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Return of the Campbell, an Ornate Grand Central Bar

By Robert Simonson

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The Campbell Apartment, a soaring, old-fashioned cocktail bar tucked away in an ornate corner of Grand Central Terminal, closed in July to the dismay of many commuters. It will reopen to the public on Wednesday — in triplicate.

The main room — once the lordly private office of the railroad executive and millionaire John Williams Campbell, complete with Florentine décor, a coffered ceiling and a fireplace — will be reborn simply as the Campbell Bar. A second, smaller bar area just outside the entrance, bookended by two palm trees, will be called the Campbell Palm Court. And a former taxi stand just outside will be fitted with a third bar, the Campbell Terrace. Announcing the presence of all three, collectively titled the Campbell, will be a large awning on Vanderbilt Avenue.

The bar's days as a hard-to-find, slightly mysterious hideaway appear to be over.

“We want people to know about it,” said Scott Gerber, the chief executive of Gerber Group, which runs several bars and restaurants in New York City. “We don't want it to be that secret place. We want it to be more inclusive. There are so many people who commute through here every day who didn't know about it.”

Gerber Group won the lease last year after a legal battle in which Mark Grossich, who had restored the space and ran the bar for 17 years, sued the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which runs the terminal. Many people loved the bar and worried that the new owners would erase its special charm.



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Karsten Moran for The New York Times

“Before, it might have been on the stuffier side,” Mr. Gerber said. “We’re hoping to make it a little more relaxed.”

There will no longer be a dress code. The Campbell will open earlier, at noon, offering sandwiches, salads and soup for lunch. Reservations, which were previously accepted only for large parties, will now be accepted for two or more. The cocktail list will focus on classics like the Negroni, the manhattan and the old-fashioned, and variations on those drinks.

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The former Campbell was dark, so lighting will be enhanced to better show off the ceiling. The big room, which could get quite warm, will be air-conditioned.

But for the most part, the new Campbell will look pretty much like the old one. The interior has landmark protection, so Mr. Gerber didn’t have much say about that. Every inch of the main bar has been cleaned and restored, from the leaded windows to John Campbell’s old safe.

The bar, too, is the same, in the same spot. And there will be a familiar face behind it.

Mr. Gerber has rehired Paris DuRante, who tended bar there for 16 years and became a beloved figure. Mr. DuRante, a native New Yorker whose given name stems from his father's love of the Trojan War story ("Helen," in ancient Greek, is tattooed on his arm), understands patrons' affection for the space.

"It's such a beautiful room," he said. "You don't expect to see what you see. It's like a church. I think of New York as the center of the universe, and this bar is at the center of that universe."

The Campbell, Grand Central Terminal, 15 Vanderbilt Avenue (43rd Street), 212-297-1781, thecampbellnyc.com.

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