

THE CASE FOR JEAN HARRIS, BY SHANA ALEXANDER

\$1.95 • APRIL 7, 1986

# NEW YORK

THE  
NEW

# SNOBBERY

BY PATRICIA MORRISROE





# The NEW Snobbery

The World of  
"WE HAPPY FEW"



BY PATRICIA MORRISROE

GEORGE CARROLL WHIPPLE III IS RUNNING UP AND DOWN THE hallway of the Seventh Regiment Armory, hanging dozens of poster-size photographs of his friends. "Isn't this fun?" he asks, letting out a high-pitched giggle. In between hanging the pictures, he rushes to a nearby phone booth to answer calls from his office. Whipple works at a Wall Street law firm, but he has taken the afternoon off. "Shh!" he says. "Don't tell."

For the past six years, Whipple has been taking pictures of his friends—"all fabulous, successful people"—and now he's putting together an exhibit. One of his shows, "Dead Fish," was a study of "dead fish at the Fulton Fish Market," he says. "It was really a joke, but people took it seriously. They thought it was art."

It's hard to know what to think of Whipple's latest effort. There are pictures of a plumpish Patty Hearst Shaw; Jacqueline Onassis and the Maharaja of Jaipur; a member of the Securities and Exchange Commission in black tie and Kiss makeup; and plenty of photos of himself. "I used a self-timer," he explains.

While Whipple runs upstairs to get a better view of his portrait gallery, an elderly woman who lives in the armory's shelter for the homeless walks up and down the hallway, examining the photos. She stops at a shot of Priscilla Woolworth, the variety-store heiress, lounging on a pool table. Dangling from Woolworth's ears are a pair of Harry Winston ruby earrings the size of Triscuits.

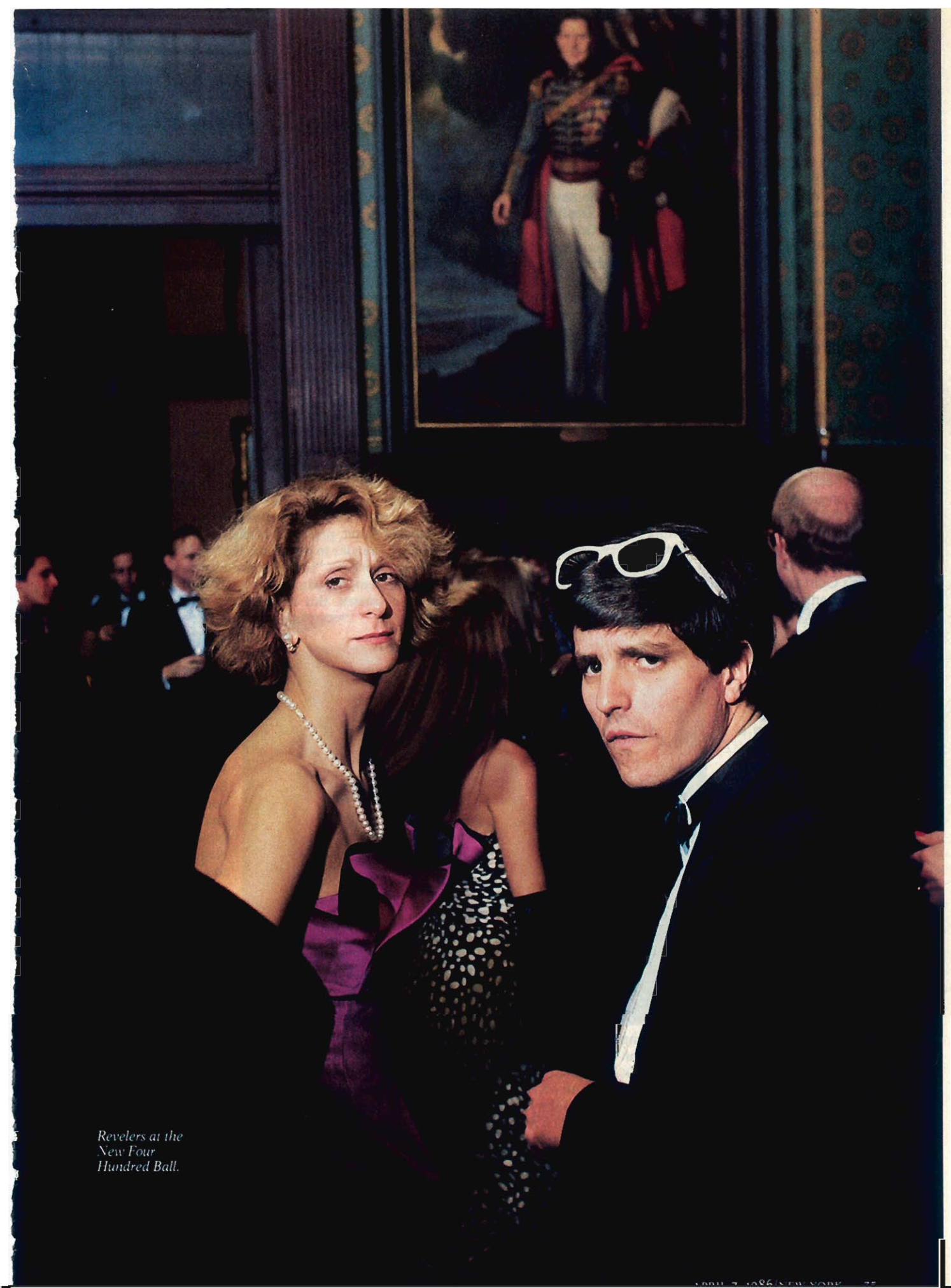
"We get all walks of life here," says the armory's manager, who is watching Whipple to make sure he doesn't do any damage. "We get rich and poor," he says. "A while ago, we even

