendy," says Dana. "She had a gentility about her that's very captivating. And we could see she was interested in keeping the club the way we wanted it to be."

Characterizing the prototypical Doubles woman, Mrs. Carduner in fact might be describing herself and the reason she's been so successful: "well-dressed, conservative, not the fashion

leaders but in fashion. Nothing—hair, jewelry, or clothing—is extreme or overboard." And in her staff at Doubles, whipped to perfectionist standards, members have a team of men willing to literally give the clothes off their backs—even their pants, as one waiter did when Daisy Soros's maid forgot to pack the lower half of her husband's tuxedo.

"She's a very clever girl," says Mark Birley, owner of the 30-year-old Annabel's, about Carduner. "She runs it very strictly. People who are not members are not let in no matter what. And she has never lost interest as she might have done—she's kept her hands on. And for that reason, she continues to be successful."

Today, the 2,500-strong membership has (a few) minority members, and spans different cliques and different age groups. The common denominator is that everyone is well-dressed, well-behaved, and, at a minimum, refined. "I wouldn't bring most of the people I work with to Doubles," confesses a sincere and serious 29-year-old who manages a fine-jewelry department. "Some of them probably don't even know what a supper club is."

"I don't know anything about the younger members, but there are three older types," Bill Free maintains, "the mainstay being the New York Wasps who go out to dinner four nights a week and think SoHo is a place in London. They're cheap as nails and find Doubles great for entertaining. The ladies like it because it gives them a chance to wear their finest and the lighting makes them look glamorous. Then there are the hotshots who have to belong to everything—Wall Streeters, wheeler-dealers, big money. They're in there trying to impress their dolly birds, smoking their Havanas and drinking Petrus. Finally, there are the out-of-

towners—Californians, Texans, Europeans."

Many of the original Doubblers don't go out much anymore, preferring quiet dinner parties to the din of canned music. And no one stays up as late. Kempner, who still lunches there with cronies, let her membership lapse a few years ago. "That has to do with age, dear," she says. "I don't go nightclubbing very much anymore. I had my day, and now it's my children's generation."

Not all the Gotham Golden Girls are so sanguine about stepping aside. "The new people aren't into the things we were born and bred to do," laments Kropotkin with characteristic candor. "They don't really care about society per se or the lack of it. In my day, you did things in great style and taste—things that it took money to do. But no one ever discussed money." Kropotkin also deplors what she calls "the shopping-bag set." When her generation reigned, she says, "you'd never walk into '21' or the Colony—or Doubles—with a shopping bag. You'd leave it in your limo, or at least you'd check it at the door!"

Such comments notwithstanding, Doubles must now depend on the new New York—and on younger members—to breathe life into the club. To that end, membership dues are scaled, with regular members (40 and over) paying approximately \$800 a year, and associates (35–39), intermediates (27–34), and juniors (21–26) paying incrementally less. Events are reasonably priced as well. For example, the recent Leopard party, a full evening of cocktails, dinner, and dancing, cost members \$50, their non-member guests \$65.

Many of the newest additions to the roster are twentysomethings who segued into Doubles memberships as a rite of passage. "When I turned 21, my parents said it was time for my brother and me to apply," recalls Tina Murphy, 29, daughter of Nancy Sullivan, who is married to founding member George O'Sullivan.

Though it is probably a mere formality in some cases, even members' children have to submit the requisite two letters of recommendation. Years ago, young prospects suffered through group interviews that smacked of dance-school etiquette, rotating through a circle of Membership Committee representatives. But now the process, overseen by Carduner, is more streamlined and informal. "When they're asked why they want to join, many of them remember the club's *Nutcracker* trip or being at the Ghosties and Goodies party when they were kids," Carduner explains.

Other hopefuls find their way to Doubles via the outreach efforts of the Associates' Committee, co-chaired by Mark Gilbertson, who assembled the group four years ago to keep young members happy and to attract new ones. "Not everyone at Doubles is from the *Social Register*," claims Gilbertson. "It's a whole mixed bag of high-quality people—polite, respectable, good company. Not all one type. Obviously, you can't be poor and join. But the club has remained a haven of civility. If they hadn't kept it private, it wouldn't have survived."

Young people join for the same reasons their parents did. Not so surprisingly, they're also as conservative and thrill-wary as their elders were twenty years ago. A 29-year-old venture capitalist who was given a Doubles membership as a graduation present says, "It was one of the more useful gifts I've ever received." He and his wife frequent '21' and Mortimers and are regulars on the charity-ball circuit. "But Lester Lanin is just not danceable for someone my age," he explains, adding that all his friends are members of Doubles, too. Though he didn't make it to Lace, Leather & Leopard, such a full-service evening at Doubles, he notes, costs far less than dinner and dancing elsewhere. "Besides, those downtown clubs, like System and Chaos, are crowded with a whole bunch of weird people. At Doubles, we can dance and we don't have to worry about security."

Twenty years from now, his son will probably be saying the same thing.



The lunch bunch at a benefit for the Central Park Conservancy.