

## Be Nice, And They Will Come

**NAME:** Ariel Lacayo.

**IDENTITY:** Nicaraguan-born former maître d'hôtel for Pino Luongo, the restaurateur who owns Le Madri, Sapore di Mare and Coco Pazzo.

**CURRENT ACTIVITY:** Last week, Mr. Lacayo opened his first restaurant, Ariel & Michael, at 23 East 23d Street, with partner Michael Baidridge.

**AGE:** 33 years old.

**INFAMOUS FOR:** Getting Ralph Lauren to wear chef's pants at Sapore di Mare two years ago when he arrived wearing shorts, in violation of the dress code.

**Q.** How do you feel about finally having your own place?

**A.** It's not just about coming in here and running it. There's this aura, this type of energy that you have to create in the air. It's a part of every successful restaurant. Like Le Cirque. You know, Sirio [Maccioni] is there creating this energy. That's the way I am, even though I am different. I'm a master in this business. I've done everything: busboy, waiter, captain, manager, cook, dishwasher.

**Q.** Do you expect a lot of celebrities to come in?

**A.** Well, I do, because I've always treated them really well, but I am not really concerned about them. I'm more concerned about my own celebrities — the people who have followed me. I used to work two days at Le Madri, two days at Coco Pazzo, two days at Sapore. Wherever I go, they go. It's pretty much the same crowd. Calvin Klein. Ralph Lauren. Donna Karan. People like that Billy Joel.

**Q.** How can you become friends



Jack Marquardt/The New York Times

**Q.** Do you think your restaurant could become too trendy?

**A.** No, because I don't want to be trendy. I also want to get my neighborhood people. I treat everybody fine. You never know who anybody is. I want to start the trend of being nice.

**Q.** Your former boss, Pino Luongo, recently said you'll need more than your "cute face and Spanish accent" to be successful. How did you take that?

**A.** To be honest, I expect more than that from him. I think when somebody leaves you on good terms, somebody who gave you their heart, their blood, everything you have in yourself, I think you should shake their hand and say good luck. I think that was very unfair.

**Q.** What did you learn from him?

**A.** The Italian hospitality. How to take care of the people and make them feel at home.

**Q.** But what's the real secret of his success?

**A.** I think I was part of his success, which I know because I'm the one who greeted people every day. I was in front of the

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