got the National Funeral Directors & Morticians Association. The place was filled with coffins. They even have special suits for corpses. Yup, no buttons—just a zipper in the back, so you can drop the body in and zip the suit up."

"Excuse me, excuse me," Whipple interrupts. "Can I tack this to the wall?" He's waving one of his favorite photos, a group shot of several young women, including Nina Ford, Blandy Uzielli, and Alexandra Stafford. They're standing in front of a gold-trimmed painting and holding gold-trimmed champagne glasses. Several of them are wearing gold-trimmed evening gowns. Even the photo is tinted gold; it looks like a picture of a debutante party at the court of the Sun King. "Isn't this fun?" Whipple asks the manager. The manager looks at the photo. "Is this for real?" he asks.

Well, almost. It's the New Four Hundred, an eighties version of the concept created by social arbiter Ward McAllister to mark the number of people who would fit into Mrs. William Astor's ballroom. But unlike that group, says Whipple, "we're not elitists. We accept anybody who wants to jump onboard." Of course, it helps if your name is Woolworth, Hearst, or Bidle. "These are just my friends," says Whipple, who went to Kent, Choate, and Columbia. "When you grow up in New York, you meet people." (Whipple is not being disingenuous:





*Revelers at the  
New Four  
Hundred Ball.*



# IF THE SEVENTIES WERE THE ME DECADE, THEN THE EIGHTIES MUST BE THE U DECADE—AS IN “UPPER CLASS.”

That there are few Jews, for instance, among the new snobs is more a matter of old school ties than of anti-Semitism.)

“We’re totally egalitarian,” says Marc de Gontaut Biron, who helped Whipple come up with the Four Hundred idea. He also invested \$40,000 in the New Four Hundred Ball, which took place on February 19 at the armory. “Today, New York society accepts international people, too.” So along with the Woolworths and Rockefellers, there’s Princess Sarvenaz Pahlavi, Count Carl Edward von Bismarck, Prince Dimitri of Yugoslavia, and Prince Ludwig zu Salm Salm. “They’re not all titled,” Biron explains. “Don’t forget Louis Giscard d’Estaing.”

Whipple says he doesn’t take the New Four Hundred seriously; in fact, he claims the whole idea is a joke, a bigger, more elaborate version of “Dead Fish.” “It’s just an amusing concept,” he says. “There’s nothing to it.”

Actually, there is—it’s snobbery, eighties-style, although Whipple and his friends might not see it that way. In recent years, it’s been masquerading as “the new etiquette” and “the return of elegance.” But now it’s out in the open. If the seventies were the Me Decade, then the eighties must surely be the U Decade—as in “upper class.” More and more people are going to black-tie balls, and debutante parties—once shunned by adolescents—have suddenly become hot social events. At this year’s Gold and Silver Ball, fourteen-year-olds in Oscar de la Rentas drank Coke and ate hero sandwiches. “They looked

joining private men’s clubs. The lines of social class, blurred after the fifties, have snapped back into focus, and the accoutrements have come out of the closet. The White House has helped set the tone: When in Washington, the Reagans never seem to be out of black tie; Rosalynn Carter didn’t even wear a new gown to the 1977 inaugural ball.

But the new snobbery goes beyond clothing. It’s an attitude that says, “I’m privileged, and you’re not.” As often as not, it grows out of insecurity. A lot of old family money isn’t around anymore, and what’s left doesn’t buy as much. Moreover, in appearances at least, the middle class in America encompasses all but the very poor and the very rich. Not just the wealthy go to college, travel to Europe, and eat in gourmet restaurants. And thanks to Ralph Lauren, everybody can also go to a department store and come out looking like a Connecticut Wasp.

So, many of the new snobs focus on such things as social status and breeding. Even if they don’t have their grandparents’ money, they still have the family name, or, in the case of Europeans, the title. “These days, like wants to be with like,” says Ludovic Autet, president of the Junior International Club. He organizes parties to introduce the “right” Europeans to the “right” New Yorkers. “In the seventies, you could go to Studio 54 and it was a mixed bag,” he says. “You’d talk to models and would-be actresses. But now people don’t want that. They

don’t want to party with Margaux Hemingway. They’re searching for people with an affinity.”

“A lot of us grew very tired with the downtown scene and places like Area,” says Alexandra Stafford, who grew up in Paris but now lives near Sutton Place. “It’s like you’ve seen one punk, you’ve seen them all. Now people try to look elegant. They want to go to small, black-tie dinners where they can have conversations with their friends. If women want to be like their mothers, to wear the Dior gowns and all the jewelry, it’s lovely.”

