

CHARACTERS OF THE VILLAGE

Jose and Miguel Lloves of Sevilla Restaurant

BY BRIAN AND JOY PAPE

Behind the history of one of Greenwich Village's storied establishments are the people who make it a welcoming place and keep the flame burning. The Sevilla Restaurant at 62 Charles Street, a James Beard Award winner, wouldn't be what it is today if it weren't for some remarkable Characters of the Village! If we were to characterize the Sevilla, it would be authenticity and continuity.

Village View interviewed Jose and Miguel Lloves at the restaurant.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND

Jose: I am 84 years old. My wife, Julia, and I were born in a small town in a Celtic region of northwest Spain, Celanova (north of the border with Portugal). My sisters were also born there. Growing up, there weren't many men in the region, due to casualties of the wars and the poor economic conditions. Many men had to leave the area to find work, including coming to America. I too went abroad, first to Argentina to work with my sister when I was 17, then to America two years later to work with my aunt. I worked at a number of places in Greenwich Village, doing whatever was available and then at Sevilla. Sevilla was started in 1936 when the neighborhood had many Spaniards and many Spanish restaurants. In 1962, I became a chef at Sevilla, and in 1964, I took over the operation. By convincing the owner, Tomas Gonzalez, to sell me the business in 1967 I succeeded in buying it with my partner Antonio Rodriguez. In 1972, my brother Bienvenido Alvarez became my partner in the restaurant. I saved enough to be able to go back to my hometown to find and marry my wife, and then we returned to live in the West Village.

Miguel: I am 46, my brother Tony, 49, and sister Delores, 48, were all born in USA. We all worked at the restaurant whenever we weren't in school. They live in Manhasset now near my parents, while I live on West 11th Street. Once I was out of school, I trav-



NINA THE COCKER SPANIEL, Miguel Lloves, Jose Lloves, and Antonio Rodriguez, a 40-year veteran at Sevilla, behind the historic Sevilla bar. Credit Brian J Pape, AIA.

eled a lot and lived in Europe for many years. I was trained at Le Cordon Bleu and was in pursuit of establishing my own restaurant in Spain, when I 'got the call' from my parents. Sevilla needed help managing the operation, so, I reversed course and returned to New York. I have taken on many tasks at Sevilla, from creating Chef's Specials to accounting and other managerial work.

HOW DID THE PANDEMIC CHANGE THINGS?

Jose: We never did outdoor dining at Sevilla and I didn't want to do that. But when the lockdowns hit, we had to do something, and many customers prefer it anyway. Business was way down but we kept going with our loyal staff. Business is good now, but it's different. The narrow sidewalks and streets make it very hard to comply with the accessibility rules for outdoor dining. Many people don't feel good about being out late

at night. We always welcome 'walk-in' diners. We've never taken strict reservations, but we will schedule customers at times when waits are shorter. We try to work with people's requests.

Miguel: I knew we needed to make changes to survive the pandemic. We had to be safe and follow the rules, but we also had to instigate new technologies and methods. We started making deliveries, sometimes Tony and I would hop on our bikes and deliver all over the city, at all hours. We also started touchless credit payments, online ordering, and other updates. These all remain in place and things are going smoothly.

WHAT IS YOUR PASSION? WHAT IS YOUR LEAST FAVORITE THING?

Jose: I grew up in poverty, so I worked passionately to earn a living and to save and invest my money. I am passionate about my family. Unfortunately, the restaurant business de-

mands long hours late into the night. Somehow, my wife would stay up to greet me no matter how late it was that I returned home.

Miguel: I've learned to be organized, methodical and always maintain cleanliness. I'm passionate about giving patrons the best experience possible. I'm proud to say that many of these patrons have become lifelong friends and additions to our family. One aspect I don't like about business is the danger of having an open door policy where we accept everyone to come in. Sometimes we have to tell certain patrons to leave because they cause disruption. We like to maintain a friendly, vibrant and safe atmosphere for a healthy day to day operation.

DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE VILLAGE

Jose: During those early years with the Sevilla Restaurant, I lived nearby on West 11th and 12th streets. I was able to invest in other properties over the years, including 62 Charles Street and seven others. I believed in the Village and wanted to invest here, be a part of its future, and be a good neighbor; that's why I bought the restaurant building. I was active with the Charles Street Block Association that George Capsis started when we were younger. I get to know the neighbors and we keep the streets clean. I am here at the restaurant every day keeping things in order. Owning the building helps us keep prices as low as possible and give good value to our customers.

Miguel: I have been working with my father at the restaurant since I was eight years old. I now live nearby with my wife Maria, and our cocker spaniel and I am still here every day. This is my home. I am very proud of what our restaurant is contributing to our neighborhood.

To get more of the backstory, check out sevillarestaurantandbar.com



CORRECTION: The article entitled "David's Watch Repair Shop Survives" in the October 2024 issue of *Village View* requires an update/correction, according to David, the proprietor. He is now offering shoe repair as well as watch repair, since he is working with Levy off-site to handle the shoe repair. David has put out a "new" (actually old) yellow sandwich board sign against the window announcing the shoe repair service. Just drop off your shoes with David, and he'll take care of it from there. We regret any inconvenience our earlier article may have caused. Photo by Brian J. Pape, AIA.



RALLY IN FATHER DEMO SQUARE. In support of Proposal 1, a change to the NY State Constitution "that would protect against unequal treatment based on ethnicity, national origin, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, and pregnancy outcomes, as well as reproductive healthcare and autonomy." District 1 Councilmember Chris Marte, Representative Jerrold Nadler and Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine all attended and spoke to a crowd of about 50 who had gathered at Father Demo Square on the corner of Bleecker and 6th Avenue. Photo by Anthony Paradiso.