

# With a Twist

BY JEFF WEINSTEIN

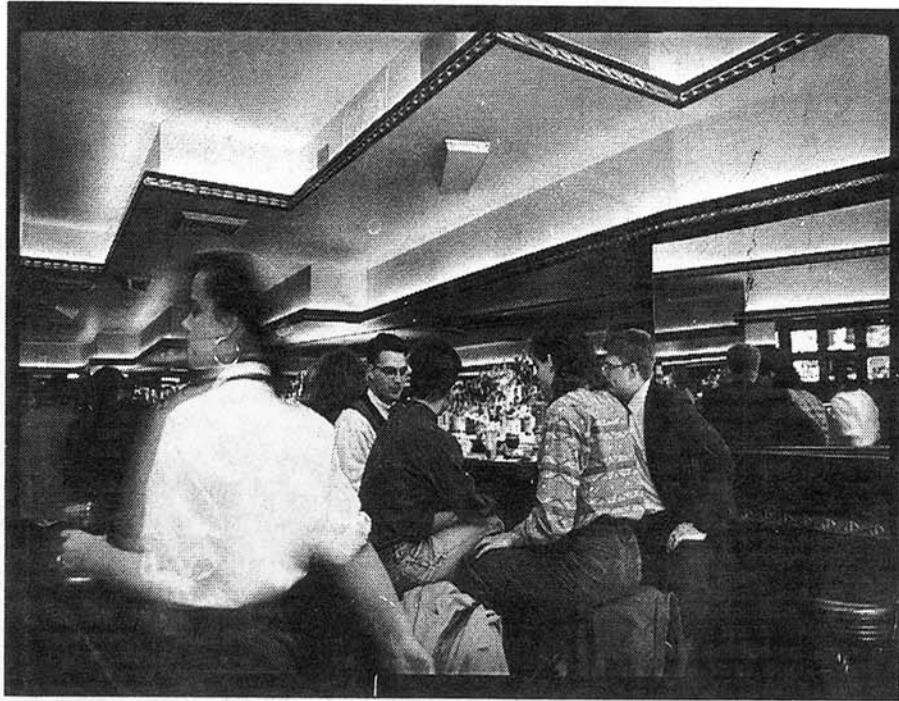
**ZIG ZAG BAR & GRILL.** 206 West 23rd Street (between Sixth and Seventh avenues), 645-5060. Open 11:30 a.m. to "1:30 or 2 in the morning" Mondays through Saturdays. Closed Sundays. Burgers around \$5, sandwiches around \$6, entrées around \$9 to \$11. Full bar, perhaps too full, since it serves Coors beer (see below).

Those who can't or won't drink alcoholic beverages may miss a particular form of restaurant pleasure, namely, that which results from eating within the ken of an active bar. Some bargoers would turn that around, to missing the pleasure of drinking within sight of a sandwich.

Certainly one can booze barless at table; many, even professional eaters, do. Drinking is said to dull the capacity to distinguish flavors even while it heightens the capacity to enjoy them, but I find that alcohol has more profound restaurant effects. In the first place, it collapses time. As any nondrinker stuck at a table of imbibers will testify, an hour's wait for bread and butter doesn't concern them in the least. They have already, as M. F. K. Fisher wrote, "lubricated" their conversation. The sober member of the party sits stuck and hollow, audience to another speed.

The other alcoholic effect is visual, and the Zig Zag Bar & Grill, shuffling distance from any floor of the Chelsea Hotel, presents a warm example. Bottles filled with amber and chartreuse emollients look beautiful, especially in front of mirrors. If the lighting is right, the array can be consoling and even breathtaking, assum-

## EATING AROUND



PAMELA DUFFY

ing the viewer is in the mood to be moved by spectral pluralism. The bottles' uniformed manager moves laterally, at your pleasure. The sight of this performance from a table, with the knowledge that food is coming, could almost convince you that the world is a safe place, that accidents caused by drunk driving, for example, never really happen.

Last year, the family that ran the 23rd Street Bar & Grill, a congenial but dowdy watering hole, decided to refurbish. Restaurant design rarely succeeds in achieving what it must: creating a practical space in which to cook, serve, and eat; presenting the restaurant as new and established at the same time; allowing for pleasure in itself—designers have egos—yet not outshouting the food; and somehow making the site seem inevitable, as if

it had to be this way, here. Zig Zag takes a narrow plan and divides the space longwise into bar area and tables. It emphasizes ceiling corners and the mild angles of the room with outlines of indirect light, covers walls with planes of dark mahogany and mirrors, and accents these with another runner of deco-style metal. The tubular furniture follows the spare (at last) deco theme; dishes are solid, simple restaurant ware. The result is salutary, a sophisticated urban space that acknowledges the past, allows eaters and drinkers to coexist in all the best ways, and, most difficult, cues both dressy chic and an honest bargain. The decor suggests hamburgers, but they have to be the best.

And they're not bad, not bad at all. You're given a plastic card that is usually

called a "bar menu." I have eaten everything twice. Don't order the fish special. Soups of the day have been good to excellent; I especially enjoyed a robust Manhattan-style (of course) clam chowder. Chicken salad is nothing but a seasoned toss of chicken cubes that don't taste boiled, as most dice of this type do. A sandwich of Italian salami, mozzarella, and roasted red pepper pressed and grilled on challah tastes much better than it sounds; its sweetness is surprising. Grilled chicken breast, boneless, manages to remain moist yet not bloody, with a bracing taste of char. Back ribs and calf's liver are better than acceptable; only the pasta disappoints in this context. My ideal meal: the superior Caesar salad, a hamburger, and a draft beer, probably New Amsterdam, just to follow through on the theme of being happy where we are.

I would not order a Coors. I would tell the server that the restaurant shouldn't carry Coors. (When I have told them, they say "everyone says that.") So why does a nice place like Zig Zag carry a beer that is boycotted even by the AFL-CIO and many other groups? Perhaps they saw the McDonald's-like "we give scholarships" TV ads, part of a campaign obviously waged to soften criticism and roll out a carpet for the company's Big Push East. Perhaps they didn't know that Coors money has been used to thwart unionizing at their plants, used to prop up right-wing think tanks (an oxymoron if I ever heard one), used to fund charming seminars such as "Hope & Homosexuality"—you can guess who hopes what. And perhaps you should know that the New York City Coors Boycott Coalition will be demonstrating their objections to the sale of the offending lager at Food Emporiums by meeting at one, on 13th Street and Sixth Avenue, June 24 from 4 to 6 p.m. They would love company. ■