“We’re trying to inject some civility into our

lives,” says political strategist James Thompson Severin III, who dresses in black tie every month for a “boys’ night out” at the Yale Club. “The seventies were a period of forced egalitarianism. Now everybody is so busy, they don’t want to waste their time with anybody who isn’t a peer.”

IT’S A WEEK BEFORE THE NEW FOUR HUNDRED BALL, AND George Whipple is eating lunch at a private club. The only woman in evidence is the attendant in the ladies’ coatroom. The men, most of whom are wearing navy suits and white shirts, look like the Duke brothers in *Trading Places* (some of which was filmed in the armory). “Fifty years ago, New York society was basically white males in business suits,” Whipple says. “Now it’s not so rigid.”

**M**arc Biron wants to turn the ball into a charity event: “But it should be an amusing charity, like for the homeless.”

Biron and Alexandra Stafford prepare for a night on the town.



adorable,” says Nicole Nicholas, who chaperoned the event.

Ten years ago, a fourteen-year-old in an Oscar de la Renta would have been considered a freak. But conspicuous consumption has made a comeback. “In the sixties and seventies, money was treated like a dirty little secret,” says John Sedgwick, a cousin of Edie Sedgwick and the author of *Rich Kids*, a book about heirs and heiresses. “If you had it, you pretended you didn’t.” That wasn’t so hard to do back then. Most people under 30 wore blue jeans, and even people with high-profile family names didn’t flaunt them. Instead, they were busy developing their “inner selves,” and the search for fulfillment rarely included a side trip to Bergdorf Goodman.

Now some of the same people who were into meditation and macrobiotics are wearing gold rings with family crests and are



He places his linen napkin on his lap and fingers his gold signet ring. "I wanted to be a political activist," he says. In college, he worked for Eugene McCarthy's campaign. "Today, the people who are accomplishing things are the lawyers and investment bankers," he says. "Not the ones who dropped out."

"Good afternoon, sir," the waiter says, nodding.

"Ah, yes," says Whipple, glancing at the menu. "By the way," he tells me, "everything is quite excellent." He orders lunch and then relaxes a bit in his chair. "To say you copped out by going to Wall Street is ridiculous," he says. I pull out my notebook and lay it on the table. Whipple acts as if he'd swallowed a chicken bone. "Not here," he gasps. "There are rules against these things."

I'm confused. "Against what things?" I ask. "Steno pads?"

Whipple nods his head, and suddenly the room grows very quiet. "Please," he whispers. "Put it away." I shove the notebook in my bag, and Whipple says that "next time," he and I should eat at a more appropriate place.

Next time, at a Jamaican fast-food stand, Whipple explains how he came up with the Four Hundred idea. "Andy Warhol gave me my first camera," he says. "I used to watch him shoot celebrities at Studio 54, so I started taking pictures of my friends. I'm really documenting an era. It's a fabulously exciting time.

All my friends are out there, working and achieving success."

"But what are you trying to say with pictures?" I ask him. "Aren't you projecting a certain elitism? Like Priscilla Woolworth in the Harry Winston earrings?"

"Priscilla was appearing at a benefit for African-famine relief," Whipple says. "By being at that benefit, and wearing those earrings, she helped raise a heck of a lot of money for starving people. My friends are the young movers and shakers of society. They have style, but more important, they have substance. Unlike a lot of the downtown crowd, they're not just famous for fifteen minutes. They'll be around for a long, long time."

*At about 10 p.m., the first of the New Four Hundred arrive at the ball. Others are still at dinner parties. Alexandra Stafford had to hold her dinner at her mother's apartment on Fifth Avenue. Her one-bedroom wasn't big enough. Whipple also borrowed her mother's apartment, to shoot some of his pictures. But that's the way it goes in the age of downward mobility. "In the old days," Whipple says, "you didn't have to rent a ballroom for a ball." And you certainly wouldn't have expected your guests to pay \$55 at the door. "But that's the nice thing about today's society," Biron adds. "It's so democratic."*

*For the next few hours, limousines pull up at the armory, depositing beautifully dressed young couples at the door. Many of them look identical: eighties Barbie and Ken dolls with outfits by Nolan Miller. "Isn't it fun?" gushes Whipple as he greets his friends and escorts them to their portraits. No one quite knows why they're here. It's not a charity event, so there's something*

*vaguely uncomfortable about looking this good without a socially redeeming reason. But nobody worries about it for long.*

**F**OR THE PAST WEEK, MARC BIRON HAS BEEN MAILING out invitations to the ball, and now he's taking a break, eating chocolate mousse at La Goulue. In his native France, the 32-year-old Biron is a count, but he doesn't like to use his title, because "this is America." That doesn't stop him from making use of other people's titles. In the past year, he has held parties "to welcome to New York" Prince Tassilo von Ratibor, Prince Manfred zu Windisch-Graetz, Prince Charles de Bourbon



**'We're trying to inject some civility into our lives,' says Jay Severin, who dresses in black tie every month for a "boys night out" at the Yale Club.**

Severin (center) and friends.

