

Vintage class with a side of multigenerational party

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Verdi Club in San Francisco. Stephanie Wright Hession

Nestled in the east end of the Mission District, just off Potrero Avenue and a block up from the Muni bus yards, is a rather nondescript social club. The only real

acknowledgment of the Verdi Club's presence glows in one of the city's best neon logos, its retro vibe offering a hint as to what lies inside the plain white stucco building.

The Italian American social club formed in 1916, but didn't move into its current digs until 1935. And while, sure, the club is technically in the Mission, the location is closer to a McDonald's and gas station than the hipster corridors of Valencia. The Verdi Club doesn't care, though. In this notoriously evolving neighborhood, the club hasn't budged for 81 years, proudly maintaining its vibe as the sort of joint Jimmy Hoffa would've found ideal.

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Now a century old, the Verdi Club is often used as an indie event venue — a venue that's so warm-toned and cigarette-stained, it obviously provides a gratis 1970s Instagram filter to everything.

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Ponytailed and super-positive, the club's general manager, Jason Mulvaney, had revealed that ticket sales for last Friday's 100th anniversary party were lower than expected, so I was prepared for an awkward start at 7 p.m. But when we rolled by the club at a fashionably late 8 o'clock, the front doors revealed a brutally empty ballroom. This might be the outskirts of the Mission, but it's still the Mission. No one shows up to a 7 p.m. party until 9.

An hour later, 75 or so guests had nicely filled up the Verdi's old-school bar and ballroom. A few confident couples danced to Marc Capelle and the Casuals' rocking cover of "Lovely Day."

Comedian Nato Green immediately approached. "Go get the ribs," he instructed, with a spot of barbecue sauce on his cheek. Green held a rib bone up. "These are amazing."

The ballroom, festooned with a felt banner insisting on no smoking, features San Francisco's coziest classic stage and dangling, dated chandeliers. Faded photos, some tilted and falling out of their matting, line the walls. Several partygoers spent ages along the stairway, marveling at old-school

snapshots. Favorite photos contained indoor cigarette-smoking, Scorsese eyebrows and visible pantyhose.

Upstairs, the ladies' room offers a lounge filled with mirrors and couches, as if some long-dead gentlemen decided "the broads" needed their own lady-area. You know, out of respect.

The ballroom might have been half-full that Friday, but that half was filled with an eclectic, friendly crowd whose ages spanned five decades. An elderly couple dressed as extras from a "Golden Girls" episode twirled alongside tattooed rockabilly duos. One silver-haired pair sat at the bar, entirely bemused by the spectacle of fedoras and piercings.

Mulvaney hoped that the 100th anniversary party would demonstrate to the Verdi Club's 100-plus active (relatively speaking) members just whom the club serves when it's not hosting their monthly sit-down dinner.

"We've had full-on drag shows, leather-daddy parties, bawdy storytelling," Mulvaney explained over the music and disco lights. "Most of the members don't have any idea what goes on here when they're not here."

Guests sipped Manhattans or mugs of coffee while sampling surprisingly impressive snacks and tapping their toes to the equally impressive band. Taking the stage for a 10-minute

comedy set, Green marveled at the big open space on the dance floor before him. With that, a collection of tipsy Verdi regulars dragged a cocktail table to the front of the ballroom and egged the comedian on.

The party felt easy and warm, like the time my folks let me invite a collection of my friends to their party and the generations mingled to great success. Perhaps it's that sort of all-inclusive attitude that has allowed the Verdi Club to survive for a hundred years.

I took advantage of the pillowy couches in the upstairs powder room to jot down a few observations when a young woman plopped herself on the coffee table. "I need your advice," she deadpanned. "Can we talk?"

As old-school powder rooms have seen thousands of times before, complete strangers analyzed the clues and cues of a fourth date. I was reminded of girls' bathroom meetings of my childhood, when pep talks and lipstick reapplication went hand in hand.

Back in the ballroom, my friend had run into someone she knew. Adrian Lechuga is a sous chef at the very hip restaurant Octavia, and is friends with the Verdi Club's chef Sean Gawel — he of the ribs. From under his cap, Lechuga looked about the Verdi Club. "It's class," he smiled. "It's vintage class."

Beth Spotswood's column appears Thursdays in Datebook.

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