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Bob - 7.45



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

TABLE TALK

How Philip Roth got a good table at Le Cirque 2000.



ROBERT CENEDELLA should have at least a hundred and fifty-seven interested buyers for the two-hundred-edition serigraph of his mural "Le Cirque, The First Generation," which he unveiled last week at the Galerie Rienzo, off Madison Avenue. That's the number of the restaurant's celebrated patrons and staff whom Cenedella depicted in the original six-by-ten-foot painting, which decorates the entryway to Le Cirque 2000. How it came to hang there in its current form is one of those stories that make New York New York.

About two years ago, when Le Cirque's owner, Sirio Maccioni, was planning to relocate the restaurant from Sixty-fifth Street to the Palace Hotel, the *Times'* former restaurant critic Bryan Miller introduced him to Cenedella. Miller had admired a painting of the artist's in Kenn's Broome Street Bar, a George Grosz-like rendering of the place's regulars. Perhaps, he told Maccioni, Cenedella could do the same for Le Cirque.

Maccioni agreed to feed Cenedella for free while he sketched something on spec. It took about fifty meals for the painting to take shape. Miller helped by sneaking reference photos of the restaurant's famous regulars out of the *Times'* morgue. Finally, after six months, Maccioni travelled to the artist's Tribeca studio to take a look. Soon, like any good maître d', he was orchestrating the seating arrangements. Would Liz Smith really want Richard Nixon at her table? (Cenedella had painted the disgraced President once before—sharing drinks with Hitler.) Why is Woody Allen all the way in the back? And who should sit next to Frank Zappa?

As the artist was finishing up his picture, he met Peter Kaminsky, a writer who was working on a cover story for *New York* about Le Cirque's opening. Kaminsky, Cenedella says, was fascinated with the mural and told him he'd like to do a sidebar on it. In gratitude, the artist offered to put Kaminsky into the painting, and he did.

When the *New York* story appeared, there was no sidebar—the mural was too big to reproduce well, Kaminsky later explained—and Cenedella was distressed. "It was like a slap in the face," he says. But, after all, the picture was finished, it was hanging in Le Cirque 2000, and there it would rest for posterity.

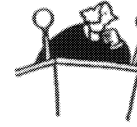
Except for one thing. Maccioni had a final request. Cenedella had seated the wife of Marvin Shanken, of *Cigar Aficionado*, next to Tony Randall. But Shanken wanted to sit next to his wife. Would Cenedella mind making the adjustment over the weekend if the mural was shipped back down to Tribeca?

Coincidentally, the artist was visited that weekend by Philip Roth. The novelist was researching a work in progress on the blacklist era, and wanted to interview Cenedella about his father, who was fired from his job as head of the Radio Writers Guild in the fifties. The two men got to talking about injustice. For Cenedella, it was only a short step from the unfairness of McCarthyism to the disappointment of not getting the sidebar he had been expecting in *New York*.

As it happens, Roth had recently been featured in *New York*, in an unflattering article about his breakup with Claire Bloom. Inspired by their mutual mistreatment, Cenedella came up with a plan of revenge: why not replace Peter Kaminsky with Philip Roth? Guess who's sitting next to Frank Zappa now. —ERIC ALTERMAN

THE BENCH

How Paula Jones's defenders left her defenseless.



THE lawyers and advisers who steered Paula Corbin Jones's lawsuit to its ignominious end last week will probably enjoy a long afterlife on the talk-show and lecture circuit. Donovan Campbell, Jr., of Dallas, John Whitehead, of the now famous Rutherford Institute, and Susan Carpenter-McMillan, of untold snappy sound bites, will probably be dining out on Jones v. Clinton stories for years. But, in light of Judge Susan Webber Wright's brusque dismissal of the case, it's worth noting what Jones got out of all the high-profile assistance: not much.

As the Paula Jones case assumed a larger place in the national consciousness over the past several months, the plaintiff seemed almost a forgotten figure. She was replaced, of course, by the group usually known as the "other women"—Monica Lewinsky, Kathleen Willey, and all the other alleged targets of the President's sexual attentions. This did not happen by accident. As the President's lawyers wrote in their successful brief asking for summary judgment, "Plaintiff spent 99% of her discovery efforts attempting to substantiate rumors that President Clinton made sexual advances to *other* women." for news, because the slot could expand or contract depending on the events of the day, mimicking the front and back of the book in a print news magazine. All this is, no doubt, more plausible because of the innovative spirit that *Roone Arledge*—the *Toscanini* of the control room—brought to his kingdom. —KEN AULETTA