Deaux Siciles, Archduke Gerhardt of Austria, and Sophie, Duchess of Wurtemberg. He also celebrated the "farewell from New York" of His Royal Highness Prince Jean of Luxembourg.

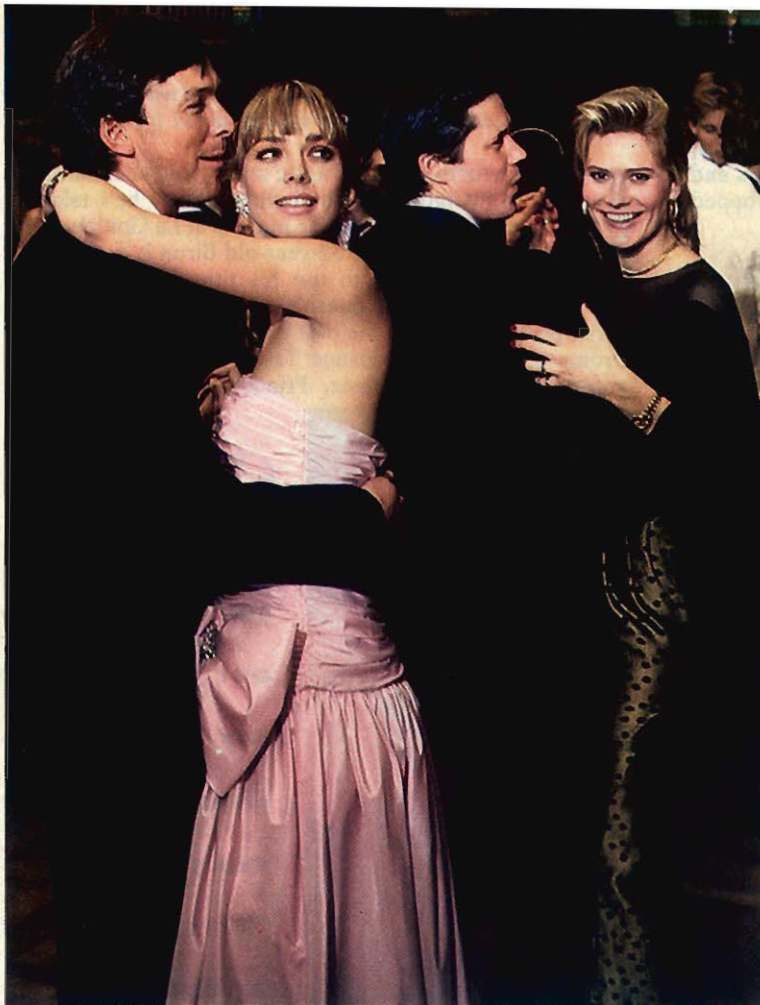
In the past few years, Biron has become a high-profile party-giver. He started the Junior International Club (JIC) with Ludovic Autet, but last year they had a "falling-out." (Biron officially bade farewell to Autet at a party at Le Cirque.) Now he's created Club Biron, founded "with the goal of fostering international understanding." So far, Biron's greatest diplomatic coup was his Midsummer Night's Eve party at the Lycée Français. The women were told to "dress ethereal." "And they did," Biron says. "They really looked light and frothy."

Biron plans to create a "new society." Above all, he says, its members must have "style." And style, Biron explains, can be had by anyone. "If you want it," he says, "you just have to go out and get it. You have to learn how to be beautiful. Americans think there's something bad in going out all the time. But when you go out, and you have to say something interesting to 300 people, it keeps your mind awake. It's the ultimate challenge."

Biron says that next year he hopes to turn the Four Hundred Ball into a charity event. "We could do something like charity of the year," he says. "But it should be an amusing charity, like for the homeless."

Ludovic Autet, the man who has been depicted as Biron's arch-rival in snobbery, is working in the JIC's office on Madison Avenue. Autet claims the press has made a big deal over nothing; in fact, after Biron was quoted as slighting Autet





## FAMILY TIES:

FOR MANY OF THE PEOPLE AT THE NEW FOUR HUNDRED BALL, THE NEW SNOBBERY MEANS GETTING BACK TO WHERE YOU ONCE BELONGED.



**"I THINK DRESSING UP IS WONDERFUL," SAYS LETITIA BALDRIGE. "IT'S A REACTION TO LOOKING LIKE A SLOB."**

("He's not very bright. He's insecure"), Biron sent him a written apology. "That was very decent," says Autet.

Autet, whose family is in "the real-estate business in France," came to New York twelve years ago to work in the fast-food business. "But fast food I didn't like," he says. So he opened Le Coup de Fusil, an Upper East Side bistro. He sold it after two years, and then he started to give parties at the Underground. That evolved into the Junior International Club. For a membership fee of \$350 a year, Europeans between 21 and 35 can meet their New York counterparts. "To get into the club, you have to be proposed by two members," Autet says. "We don't want everyone."

Autet says he started the club because "Juniors don't have a lot of money even if their families have money. The Europeans have to wait around for their grandparents to die. Still, they want to go out every night, and you can easily spend \$200. With the JIC, they get discounts at clubs and restaurants, and 30 percent off Moët & Chandon champagne."

