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DINING BRIEFS

NEW PLACES

BENJAMIN STEAK HOUSE

52 East 41st Street, in the Dylan Hotel; (212) 297-9177.

At this point Peter Luger can almost be considered the mother of all steakhouses in a literal sense: its beefy children have popped up all around Manhattan over the last three years.

Former Luger employees opened Wolfgang's Steakhouse, which now has two locations in Manhattan. And both Blair Perone Steakhouse and Benjamin Steak House are the work of one-time members of the Luger brood.

On a recent night I visited Benjamin, which occupies the space in the Dylan Hotel that previously belonged to a disappointing steakhouse named the Chemist Club and, before it, a restaurant owned by Britney Spears.

I could see — and taste — the Luger family resemblance in Benjamin's juicy, sizzling porterhouses, sized for two (\$81.95), three (\$120.85) or four (\$163.80).

can try a jumbo shrimp cocktail (\$17.95) or crab cake (\$18.95) among the appetizers, and entrees include salmon (\$31.95) and yellowfin tuna (\$33.95).

Service was somewhat gruff, another hereditary trait. But Benjamin, which opened last October, departs from many of its steakhouse relatives with its more elegant setting, a grand room with a high ceiling, brass chandeliers and rich brown leather on the seats.

You can sink into them as you bite into prime beef, also available in a rib-eye (\$39.95) and New York sirloin (\$39.95). But brace yourself for the check. The Luger DNA doesn't come cheap. *FRANK BRUNI*



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Dining & Wine