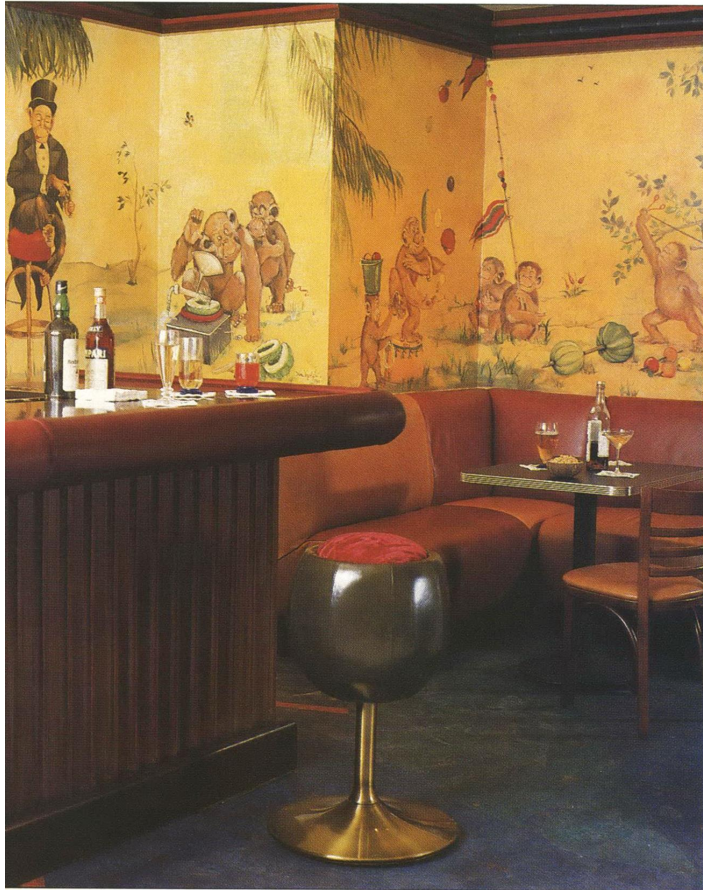


TRAVEL

More Monkey Business

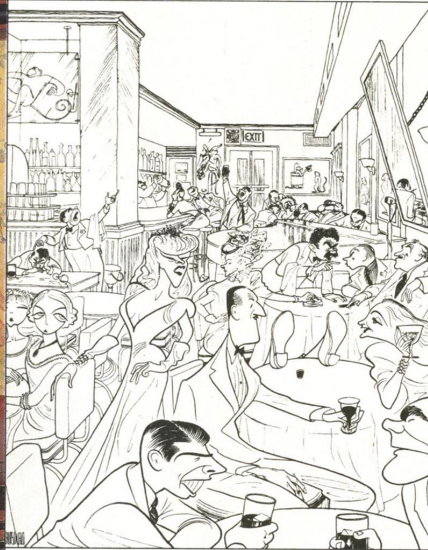


that bygone regulars probably wouldn't have recognized. The original monkey murals are still there, as are the monkey sconces and, of course, the piano. The old leopard-print carpeting has yielded to a restoration of the original stunning jungle-green-and-cobalt-blue inlaid linoleum. Altogether new are bar stools in the shape of

still houses the Monkey Bar today, midblock between Madison and Park avenues on Fifty-fourth Street.

Opened in 1936, ten years after the Elysée was built, the Monkey Bar survived virtually intact into this decade, "a boîte of the type called *intime*," as newspaperman/novelist Robert Ruark once wrote: a dozen

or so cocktail tables surrounding a scarred baby grand, the domain of a semipermanent roster of seminotorious crooners who specialized in "dirty ditties" and the ruthless melodic deflating of all comers. The first anthropomorphically imbibing monkey was painted in 1950 by an artist pal of Elysée owner Leon Quain's, one Eugene Zaikine, whose conceit was perpetuated by two more monkey mural-



Rhesus redux: The spruced-up Monkey Bar, where Hirschfeld's 1950 homage to its celebrated clientele (above) still hangs.

cocktail olives. Might Tallulah have found pimento seats amusing?

Sure, the Stork Club was ritzier, El Morocco tonier, the Astor Roof grander. The Monkey Bar, however, was an oasis of outrageously raucous wit and often bawdy, but rarely inelegant, style. It was the refuge of preference for numerous theatrical, literary, and sports celebrities, many of them—Tallulah Bankhead, Joe DiMaggio, John Barrymore, Helen Hayes, Tennessee Williams, Dorothy and Lillian Gish, Ben Hecht, and Charles MacArthur, to name but a handful—residents of the singularly eccentric Hotel Elysée, which

ists in later years.

If anything has been compromised through restoration, it may be that *intime* sense so prized in the Monkey Bar's prime. A 130-seat restaurant extension now beckons beneath a majestic staircase just beyond the room's southernmost wall. It is a beautiful space graced with a marquee chef, John Schenk, previously of Mad.61. But is it an inescapable... intrusion? No, insists Quain, who's still on the premises and perfectly schooled in matters of timeless allure: "It is an invitation, sure. But the Monkey Bar will keep you, if you let it."

—BARRY SINGER



TWO YEARS ago, when the Monkey Bar was unceremoniously shuttered, the lone surviving pianist-in-residence, fifty-year veteran Johnny Andrews, was gently retired, and the staff of caustically professional waiters was let go. This fall, though, the doors were again thrown open, revealing a rejuvenated Monkey Bar, restored to a luster