But there are other prices to pay. For one thing, "women have to look beautiful," Autet says. "If they don't, they have to stay at home." But, according to Autet, most of them make the effort. "They know photographers will be taking their pictures at Regine's or the Palladium," he says, "and all the women are vying to be queen of the night."

Later, at the DDL café at Trump Tower, Autet explains that he "loves beauty." That's why he finds it a "little depressing" when he travels to "small villages, maybe in Arizona, because they don't know Bill Blass." But Autet is forgiving. "It's hard to

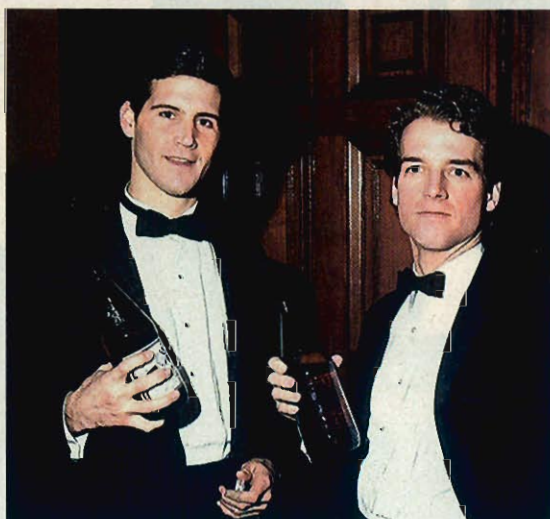
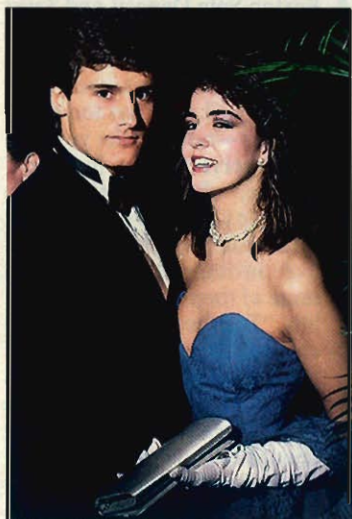
look good in Tucson," he says. But if you can't look good in New York, you've got a problem. "Walk along Madison Avenue," he says. "There's Valentino and Versace. There's even some American designers who are good."

But Autet admits that his Junior Internationals have other problems besides looking beautiful. "Real estate is a problem," he says. "In Europe, they live in places with 300 bedrooms, and then they come to New York, and they have to live in a modern apartment building on the Upper East Side. Maybe even with a roommate."

**C**OUNT CARL EDWARD VON BISMARCK KNOWS THE syndrome only too well. "I grew up in the old castle of the Iron Chancellor," he says, sipping a cappuccino at Alo Alo. Now he lives in the East Sixties, in an apartment. Bismarck, who is a great-grandson of German chancellor Otto von Bismarck, works as a Wall Street stockbroker. "In America, that's where the money is," he says.

Bismarck goes to both the JIC and Club Biron parties, but prefers private dinners. "I go to a lot of black-tie things," he says, "but no big deal. At the castle, it was always formal." These days, Bismarck isn't going out as much, because he's trying to keep a lower profile. "I have a girlfriend," he says. "Do you know her? Her name's Miss U.S.A.?" They met at the Palladium, and although Bismarck says she's not supposed to have a boyfriend, he follows her around in secret. "Yeah," he says, "I wait for her outside places like J. C. Penney's." He





makes a face. "She comes from a rich family in Texas," he says, "so she doesn't need the job."

In two years or so, Bismarck says, he plans to go back to Germany, where he might get involved in forestry.

Forestry?

"Yeah," he says, "the forest around the castle. It's very large."

Twenty-seven-year-old Prince Dimitri of Yugoslavia is another young aristocrat who goes to JIC parties. He used to work at E. F. Hutton, but now he's a gemologist at Sotheby's.

In the late afternoon, a limousine is waiting outside his East Side townhouse to take him to the airport. He's heading to St. Moritz on business. Two friends drop in to say good-bye. They talk in French for about ten minutes, and then Dimitri tells them he's in the middle of an interview. He invites them to share their views on the New York social scene.

"Americans are very impressed by social status," says a young woman with waist-length brown hair. "I'm American, so I can say that."

"It's really unbelievable," says her male friend, who is French. "A few years ago, everybody was marrying aristocrats who were broke, but who had titles."

"I think it's good for Americans who don't have money to try to better themselves," Dimitri says. "But I don't like *nouveaux riches* Americans. They're tacky. Social climbing is fine if you do it in the right way. Estée Lauder is a perfect example. She didn't social-climb in a tacky way. She did it in an elegant way."

"The problem," he says, "is that Americans try too hard to be successful. But it's understandable. America is a young country. Two hundred years ago, everybody was still climbing trees. I think the best thing Europeans have given Americans is to show them they can have fun in life."

"Oui," says the woman friend. "Fun."

From about 10:30 p.m. to midnight, 800 of the New Four Hundred parade up and down the hallway of the armory, staring at their pictures, kissing people they haven't seen since the night before, at Primavera or Prima Donna. In the Clark Room, Alex Donner is singing a medley of Cole Porter songs. According to a press release, the 35-year-old bachelor bandleader-divorce lawyer has a "genealogical heritage well-rooted in American society."

