

ATLANTA

PEACH



MEET THE MOGUL





PHOTOS BY JESSE CHAMBERLIN/THE REYNOLDS GROUP INC.

A PRIME SPOT

Restaurateur **Jeffrey Chodorow** brings the flavor and energy of his famous restaurants to Atlanta with the first Maxim Prime

BY JACQUELYNN D. POWERS



Décor in Atlanta's Maxim Prime is meant to depart from the interiors of traditional steakhouses, with a female-friendly, sexy vibe.

MEET THE MOGUL

As one of the most successful restaurateurs in America, Jeffrey Chodorow has tackled nearly every concept in the gourmet oeuvre. While he is not the inventor of world-fusion cuisine, his China Grill restaurant made that foodie trend popular twenty years ago in New York City. Today, Chodorow, 57, owns 26 restaurants across the United States (and a handful in London and Mexico) and employs 3,500 people. Along the way, the entrepreneur has explored new culinary paths, like Chinese-Cuban cooking and endeavors including NBC's reality show *The Restaurant*. This month, however, the pioneering gourmand is teaming up with *Maxim* magazine to debut an upscale steakhouse at the Glenn Hotel in downtown Atlanta. Called Maxim Prime, this is the first in a chain of sexy eateries he is launching nationwide.

So, who will Maxim Prime appeal to? According to Chodorow, it is not going to attract the boobs-and-beer crowd *Maxim* is known for. "There is a disconnect between the perception of *Maxim* and the actuality of the magazine," he notes. "People who know the magazine understand what it's about. People who don't know the magazine draw conclusions about what it is. But do you think these celebrities would be on the cover if it was a Hooters brand? *Maxim* has one of the most important Super Bowl parties that everybody wants to get into. People are fundamentally curious. They are going to come to the restaurant and they will



Miami resident Jeffrey Chodorow, here with wife Linda, has been creating high-fashion, high-energy restaurants for the last 20 years.

find a very sophisticated environment with beautiful people and interesting food. It's not a bullshit restaurant." Yes, but are the waitresses hot? "We always want our waitresses to be sexy," he asserts. "Who doesn't? But this is not Hooters steakhouse. The waitresses will be sexy, but they will not be overtly sexual. The uniforms are night-clubby, but not Las Vegas style."

More importantly, the fare at the 150-seat Maxim Prime promises to be a steakhouse for the next generation, with reasonable pricing and portions. "Dining today is more about entertainment—at least what I do," Chodorow notes. "My son Zach told me that the last thing people want to do when they leave a restaurant is go home and go to sleep. Most people want to go out after dinner. Maxim Prime is going to be a steakhouse, but let's not do a steakhouse with 16-ounces of meat and giant side dishes. You can't eat it all, and no one wants to take a doggy bag with them to a nightclub. The menu has a broad spectrum of

food. We have sushi, *crudo* and a raw bar." Though the menu was not finalized as we went to press, Chodorow envisions starters including crispy crawfish tempura, iceberg wedge with heirloom tomatoes, wild salmon *crudo*, and grilled shrimp with tasso ham and stone-ground grits—a nod to Atlanta's Southern heritage. Hormone-free steaks weigh in at 10 ounces, lobster tails are six ounces, and there is a whole-wheat pasta with roasted jumbo tiger shrimp and tomato fondue.

If you're noticing a trend toward healthfulness, it's probably because Chodorow recently hired a nutritionist to oversee his menus companywide. "Look, if you want something really fattening, we are going to give it to you," he says. "But where we can, we are going to make the food more nutritional." This from the man who has introduced dishes to the American restaurant public like crispy spinach, tempura sashimi, wasabi mashed potatoes, lobster pancakes, avocado fried rice and lamb spareribs. Also of note are the so-called "threesomes" (what would you expect from a *Maxim* partner?) with a trio of regional specialties on each platter. The Japanese version features a petit filet with soy ginger, miso-marinated black cod and sticky rice with pickled vegetables; while the French edition is comprised of sirloin *au poivre*, king crab with sauce *Américaine*, and truffled potato cake. In the 50-seat lounge, guests can nibble on foie gras, PB&J, deviled eggs with white-truffle oil, Kobe sloppy-joe sandwiches, grilled-lobster sliders, baby lamb chops and sweet-corn and black-truffle cappuccino.

The corporate chef for Maxim Prime is Scott Ubert. "He had so much fun doing this menu," Chodorow recalls. "I asked him to blow up the steakhouse concept and think outside the box." Locally, Daniel Zoby will be executing these dishes. So, how will Maxim Prime measure up against Atlanta's carnivorous favorites like Chops, Bone's and Ruth's Chris? "Those are really steakhouses," Chodorow answers. "They look and feel like steakhouses. Maxim Prime looks and feels completely different. This is a place where you want to hang out. It's female-friendly—the menu, décor and vibe. Most women think steakhouses are a man's club. We want to break that mold."

The music will be sexy, lounge-like and fun: think Tony Bennett meets Bob Sinclair. The décor is just as dynamic, with a Garden of Eden theme, including LED back-lit cutouts of leaves, snakes and an apple. Other design features span chocolate concrete flooring, suede banquettes, Lucite walls and a heavy-glass-topped bar—and nary a *Maxim* cover.

Since Atlanta is the inaugural Maxim Prime, all eyes will be on this prototype. "We are going to put 150 percent into Atlanta, but Atlanta is a laboratory for us," Chodorow acknowledges. "We have a number of Maxim Primes in the works, like Denver and Chicago. Atlanta was the quickest turnaround. We think Atlanta is a great market for this. It was on our top-10 list." Furthermore, Jeffrey was familiar with the Glenn Hotel from a construction site tour (prior to BED's rise and fall in the same space) and feels the location is a perfect fit. "The Glenn Hotel has the second-highest average daily rate (ADR) in downtown Atlanta, after the Ritz-Carlton," he explains. "There are advantages to being at the Glenn Hotel: I get a roof bar. I have a lobby to spill out onto. It's not that hard to get to. People will drive into downtown at night for something good. And we are very close to the arenas."

With wildly successful restaurants in cities such as New York, Chicago, Miami, Los Angeles, San Francisco and London, Chodorow recognizes a good location when he sees one. His winning formula at eateries like China Grill, Asia de Cuba, Social Miami and Kobe Club is exceptional food in beautiful rooms. After all, presentation is everything. "Food is very visual," the Miami resident describes. "My plates are very dramatic looking. There are many components. But we never put anything on a plate that we don't expect people to eat. The quality of every ingredient has to be great. We don't believe in overdoing or under-doing the ingredients." ☺

CHODOROW: SETH BROWARNIK



Clockwise from top: The Garden of Eden theme, with LED backlit cutouts of leaves, snakes and an apple, lends itself to the boy-meets-girl quality of Maxim Prime; the glass-topped bar; Lucite walls create a lounge-like atmosphere.

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