

Max's Kansas City



Max's Kansas City was a nightclub and restaurant at 213 Park Avenue South, in New York City, which became a gathering spot for musicians, poets, artists and politicians in the 1960s and 1970s. It was opened by Mickey Ruskin (1933–1983) in December 1965.

History

Max's

Max's quickly became a hangout of choice for artists and sculptors of the New York School, like John Chamberlain, Robert Rauschenberg and Larry Rivers, whose presence attracted hip celebrities and the jet set. Neil Williams, Larry Zox, Forrest (Frosty) Myers, Larry Poons, Brice Marden, Bob Neuwirth, Dan Christensen, Ronnie Landfield, Peter Reginato, Carl Andre, Dan Graham, Lawrence Weiner, Robert Smithson, Joseph Kosuth, Brigid Berlin, David R. Prentice, Roy Lichtenstein, Peter Forakis, Peter Young, Mark di Suvero, Larry Bell, Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Richard Serra, Lee Lozano, Robert (Tex) Wray, Carlos Villa, Jack Whitten, Philip Glass, Max Neuhaus, Ray Johnson, Malcolm Morley, Marjorie Strider, Edward Avedisian, Carolee Schneemann, Dorothea Rockburne, David Budd, Norman Bluhm, Kenneth Showell, Tiger Morse, Colette Justine, Lenore Jaffee, William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Marisol were just a few of the artists seen regularly at Max's. Willem de Kooning, Barnett Newman, art critics Lucy Lippard, Robert Hughes, Clement Greenberg, and Harold Rosenberg, art dealers Leo Castelli, and David Whitney, whose gallery was across the street, and architect Philip Johnson, occasionally would be seen there as well.



It was also a favorite hangout of Andy Warhol and his entourage, who dominated the back room. The Velvet Underground played there regularly, including their last shows, in the summer of 1970. It was a home base for the Glam Rock scene, which included David Bowie, Iggy Pop, Lou Reed, Alice Cooper, the New York Dolls, Wayne County, Dorian Zero and the Magic Tramps. While her band would not play there until the second incarnation of

the club, Patti Smith and her boyfriend, artist Robert Mapplethorpe, visited Max's almost nightly from 1969 through the early 1970s. Smith and guitarist Lenny Kaye also performed there as a

duo New Year's Day 1974, opening for Phil Ochs. Many bands made early appearances there. Bruce Springsteen played a solo acoustic set in the summer of 1972. It was the site of Aerosmith's first New York City gig. Columbia Records president Clive Davis later signed Aerosmith to his record label there. Bob Marley & The Wailers opened for Bruce Springsteen at Max's, commencing Marley's career on the international circuit. Tim Buckley, Tom Waits, Bonnie Raitt, Odetta, Dave Van Ronk, John Herald, Garland Jeffreys, Sylvia Tyson, Emmylou Harris, Gram Parsons, Elliott Murphy and Country Joe were some of the musicians that played there. Fashion designer Carlos Falchi was a busboy and Deborah Harry was a waitress.

By the end of 1974, Max's had lost popularity among the art crowd and the glam era was in decline. The legendary establishment closed in December of that year. Ed Koch later had a campaign office in the building.

Mickey Ruskin



Shortly after graduating from Cornell Law School, Mickey Ruskin opened The Tenth Street Coffeehouse, which featured nightly poetry readings. He then opened Les Deux Magots, on East

Ninth Street. His next endeavor was a bar called the "Ninth Circle Steak House" , a hangout for artists and musicians on West 10th Street. After opening Max's Kansas City, he opened similar restaurants including: the Longview Country Club (later known as Levine's Restaurant) which was on 19th street and Park Avenue South, diagonally across the street from Max's and Max's Terre Haute, on the Upper East Side, but they did not do as well. His next club was The Lower Manhattan Ocean Club, on Chambers Street in TriBeCa. Ruskin's last enterprise was Chinese Chance (nicknamed One U) a bar and restaurant that he opened in partnership with Richard Sanders, located at 1 University Place in Greenwich Village. The French composer Duncan Youngerman and the poet and mail artist Adam Czarnowski both worked there as busboys. Lauren Hutton, Ellen Barkin, Gerard Malanga, Joe Jackson, Joni Mitchell, Nico, David Bowie and a score of other "Lower Manhattan" celebs hung out there, as well as the artists that formerly frequented Max's and the doormen of the Mudd Club. Ruskin died in New York City on May 16, 1983 at the age of 50.

Max's II

Max's Kansas City reopened in 1975 under the ownership of Tommy Dean Mills, who initially thought he would make it a disco. Peter Crowley, who had been booking the same, early punk bands that played at CBGB, and Mothers, a gay bar on West 23rd Street (Manhattan), was hired to book bands at Max's.

Under Crowley's guidance the club became one of the birthplaces of punk, regularly featuring bands like New York Dolls, Wayne County and the Backstreet Boys, Cherry Vanilla, The Fast, Patti Smith Group, Ramones, The Heartbreakers, Television, Suicide, Blondie, Talking Heads, Sniper, The Dictators, The Cramps, Mink DeVille, Misfits, Annie and the Asexuals, The Fleshtones, The B-52's and Klaus Nomi, as well as out-of-town bands such as The Runaways and The Damned. After the breakup of the Sex Pistols, Sid Vicious played many of his solo gigs there. Devo played several shows at Max's in 1977, including a show where they were introduced by David Bowie as "the band of the future."

Max's original site closed its doors for the last time in November 1981. Bad Brains were the headliner on the final night with The Beastie Boys opening. The building survives and now houses Green Café, a Korean deli.

Max's III

Mills reopened the club again on January 27, 1998, at a new location — 240 West 52d Street — site of the former Lone Star Roadhouse. However, it closed shortly after opening.

The opening had been delayed due to litigation by Yvonne Sewall-Ruskin, who claimed that she owned the trademark to Max's Kansas City and was granted a temporary restraining order to prevent use of the name.

Aftermath

In 2000, Acidwork Productions, Inc., a production company founded by Neil Holstein (second cousin of Mickey Ruskin) began working in conjunction with Victoria Ruskin (Mickey Ruskin's daughter) on a feature length documentary about Mickey Ruskin and his many establishments, including Max's Kansas City. In 2001, Yvonne Sewall-Ruskin established the Max's Kansas City Project, in memory of the her late husband. In the spirit of Ruskin's philosophy of helping artists in need, the project, a 501(c)(3) non-profit provides emergency funding and resources for individuals in the arts in crisis, empowers teens through the arts.

Web site of only 35mm footage: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OuyQfxo0ocs&noredirect=1>