Donner is "related to the Cushing Family of Boston and Philadelphia, the Brokaw Family of New York, and the Donners of Donner Steel, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania." But tonight, Donner is playing to an almost empty room, because everybody's out in the hallway.

After a while, people begin circling the buffet table. A man with slicked-back hair and a waxy face talks about how nice it is to be "civilized" again. He toasts a friend with champagne, and then spends the next few seconds analyzing his puff pastry stuffed with dill and salmon.

"My last party was catered by Silver Palate," he says. After he leaves, the friend mutters the ultimate eighties curse. "Yuppie," he says, and people smile.



# MANY OF THE NEW SNOBS REFER TO THE YUPPIES—WITH HORROR—AS THE *NOUVEAUX RICHES* OF THE EIGHTIES.

**I**HATE THE WORD 'NEW,' SAYS JAY SEVERIN. "AS IN 'the new civility.' 'New' connotes nouveau. That implies acquiring something you never had. Let's just say we're returning to our roots."

Severin, who took no part in the Four Hundred Ball, is on the phone with George Bush's office in Washington. In 1979, he left David Garth to start a Republican political-consulting firm. "And as you can see, I'm very busy," Severin says. That's why he decided to organize monthly dinners with seven of his friends, because "otherwise we'd never see one another." The dinners are always black tie and are usually held at the Yale Club. Afterward, the group retires to

wardly mobile. Or being a yuppie. The distance between where we found ourselves and where we wanted to go wasn't very great."

Yuppies are regarded as the *nouveaux riches* of the eighties. They may be buying co-ops and becoming partners at law firms and investment banks. They may even be sneaking into the junior committees of certain charities. But middle-class is middle-class, even if it drives a BMW. "Yuppies are disgusting," says one woman. "All this emphasis on drinking the proper wine and going to the right restaurant. We knew about these things already. We just had to relearn an appreciation for what we had."

**M**y friends are the young movers and shakers of society," says George Carroll Whipple III, who helped create the ball. "They have style, but more important, they have substance."

At home, Whipple surrounds himself with his photos.



someone's apartment "to argue over brandy and cigars."

Severin calls these get-togethers a "hybrid of Animal House and the Pickwick Club." "We drink all night," he says, "and go on adventures." After Severin "stumbles home at dawn," he often has to get on the first shuttle to Washington. But Severin doesn't mind. In fact, he finds it "thrilling," especially if he has an appointment at the White House that morning. "There's nothing better," he says, "than knowing that after drinking yourself to imbecility you can still do your job and do it well." Severin says he likes pushing himself "to the limit, living on the edge. And I wouldn't call it a macho thing. We place a premium on conversation. We're all prominent and successful, so sometimes our get-togethers result in some profitable business transactions. But that's not the important thing. We aren't striving for success. We're already there."

"And frankly," he adds, "it wasn't a question of being up-

wardly mobile. It's a natural reaction to only wearing blue jeans and looking like a slob."

Socialite Renée Monell agrees. "Women are back to being women," she says, picking at a slice of chèvre at Manhattan Market. "And I think that's beautiful." Monell, who says she was "burning bras in Boston in the sixties," is dressed in black wool pants, a black sweater, and a black fox turban. "Today, it's important to have elegance and panache," she explains. "If we're going to follow in the footsteps of Nan Kempner and Pat Buckley, we have to groom ourselves. When I go out, I want to feel beautiful and look beautiful. I spend time with myself—the makeup, the sculpted nails, the \$5,000 Bob Mackie gown. These days, you *have* to. Some time ago, I gave a black-tie party, and a friend of mine—a brilliant girl—came straight from the office in her work clothes. I was furious. It was a direct insult to me."

"There's a real backlash," says 26-year-old Andrew Carnegie Rose, who works for Boston Safe Deposit and Trust Company. He evaluates art and horses as collateral for loans. "These days, everybody works hard and pays too much in taxes—not just the yuppies. We deserve to have fun, too."

Rose, who graduated from Buckley, St. Paul's, and Princeton, says he gets about five invitations a day, and none of them involve Jerry Rubin. "They're usually more exclusive," he says. Rose says he plans to donate the invitations to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "Many of them are very beautiful," he says, "and I think they present an interesting look at how people lived in the 1980s."

"I think what you're seeing is a desire for elegance and formality in all economic groups," says Letitia Baldrige, who wrote *The Complete Guide to Executive Manners* and revised Amy Vanderbilt's book on etiquette. "The Reagans have had an enormous impact. Of course, the over-emphasis on materialism isn't so hot. But I think dressing up



"In the past, I would wear jeans with a tuxedo jacket to dinners," says 35-year-old Whitney Tower. "Now I'd be too nervous to do that. People would talk." Tower is sitting in Prima Donna, at a table with owner Howard Stein. "I'm an investor in the restaurant," explains Tower, who grew up on a horse farm in Westbury and then moved to a hut in Fiji. ("I loved Dorothy Lamour films," he says.) Now he's back in New York, working in public relations. "Today, there's a lot of soul-searching going on," he says. "People are confused. But they're very serious about looking good. They're taking care of themselves with workouts and face-lifts, so they want to have the right clothes too."

