



## Veranda Chef George Mendes Leads Kitchen in SoHo

Restaurateur David Rabin's latest project is located on the second floor of forthcoming hotel Modernhaus SoHo. BY KRISTEN TAUER



David Rabin and George Mendes

**Persistence paid off** for restaurateur David Rabin.

Veranda, his new restaurant helmed by acclaimed chef George Mendes, is located on the second floor of the forthcoming hotel Modernhaus SoHo, formerly known as the James Hotel. Rabin – behind hot spots like the Lamb's Club, Café Clover, American Bar and the Skylark – had been pitching a restaurant concept for the space since 2009, when the building was still a construction site. The restaurant was already spoken for then, but the hotel offered him Jimmy, the hotel's impressive rooftop and pool cocktail lounge.

Five years later, the hotel was sold, and Rabin inquired again about the restaurant. It wasn't until two-and-a-half years ago that the hotel switched hands again, and he finally got the opportunity to put his mark on the space. Rabin found an opportune partner in Mendes, who a little over a year ago closed his Michelin-starred Portuguese restaurant Aldea after more than a decade. The accomplished Mendes wanted to take a break; around the time he started looking for a new project, Veranda began searching for a chef. Rabin met Mendes for coffee at Lamb's Club.

Mendes was the first and only chef the team met with and he was everything they wanted. "Mature, delightful, open to suggestion," says Rabin, referring to Mendes. "Definitely has a point of view, of course, because he's a super-accomplished guy, but bought into our idea of being something that was, for lack of a better phrase, aspirational but accessible." Rabin mentioned that he was thinking of collaborating with Mendes to an industry friend, Bobby Flay.

"Without even missing a beat, he was like, 'Wow, that guy can really cook,'" adds Rabin. "And I thought that was about as good an endorsement as we were ever going to get. Because Bobby has seen almost everyone cook live on his show, he knows who can really do it."

The concept at Veranda is an approachable menu served in a casually elegant space. Rabin wanted to make Veranda a neighborhood restaurant, the sort of place guests will want to return to often versus an over-the-top experience reserved for special occasions.

The menu is driven by recognizable American fare, with a seafood bend and emphasis on clean eating and fresh ingredients. Mendes' Portuguese culinary background is also at play in dishes like the Mediterranean shrimp with Goan coconut curry, charcoal-grilled chicken with piri-piri pepper marinade, and whole branzino grilled with fennel and lemon-arugula pesto. There are several flatbread options, made in the restaurant's wood-burning oven, and homemade sourdough bread is given prime billing on the menu. Like many, Mendes has gravitated to bread-baking in the past year. As a result, a small shop in the restaurant is selling bread for takeaway alongside jams and olive oils.

The dining room is situated in a greenhouse pergola – the stylish space is filled with light during the day and illuminated by strung lights at night. An adjacent bar area features a terrace overlooking Grand Street. After dinner, guests will be able to visit the hotel's 18th floor, where poolside cocktails and unobstructed views of downtown Manhattan await them at a renovated Jimmy.

"It's a little gussied up," Rabin says of the reimagined Jimmy, comparing the new vibe to a resort in the South of France. "It's like someone who was in high school is now in grad school."



## The Central Park Conservancy Heads To the Tennis Court

Patrick McEnroe came out to support the charitable tournament, which raised over \$155,000 for the park's 21 Playgrounds program.

BY KRISTEN TAUER

"Do you all need me to resolve this conflict?"

Patrick McEnroe was surveying one of the matches playing out at the Central Park Tennis Center on Wednesday morning. Competition was fierce but always friendly. "I mean, it's an intense game," offered one of the players, returning the former tennis pro's jest.

The Women's Committee and Playground Partners of the Central Park Conservancy had convened for Play for the Park, their first charitable tennis tournament. In total, the cheery event (sponsored by Tory Sport) raised over \$155K for the park's 21 playgrounds.

McEnroe had come out to support the

cause and offer some kind words on the court. "That's a heck of a return," McEnroe called out to another player, as he casually bounced a ball off his racket in hand.

"That may be the best compliment in tennis I've ever gotten," the woman remarked to her game partner, both decked in Tory Sport whites.

The COVID-19-compliant event marks the return of in-person fundraising events, and the trappings that come with them: bites like lemon ginger scones and gluten-free blueberry muffins (individually bagged and passed out by a masked and gloved caterer behind a glass screen); a grand, fresh flower arch leading into the event, courtesy of Lewis Miller Design; gift



Patrick McEnroe

bags. The event had been divided into two separate sessions to limit attendance.

"I know some of the ladies that helped organize this through Randall's Island and our tennis academy there, and when they told me what they were doing [this event], it was a no-brainer for me," said McEnroe. "I used to live right there," – he gestured in the direction of the Upper West Side – "back when I was just out of college and started out on the pro tour. So I used to come here all the time to practice," he added. "I have great memories. And obviously, I'm a huge fan

of Central Park and what they're trying to do to keep it going."

McEnroe was wowed by the level of skill playing out in front of him. Prizes awaited the finalists: for first-place winner, a Tory Sport tennis bag.

"I'm very impressed with the level of intensity from the people that are here; very impressed," added McEnroe. "They're getting their tennis legs after some of them being off for the winter. And what better day could we have? It's the best day of the year so far. Outdoor tennis, we're back."