

The Schmooze **Stories with a Yiddish Twist**

S.O.S. - SECRETS OF SARDI'S A YIDDISH GUIDE TO SARDI'S RESTAURANT

by
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Syosset, New York

Sardi's is the American show-business restaurant since 1927. It's located at 234 W. 44 Street, New York. Shown below is a Yiddish guide to "the restaurant [that] had a central place in the theater. You could walk in at lunch and do a day's business, see people you hadn't seen in a long time. You didn't think of going anywhere else." (Gerald Schoenfeld, President of the Shubert Organization)

MAYOR ("der birger-mayster")

NICKNAMED ("tsunemenish")

Vincent Sardi, Jr. was nicknamed "The Mayor of Broadway."

"The club, mess hall, lounge, post office, saloon and marketplace of the people of the theater..."

Description of Sardi's, by Press Agent, Richard Maney

PORTRAIT ("portret")

In May of 2016, Lin-Manuel Miranda, the composer and writer ("shrayber") of the B'way smash, Hamilton, got a portrait unveiled at Sardi's. It will hang alongside drawings of Whoopi Goldberg, Lucille Ball, Sally Field, Tom Hanks, Cyndi Lauper, Jack Dempsey and Michael Bloomberg.

CONTINENTAL ("KONTINENTAL")

The Sardi family has been credited with creating the term "Continental Cuisine." They took dishes from their homeland and served them with a twist. Ex. Cannellone ("blintse"/crepe) is made with French crepes instead

of pasta.

IMMIGRANT (“IMIGRANT”)

Sardi’s restaurant was founded by Northern Italian immigrants Vincent Sardi and Eugenia Pallera. The couple (“di por”) met just after each had landed at Ellis Island. They both had worked at the Bartholdi Inn, an upscale boardinghouse for actors. Their first restaurant opened at 146 W. 44 Street, in 1921.

ACTOR (“AKTYOR”)

Vincent Sardi Sr.’s brother, Domenico, back in Italy, had been an actor.

OPENING-NIGHT (“efn nakht”)

Vincent Sardi, a theater lover of the arts (“libhober”) kept the restaurant open much later than others in the area to accommodate Broadway performers’ schedules. It became known as a pre- and post-theater hangout, as well as a location for opening night parties.

ALCOHOL (“ALKOHOL”)

Sardi’s did not serve alcohol until the 21st amendment had passed, which they celebrated by opening “The Little Bar” at the front of the restaurant in 1933.

“FRIENDS OF THE HOUSE” (“dos hoyz”)

In order to have a portrait at Sardi’s, subjects must frequent the restaurant. Each portrait must be signed.

The portraits are not permanently affixed to the wall (“di vant”) so that they can be taken down if the restaurant had to move. As a result, actress Anna Maria Alberghetti, who hated producer David Merrick so much, she stole his portrait and hung it in her bathroom (“vashtsimer”) right over the toilet (“der klozet”).

Not everyone was happy with their portrait. Some thought it was unflattering. Actress (“aktrise”) Maureen Stapleton hated her portrait so much she stole it from the wall (“di vant”). She took it home and burned it. Milton Berle did not like how his nose looked in his portrait. Shortly after he got a nose job and demanded a new portrait after the surgery. Sardi’s refused to re-do it. Bette Midler hated her photo, taken by Richard Baratz, and declined to sign it.

When Sardi’s son, Vincent Sardi, Jr. (1915-2007) took over restaurant

operations in 1947, he offered to change the terms of Gard's agreement ("der heskem"). Gard refused and continued to draw the caricatures in exchange for meals until his death. The only stipulation was that Vincent wouldn't criticize Alex's art and Alex wouldn't criticize Vincent's food.

CONTRACT ("kontrakt")

Alex Gard (1898-1948) and Sardi drew up a contract that stated Gard would make the caricatures in exchange ("oysbaytn") for one meal per day at the restaurant.

EXPANSION ("EXPANSYON")

Vincent Sardi Jr. tried to expand but failed. He opened Sardi's East, on East 54th Street, but had trouble ("tsore") luring patrons from the Theater District over. He even purchased a double-decker bus ("oytobus") to run diners over from B'way shows. The restaurant closed in 1968.

RUINOUS VENTURE ("firnem")

In 1974, Mr. Sardi embarked on a ruinous venture. He opened a 700-seat dinner theater in Franklin Square, Long Island. It closed in two years.

SENSITIVE ("shpirevdik")

"You've got to be awfully careful with actors out of work. They're very sensitive about their fading prestige ("prestizh"), and I know darn well they scrimp ("skrimp") to come in here, on the chance that they'll be considered for a part. Boosting an actor's ego with a table in a good location is simply my way of giving him a pat on the back."

Quote by Vincent Sardi, Jr.

MOVIES ("der kino" means "movie theatre")

Many movies have filmed scenes at Sardi's. Three examples:

Naked in New York, 1993

The Producers, 2005

Shortcut to Happiness, 2007

RADIO ("radyo")

Joan Hamburg ("New York Radio's First Lady") frequently broadcast from her favorite place--instead of a studio--Sardi's, the Hamptons, Canyon Ranch, and The Villages in Florida. Her interviews often sound more like back-fence chitchat with the neighbors.

PREMIERE ("premyere")

Hugo Claus went to the premiere of a new play by (Paddy) Chayefski [sic].

He says that after the show he went to dinner at Sardi's, where all the playwrights and theater people dine. Everyone awaits the appearance of the next day's papers in a state of great anxiety..."

Source: "Italo Calvino's American Diary, 1959-1960, when Calvino was in New York on a Ford Foundation scholarship.