"Last week, someone told Marc Biron that I was wearing the same gown," says Alexandra Stafford in her apartment, discreetly removing a price tag from her antique silver creamer. "I couldn't believe it. It's like we're living in eighteenth-century France."

Stafford's place is decorated with French antiques. Hanging on the walls of her bathroom are photographs of people in black tie. Stafford says she partially blames the British royal family, particularly Charles and Diana, for putting pressure on Americans to dress up. "We all got up at 4 A.M. to watch the bloody wedding," she says. "And it affected us."

"Isn't it fun?" Whipple is saying. He's talking about the 1963 Buick Special that was painted by artist Keith Haring. It's parked in the middle of the armory's indoor tennis court. "Yucky!" says a woman in a silk-crêpe Valentino. "Who wants to look at a Buick?"

At about midnight, people move into the Tiffany Room. A rock group known as Little Campers is performing in front of a fireplace inlaid with turquoise stones. A very large woman, who looks as if she stepped out of a John Singer Sargent painting, is doing the pony; her partner is doing the twist. In the background, behind a glass case, stand the original uniforms of the National Guard, from 1835. Looking like headless bodies, they form a ghostly backdrop for the dancers.

**T**HERE'S A REAL NOSTALGIA FOR THE WAY IT was," says model Mallory Harrington. "There's a lot of romanticism in getting dressed up in black tie and going to a ball. It's like living in the nineteenth century." Harrington says that many people want to live the way their grandparents did, but they don't have the money. "A lot of the old New York wealth just isn't around anymore," she says, "but at least people can still dress up, even if they can't have cocktail parties for 300 in their living rooms."

Harrington has just finished overseeing the trompe l'oeil work she's having done in her new apartment; now she's having breakfast at Sarabeth's Kitchen. She's wearing Chanel earrings and an Hermès scarf, and her dark hair is tied in a taut ponytail. "I used to be a crazy New York teenager," she says in a breathy voice. "I had shaved eyebrows. Big red lips. I used to hang out all night at CBGB's with Lou Reed, and eat souvlakia for breakfast."

Now she lives with architect Pierre Crosby on the Upper

East Side. "My experience really made me appreciate the stability of my life-style," she says. "Now, when I go downtown, and NYU students with mohawks look at me funny, I don't mind. I say to myself, 'I've been there.' But now it's nice to feel privileged."

Anne Moore, who works at Revillon Furs, likes to feel privileged, too. She went to Chapin and Farmington, and then "studied in Europe." At eighteen, she made her debut at the



**W**omen have to look beautiful," says Ludovic Autet of the Junior International Club. "If

Autel at Maxim's.

they don't, they have to stay at home."

Waldorf. "A lot of the girls treated it like a joke," she says, "but in a way, we also liked it." Moore says that all her friends are becoming "more conservative, more like their parents. All the girls go to hairdressers before any big party. Maybe some part of this is decadent, but it's not a snobby thing. Girls from the Bronx aren't coming to these black-tie parties, but girls from the Bronx never did."

"Today, a lot of young people are driven by the desire to be smooth and cool, to be in the right place," says Baldrige. "They want to be able to say to their boss, 'Last night I went to Mortimer's, and Gloria Vanderbilt was there.'"

Many of the new nightclubs are picking up on the trend. The days of the large discos are fading, and people are searching for smaller, more selective spots. "Everybody used to be doing so many drugs that they'd talk to almost anyone who'd listen," says Lisa Rance, who does public relations for the Surf Club. "Now that people are straighter, they're saying, 'Wait a minute, why am I bothering with that jerk?'"

**I**CAN'T FIND MY BLOODY SHIRT," SHOUTS PETER Stringfellow, the man who claims he's going to bring elegance back to New York nightlife. After a few minutes, he opens his apartment door. He's wearing leather pants, a white lace shirt, and one butterfly earring. "That's my trademark," he says.

It's four in the afternoon, and Stringfellow has just gotten up. He's been flying back and forth from London on the Con-



# SAYS THE SURF CLUB'S TOBY BEAVERS, "THE WHOLE WORLD'S REPUBLICAN AND GOING TO THE HAMPTONS."

corde to oversee construction of his latest club, Stringfellow's, on East 21st Street. He also owns Stringfellow's and the Hippodrome in London. "And," his P.R. woman points out, "he's an intimate of Princess Diana's brother, Lord Althorp."

Stringfellow, who grew up in Sheffield, England, and calls himself "the aristocrat of the working class," pops open a bottle of Perrier-Jouët. "I'd prefer you didn't mention Stringfellow's apartment," his P.R. woman says. "It's rather small, and in England he lives in a mansion."

"The era of the large club is over," Stringfellow announces. "The Palladium was really the last gasp of disco democracy. My motto is 'Back to the future.' It's a combination of Art Deco-meets-the-1980s. Do you understand that concept?"

When I tell him I'm not sure, he gets up from the couch and points to a painting. "This," he explains, "says it all." It's a picture of a couple in evening clothes dancing together; they look a little like Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. "I want people like this at my club," he says, taking a sip of champagne. "I want high glamour. I want sophistication. I want people who don't want bottled beer."

