

Night Life and Wildlife



Hiroiyuki Ito for The New York Times

WATERING HOLE Cain, a new nightclub in Chelsea, has a South African motif.

By VICTORIA DeSILVERIO

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SINCE traversing Africa in a safari is a pleasure known to few, it's perhaps fitting that exclusivity at Cain, a new nightspot in West Chelsea, is strictly protected. Not only are reservations required, but the reservation number changes periodically to ensure its selectivity. With only 24 tables, the club is not meant to be crowded.

"South Africa had been closed off for so long," said Jamie Mulholland, the club's owner, perched on a burnt-orange ottoman, using a wooden pestle to grind mint leaves into a vodka cocktail. "There has been a stigma about us, so I wanted to show off the culture."

Mr. Mulholland, who is from South Africa, and the club's designer, Robert McKinley (of PM and Table 50), traveled there, collecting the ornaments that would later transform a taxicab garage into a modern game lodge. Trophies of the voyage — glossy oversized portraits of an ostrich and a South African family — hang on the walls.

Zebra skins with manes are encased in glass on the bar; antelope horns have become bathroom door handles; and multicolored tribal beads made of glass, wood and warthog teeth are strewn around rough wooden columns and over the bare torsos of performers who suddenly appear on the dance floor.

"I met them at Starbucks!" Mr. Mulholland said. "They were speaking Zulu so I introduced myself. Turns out, they are with 'The Lion King' on Broadway."

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Cain
544 West 27th Street; (212) 947-8000.
GETTING IN Reservations required.
DRESS CODE Euro-style, dressy.
D.J. PICK "Murder She Wrote" by Chaka Demus & Pliers.
SIGHTINGS Mariah Carey, Jason Biggs.
SIGNATURE DRINK Cape Grace (honey, basil seeds, vodka), \$15.

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Across the room this recent evening, Mariah Carey and a friend huddle over a hand-held computer, typing and giggling.

A man in a tuxedo dances in place. His gaze falls upon a waitress in a tiny frock (a knockoff of Yves Saint Laurent's safari dress from the 70's). Bending over, she displays a surprise element of her uniform: white-and-orange-striped knickers.

Rain, a former busboy at PM, is tapping a tambourine. A gaggle of girls in a rumba line slinks past a giant head — once connected to a 600-pound kudu buck — mounted over a huge slab of rock that serves as the D.J. booth.

"If you lay on the floor," said Paul Alexander, a singer in knee-high black stiletto boots and a sequined top, "and if you're drunk, it looks like Table Mountain in Cape Town."