BIRTHDAY ("geboyrn-tog")

Arthur Miller had his 80th birthday at Sardi's.

BOOK ("bukh")

In 2013 Nancy Maniscalco Miracle published a book titled, "From Sardi's to Sicily, the Biography of Marilyn Monroe: Marilyn's Secrets Fifty Years After Her Death."

In 1957 Vincent Sardi, Jr. collaborated with Helen Bryson to compile a cookbook of Sardi's recipes. "Curtain Up Sardi's" contains nearly 300 recipes.

DISCOUNT ("hanokhe")

Sardi's has an actors' discount menu, available to any customer presenting his or her paid-up Equity or Screen Actors Guild card.

CULINARY ("kularish")

In 1987, Zagat described the food at Sardi's as "a culinary laughing stock." Another customer ("koyne") who was surveyed, called Sardi's "the longest running gag on Broadway."

RECKLESS ("nit barakht") GENEROSITY ("dos vatrones")

Richard Saul Wurman ("NYC Access," 1989) made the following comments about Sardi's: On rare occasions a celebrity or two can be seen here, but these days there is more seeking than finding. Many of the big Broadway stars have moved on to other galaxies and other eateries, but their presence is still felt in the caricatures that decorate the walls of both floors. At the 2nd-floor bar, the drinks flow with reckless generosity--a compelling reason for it to have remained a favorite hangout for New York Times reporters, who search for inspiration among the clinking ice cubes....

TOURIST ("turist") TRAP

ZAGAT'S NYC RESTAURANT SURVEY, 1989, contained the following review of Sardi's: "If you could eat the caricatures" on the wall, food ratings might improve dramatically at this faded Theater District landmark; apart from a glimpse of an occasional celebrity, comments are

savage: “gone way downhill,” “once upon a time,” “truly inedible,” “tourist trap,” “a myth,” “why, oh why?”

The 1998 ZAGAT SURVEY OF NYC RESTAURANTS, rates Sardi’s as follows: “This theater District mecca is as integral to NY” as the Empire State Building”; but it’s “overpriced” Italian “food needs rejuvenation” and it has “staff so old” they make Tony Randall look like a kid.

NEWSPAPER (“tsaytung”) MEN

A “newspaper macher” is “a man with contacts.” Walter Winchell and Ward Morehouse added to Sardi’s popularity. They belonged to a group of newspaper pressagents and drama critics who met for lunch regularly at Sardi’s.

TELEVISION (“televisye”) EPISODE

A 2007 “I Love Lucy” episode was produced at Sardi’s restaurant. Lucy and the Mertz’s are having lunch, when Ethel spots hunky William Holden sitting at the next table from them. He’s smoking and reading a paper. Ethel informs Lucy that he’s right behind her, and she lifts her compact mirror to get a better look. Lucy says, “Oh, he’s dreamy. Oh.”

The waiter asks, “Are you ready to order, Mr. Holden?”

“Yeah, Gus. I’d like to start with Cobb salad and a cup of coffee.”

After the waiter sees how Lucy is overly excited about being near Holden, he tells him, “I don’t have another booth.” Lucy greets Holden face to face. She’s so nervous (“nervez”) that she butters her HAND and has difficulty eating her spaghetti. Lucy drops her napkin and food is spilled all over Holden’s clothing.

Holden replies, “They say when they stop looking, it’s time to worry.”

FAVORITE (“balibt”) CUSTOMERS

For many years, one of the best tables at Sardi’s was held for Mr. & Mrs. Ira Katzenberg. By the early 1950s, the Katzenberg’s attended virtually every Broadway opening for 30 years. They took their seats at Sardi’s at 7:15 and ordered, without fail, a brandy and a bottle of Saratoga water. Mr. Sardi called him his favorite customer.

Source: New York Times obituary

SUCCESS (“hatlokhe”) and FAILURE (“durkhfaln”)

“All of us on the staff were caught up in each Broadway play. We became involved in the raising of money, the casting of roles, the progress

of rehearsals, and, after opening night, the success or failure of a play.”

Mr. Sardi, Playbill magazine

OBITUARY (nekrolog”)

Vincent Sardi Jr. died on Jan. 4, 2007. William Grimes [Jan. 5, 2007] wrote in The New York Times, “Mr. Sardi, a tall, affable man with a military bearing perfected the art of seating enemies far apart and putting friends and potential allies near one another. He was always the soul of politesse, but where he seated you could be crucial to making a deal,” said producer Arthur Cantor.

“Seems impossible to imagine NYC without a Sardi’s but one day we may see the Starbucks sign go up and Sardi’s reappearing at a Disney theme park.”

Source: Unknown, 2007

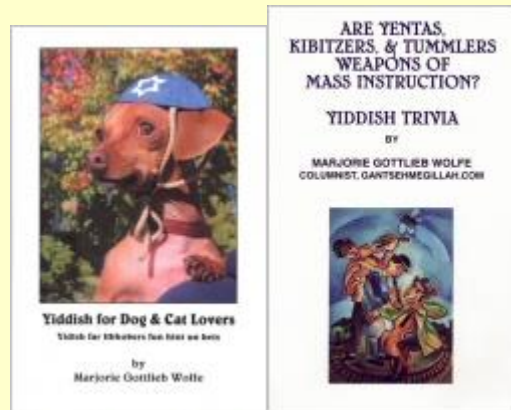
LIGHTS DIMMED (“dimd”)

Following Vincent Sardi Jr.’s death in 2007, the lights on Broadway briefly dimmed in his honor.

Max Klimavicius, the current owner and President of Sardi’s restaurant said, “As long as there is Broadway, we’ll always be here.”

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**Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of
two books:**



**"Yiddish for Dog & Cat Lovers" and
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