

TWO WHEEL TUESDAYS



New York restaurant Spiegel opens its doors and its arms to a weekly celebration of motorcycles and their owners.

> By Moshe K. Levy

Like any faithful moto-zealot, I have made many pilgrimages to the venerable Meccas of our favorite passion, from the Rock Store on Mulholland Highway near Malibu, in California, to the Ace Café in London. These celebrated destinations, steeped in the history of the sport and all of the many changes it has endured over the decades, have captured the imagination of every serious motorcyclist.

However, as with most legends, the reality of many of these eateries often falls short of the expectations in the wayfarer's mind. Beneath the glossy veneer of nostalgia, there is something rather contrived about an atmosphere almost wholly based on the past. I've always fantasized about being part of such a place at its inception, during its actual glory period, instead of always harkening backward—and I think, at long last, I've finally found one.

Recently, I discovered Spiegel restaurant on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Spiegel is the brainchild of Shmuel Avital, who made his bones as a restaurateur in Israel's capital city of Jerusalem. He came to America in 2001 to pursue his dream of combining his zeal for

motorcycling, fine food and movies into one endeavor. The restaurant, named after Sam Spiegel (famed producer of Lawrence of Arabia), is the culmination of his efforts. Every Tuesday evening, a motley horde of motorcyclists from near and far descends on Metropolis and heads straight to Spiegel to experience the zesty food, atmosphere and camaraderie. Every genre is well represented—from bikers to off-roaders to world travelers to urban commuters to track racers, and everything in between—and the sundry collection of motorcycles parked in front of the restaurant inspires hours of uncontrollable gawking and drooling.

At age 16, Avital rode 50cc scooters to commute around his native Israel, and then graduated to pure desert riding on 250cc enduros. Upon arriving in the United States, his fervor for riding blossomed, and he soon found himself touring the country on his 1996 Harley-Davidson Sportster 1200S, which he replaced with a 2001 KTM Adventure model when the off-road bug bit him hard again. He rode the Katoom all across the U.S. and deep into Latin America (Mexico, Guatemala, Nicara-

gua, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama and El Salvador) on monthslong trips. His restaurant is adorned with several beautiful photographs commemorating those escapades. That same faded orange, battle-scarred KTM still serves him today, always parked outside Spiegel and displaying the flags of the countries he's ridden through as a welcoming gesture to other motorcyclists.

Relying on these years of experience as a grizzled adventurer, Avital uses the restaurant as a stage to host events important to the motorcycling community. Charity fundraisers, moto-centric art displays, audio-visual presentations from prominent travelers, and many more are all part of an event-packed calendar at Spiegel. He's even planning an ambitious multiweek adventure tour of the Middle East, so customers can ride together.

The ambiance inside Spiegel is definitely moto-centric, but without excessive nostalgia. Actually, the artwork is an ever-revolving showcase for local artists to display their best pieces, and during my visit the walls were decorated with Grace Roselli's visually stunning "Naked Bike Project" collection. Various

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Motorcyclists come from all along the East Coast to Spiegel restaurant in downtown Manhattan for Two Wheel Tuesdays to breathe, talk and eat motorcycling.



Restaurant owner Shmuel Avital is a longtime motorcyclist who likes sharing good riding and good food. First arrivals at a recent Two Wheel Tuesday at Spiegel hang out and talk about one of their favorite subjects.

kebab, schnitzel, shakshuka, Moroccan baked feta, couscous, bureka—it's all here, and true to its roots! Sure, you can also order burgers and other American fare from the menu, but it would be a shame to miss out on Spiegel's forte, which can instantly transport one's taste buds to the Holy Land.

Ultimately, the overall experience of a Two Wheel Tuesday at Spiegel can be best summarized as "sensory overload." The vibe is very relaxed, with no cliquishness despite the incredibly diverse backgrounds, ages, and genres of the riders in attendance. You will find whatever machine tickles your fancy, from clapped out rat bikes to hand-built customs. There will be plenty of friendly faces to strike up conversations with, all while devouring the most sumptuous food this side of the Mediterranean. Avital is a blur, racing around greeting customers, managing the staff, and admiring the hardware parked outside. His demeanor—honest, dedicated and incredibly passionate—is built into the DNA of the place. He is one of us, and that is what has motorcyclists so excited to attend every Tuesday evening. Indeed, Spiegel has ensconced itself as my favorite moto-destination in my 20 years of riding. MCN

to each other without impediment.

Perhaps only second to the sense of fellowship, riders come to Spiegel for the food. Rather than the ubiquitous greasy spoon fare, Avital has perfected his family's old-world Moroccan-Sephardic recipes that taste every bit as authentic as in the fabled cafes of Tel Aviv. There is nothing bland or boring here. The spicy

flavors and exotic textures of Sephardic food delight the senses when prepared correctly, and here Avital has succeeded mightily in bringing the best of contemporary Israeli dining to the masses of hungry motorcyclists in New York City:

gas tanks from vintage

Ducatis and Yamahas punctuate period-correct posters of famous racers and their trophies. The horseshoe-shaped bar dominates the floor plan, though everything behind the bar (taps, espresso machine, etc.) are all set purposely low, so as to allow patrons to all see and talk

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