

Gold Standard to become Tres Hipcitty Veggie Bistro and Shake Space

After long-standing rumors concerning another shake-up in the burgeoning UC Village dining scene, it was announced today that the Gold Standard Cafe will be changing its name this fall to "Tres Hipcitty Veggie Bistro and Shake Shak." The Gold Standard, which has earned a sterling reputation as the go-to venue for late brunches and hangover repairs, is to undergo a major transformation into a vegan destination. Animal-based foods will be off the menu, as a new staff of Guatemalan field laborers will serve chopped up raw vegetables and new heavily tattooed baristas will dish out kale and broccoli shakes.

We caught up with Rogerio Harmonica on the eve of his 75th birthday and knocked back ice-cold Tequila shots with him and his partner Vince Whettucine on the spacious and shady porch of their 48th Street manse. Rogerio reminisced about the long history of his West Philly restaurant ventures, beginning with the original Gold Standard on 47th Street near the corner of Chester Avenue.

"We were famous as a cheaters restaurant. Penn faculty would bring their mistresses and coed concubines in for a delicious dinner with an edgy vibe, and we ran private rooms up on the second and third floors for the apres-diner crowd. We got so famous that even Sheldon Hackney used to stop by with his posse, and eventually he invited us to move to the Penn Campus."

"Sheldon who?" I asked.

"Sheldon Hackney. He was president of Penn from 1981--1993 until Judy came along and shook the place up. Nobody remembers him anymore. Anyway, we had a prime spot in the middle of campus and opened the Gold Standard Ivy League Branch plus the Palladium. Roaring fire place, absolutely superb Ivy League atmosphere, cocktail hour, high teas, great business selling alcohol to the undergrads. Then Judy came along."

Rogerio sighed and knocked back another shot of Tequila.

"At first she was cool about it. She was the first female prexy of an Ivy League school, wanted to be the height of hipness, vowed to turn all those old parking lots into a space to rival Harvard Square."

"As I recall she got her Ph.D. from Columbia, my own alma mater," I interjected. "Never could figure out what she saw so hip about Harvard Square."

"Whatever," said Rogerio. "As I said, she was pretty cool at first; she'd even drop in for the cocktails and get totally squinty-eyed. Sometimes danced naked on the table tops after hours. Then there was that scandal where some stupid fraternity kid got wasted and set a visiting Yalie on fire during the big football game. The FBI was called in and suddenly she wasn't so friendly anymore."

"Heard about that. Didn't Yale win that game?" I reminisced.

"It was 8-7 on a field goal," commented Vince. "That really pissed her off -- that and the fact that the Yalie kid's parents sued for several million dollars."

"So -- it was no more Mr. Nice Judy after that. Can't recall all the details but I think she arranged with her mob connections to burn down this choice spot on 47th near Baltimore. Eventually of course that became the Abbraccio."

"Good times, good times." I took another shot and downed it with tears in my eyes. "I'll never forget how you kept renovating and extending that bar."

"Yeah," said Rogerio, "the bar was the joint's best feature. But eventually we ran out of space to lengthen it. Then the bills started coming in. We had built the damn place from ground up. Finally the collection agencies started getting to us. One morning we woke up and there was a dead goat's head in our bed, with a little note "Best wishes, Melanie. Call me."

"A very very low point," recalled Vince. "But by that time the feral little squirt owned half of University City and she made us an offer we couldn't refuse. In return for having us lease a teensy tiny space at 48th and Baltimore she called off the mob."

"And so the new Gold Standard took shape." I proposed a toast, and Vince went to get another couple of bottles of tequila from the fridge.

"You can't deny we've had some great times at that little corner," said Rogerio, sobbing. "But things are moving so fast with all these yuppies flooding into West Philly and 'discovering' it. And all these fucking vegans. Sheesh. Wouldn't know a plate of Eggs Benedict from a rib-eye steak. Hence the name change. And we're offering free parking for skate boards."

"The times they are a-changing," I observed. "So what about your top notch staff of cooks and sous-chefs? What will happen to them?"

"Well," said Rogerio, "we're still looking ahead to the next big thing. We're flying Chef Joey out to Colorado to make some contacts with the Mennonite marijuana farmers. Hopefully this stupid vegan craze will blow over. By the time Pennsylvania finally legalizes it, we'll be all ready to re-open again as Le Hashish Brownie. Ever read any Gertrude Stein?"

"Yeah, I seem to remember she had a dynamite recipe. Anyhow here's hoping the high times will come sooner rather than later." I emptied my shot glass, wished Rogerio a happy 75th, and vanished into the night.

--Ross Bender