As a result, Stringfellow's door policy will be "extremely strict." "I want the affluent," he says. "I want people who go out at night, people who know how to chitchat. I want a marquis here and there. And maybe a preppy. But that preppy can't be a boring businessman. Unless, of course, he happens to be Donald Trump. At Stringfellow's, the black-tie man is always welcome. And ladies will never, never be overdressed." The cocktail waitresses at Stringfellow's will wear pink tutus, garter belts, and high heels.

At Maxim's, manager Monty Zullo has a lot of rules, but the most important one is "No polyester." For the moment, Maxim's is the ultimate in high-priced dinner-dancing. Every Friday and Saturday night, couples in black tie pay about \$200 to eat French food and dance to the music of Peter Duchin. "A few years ago, we were in a hot disco period," says Zullo. "Now the baby-boomers are growing up. They're almost 40, and they want elegance."

Maxim's is "a bit intimidating," he says. "We're probably the only restaurant in New York with a concierge. When you arrive, he phones the maître d' and announces, 'Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so are coming up the stairs.' It's a bit snobby, but then, that's the beauty of it."

**T**HE SURF CLUB'S CROWD IS DIFFERENT FROM MAXIM's, but there's a similar sense of exclusivity. "We hate slobs from BBQ," says 27-year-old Angus Beavers, who owns the club with his brother Toby and John Muller. "They stand outside with their Sergio Valente jeans and I tell them, 'Nice pants—now get out of here.'" Men have to wear jacket and tie, but there's no dress code for women. "I like pearls and see-through blouses," says Toby, 31, who says he's on the junior committee of at least twelve charities. "Basically, we opened the Surf Club because we were looking for fun, free booze, and girls."

"Yeah," says Angus. "We opened it on East 91st Street because it was in the heart of yuppie Harlem, and we've got a lot of preppies here, and preppies drink like fish."

"The people who come to the Surf Club are pretty inhibited," says Angus's 21-year-old brother Nick. "They need to get loaded before they can socialize."

"Yeah," says Angus. "It's the pressure of living in the outside world. Like last night, when I was watching MTV. I got so wasted that I ripped out somebody's cable box."

Toby, who says he's been observing the nightclub scene

"practically my whole life, give or take a year," offers this analysis: "Everybody's more concerned with money," he says, "and they only want to be with people who have dough. The whole world's Republican and going to the Hamptons."

Steve Rubell, who runs the Palladium, sees it a little differently.

"Today, the really 'in' people," he says, "are going to Harlem. That's the new hot spot." Rubell says the really "in" people also like Liberace. What Rubell doesn't say is that the really "in" people don't much like the Palladium. Mostly because it's too big and, to quote Peter Stringfellow, too "democratic."

Right from the start, Rubell was aware of the "selectivity problem."

"That's why I created the Mike Todd Room," he says. "It was a club within a club." But now the Mike Todd Room has a "selectivity problem," and Rubell is creating a third room, a club within a club within a club.

And what happens when that room has a "selectivity problem?"

"Right now, I'm thinking of getting into the resort business," Rubell says. "I'd like to do something like Club Med villages, but with a different crowd, maybe geared toward highly successful people on vacation."

*Whipple is taking pictures of people looking at their pictures. "Smile," he says. Priscilla Woolworth shows up at the ball wearing blue jeans. She looks at her picture. "It's so . . . big," she says. Woolworth is in jeans because she doesn't want to give people the wrong impression. Even though she gets her picture in the newspapers all the time, she claims she rarely goes out. "It's just that the press uses the same picture over and over again," she says.*

*Woolworth, who grew up in Cannes, says that "in France my name meant nothing. Now, in New York, I'm the 'five-and-dime queen.' Men send me their résumés. Why? I don't understand."*

*By about 1:30, most of the New Four Hundred have gone home. Many of them have to work in the morning, and besides, there's a black-tie benefit for the Museum of Natural History tomorrow night. A few couples linger at the far end of the buffet table, picking at the remains of a fruit tart. At the other end, a black woman employed by the armory is scooping the leftovers into green garbage bags.*

*"Everybody smile!" Whipple says as people say good night.*

**I**T'S TWO DAYS AFTER THE BALL, AND MARC DE GONTAUT Biron is on the telephone. "It was really the new society, don't you think?" he says over the phone. "Well, I think it was a great social success."

Unfortunately, it wasn't a great financial success. "It cost me \$40,000," Biron says over the phone, "and I only deposited \$38,000 in the bank. If this had been a charity, it wouldn't have been very good." But Biron says he's getting tired of throwing parties. He wants to do something with more substance. He wants to direct movies.

He hangs up, and two seconds later, the phone rings again. It's Biron. He forgot to tell me that he donated the leftovers—all the fruit tarts and flattened salmon puff pastry—to the homeless. "Now the women upstairs in the armory can eat some dessert," he says.

He also wants to tell me about his granduncle—"one of the French aristocrats who paid money to fight with George Washington. He came to America with his own army of 800 and liberated Rhode Island. But later, in France, he was guillotined. Before his head was cut off, he requested oysters and white wine. His last words were 'What a good meal.'" ■