

## A 'Landmark' Restaurant Returns: A Preview of the Four Seasons

Just three blocks from the original, the new Four Seasons nods to the past while forging its own identity.



Julian Niccolini, left, and Alex von Bidder, the managing partners behind the new Four Seasons, opening this month. Nicole Craine for The New York Times



By Florence Fabricant

Aug. 6, 2018



It has taken two years almost to the date from the closing of the original Four Seasons restaurant in the Seagram Building to the opening next week of the relocated version, three blocks away.

“Some people have already come in to pick their tables,” said Julian Niccolini, a partner. “We get emails every day. People I can’t remember ever seeing before come up to me in stores, on the street, to ask about the opening.”

What they find at the new entrance, in an office tower on East 49<sup>th</sup> Street, is the discreet brass wall plaque engraved with the four-tree logo that was displayed near the old restaurant's door. Also echoing the original restaurant are a dining room and a bar connected by a long corridor. A few Four Seasons classics, like the roast farmhouse duck, are on the menu, and the same managing partners, Mr. Niccolini and Alex von Bidder, are in charge. But just about everything else is different.

Built from scratch, with a \$30 million price tag, the new Four Seasons inhabits a two-story space. A simple sleek, dark foyer leads to the dramatic, square Bar Room, seating 50, that captures some of the soaring grandeur of the old Four Seasons. In the center is a bar, 16-feet square and sunken, suggesting the famous pool in the previous dining room.



The Bar Room at the new Four Seasons seats 50. Nicole Craine for The New York Times

From the bar, a corridor leads to the Dining Room. Isay Weinfeld, a Brazilian architect whose work is mostly in Latin America and Europe, is responsible for the restaurant's design. He was on the short list of recommendations that was assembled for the owners by Paul Goldberger, the architecture critic, whose advice they sought.

“It was a huge challenge,” Mr. Goldberger said. “They didn’t want one of the obvious New York restaurant designers, but they also did not want to take a chance on a complete unknown. Isay had the experience. He understands the tradition of Modernism and can also push it forward.” Mr. Goldberger added that the idea was to create a restaurant that reflected the midcentury style of the 1959 original without imitating it.

The oblong Dining Room is a symphony in tones of beige and honey, from the irregular stone flooring to the plush upholstery and the tablecloths. From the ceiling hangs a sculptural arrangement of silvery rods fitted with lights by Michael Anastassiades, an artist Mr. Weinfeld chose. The tall windows are covered in fine gold-mesh panels.

The Dining Room has 33 tables, somewhat fewer than the old Pool Room. “Previously we had 160 seats, now we have about 110,” Mr. von Bidder said. “Over all, the new restaurant is significantly smaller, 20,000 square feet compared with 30,000 in the old place.” The smaller space, Mr. Niccolini noted, means reservations, which can be made starting Wednesday for lunch and dinner, are likely to be more difficult to come by.

The tableware includes copies of the shallow silver tripodal bowls originally created by Garth Huxtable and his wife, the architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable. There are Modernist wood guéridons for tableside folderol like carving ducks, mixing steak tartare, tossing Caesar salad and filleting Dover sole. The wait staff is dressed by Joseph Abboud.

The executive chef, Diego Garcia, 30, is a native of Northern Mexico. He was promoted from chef de cuisine after the departure of Pecko Zantilaveevan in early June. Mr. Garcia graduated from the Culinary Institute of America, worked at Le Bernardin and was the executive chef at Gloria, an intimate seafood spot in Hell’s Kitchen. Now comes this career-defining responsibility.

“The Four Seasons was a landmark American restaurant, even though all the food was not necessarily American,” he said. “It was one of the first seasonal restaurants.

His chef de cuisine, Brandon Lajes, 26, and a New Yorker, is also a veteran of Le Bernardin.

Like the architect, Mr. Garcia feels he was given a mandate to create a contemporary restaurant that respects the original’s legacy. So while he won’t mess with the duck, he’ll update the crab cakes, another classic, by adding the freshness and crunch of finely diced kohlrabi. Given his experience, seafood dominates the à la carte menu, with grilled langoustines, charred squid with snow peas, crispy bass with cabbage and shrimp broth, and turbot for two. In addition to serving some of the Dining Room menu, the Bar Room will offer a burger and other informal fare.

Bill Yosses will be in charge of desserts. Mr. Yosses, the White House pastry chef from 2007 to 2014, is keenly aware of the work of Albert Kumin, who created the chocolate velvet cake and the Four Seasons fancy cake. He’s updating those and also working on a seasonal peach cream tart.

Mr. von Bidder and Mr. Niccolini hope to attract a new audience and to appeal to customers who haven’t been in their restaurant for a long time. Wine lovers will find a deep collection of reds and whites from California, especially from the venerable estates that have anchored the restaurant’s wine list, like Dominus, Silver Oak and Phelps, with vintages going back to the 1970s. There will also be a good selection of Burgundies, Bordeaux and Italian wines.

The Four Seasons 2.0 also has an upstairs with a spacious private dining room, and another intimate room they call the Treehouse, in plush blue, for Champagne and small receptions.

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