

Marcus Samuelsson Plans Newark Restaurant

The celebrity chef's new restaurant will be part of the redevelopment of the historic Hahne's department store

By **SOPHIA HOLLANDER**

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The celebrity chef Marcus Samuelsson plans to open a restaurant in Newark as part of the redevelopment of the historic Hahne's department store, which also includes the city's first Whole Foods supermarket.

The restaurant, whose name and concept are still being determined, will be the latest partnership between Mr. Samuelsson and developer Ron Moelis, who became friends in Harlem over a shared vision of the way food can be used to transform a community.

Food is "where we can make a difference," said Mr. Moelis, chief executive and founding partner of L+M, a real-estate development company that frequently works in low-income areas.

Its initiatives have ranged from incorporating an urban farm and weekly farmers market into the redevelopment of the Marcus Garvey apartments in Brownsville, Brooklyn, to creating a "food hub" in New Orleans in partnership with Tulane University that includes a teaching kitchen for medical students, a Whole Foods market and culinary training for at-risk youth. The company is leading the Newark project along with Prudential.

Mr. Samuelsson, who operates Red Rooster in Harlem, views restaurants as a vehicle for social change, he said. "Red Rooster is something I did because I deeply believe in the idea that good food should not just be in certain blocks in Manhattan."

His second restaurant, Streetbird, was encouraged by the realization "there were certain blocks that people refused to deliver to, and I didn't like that idea," Mr. Samuelsson said. "When you say 'we don't deliver on that block,' there are a lot of things you're saying."

Mr. Samuelsson and Mr. Moelis struck up a conversation at Red Rooster and became friends, then business partners in 2013. Still, it took years for Mr. Moelis to convince the chef to commit to Newark. After they visited the site together, Mr. Samuelsson began taking trips on his own to Newark, studying the community and comparing it to Harlem.

“I’m always fascinated with historically African-American communities that are all going through a journey of transformation,” he said.

That certainly applies to Newark. Mr. Samuelsson will join a \$174 million public-private partnership to revitalize Hahne’s, which opened in 1901 but has sat vacant for three decades.

The project will preserve its historic facade and skylight while creating a mixed-use complex with 160 apartments, 100,000 square feet of commercial and community space, including a cultural center and arts incubator for Rutgers University, and 75,000 square feet of retail space, including the Whole Foods market, set to open in 2017.

Mr. Samuelsson said he is now searching for a concept for his 2,250-square-foot restaurant that appeals to local residents, Rutgers students and visitors streaming through the nearby Prudential Center. The process for him involves studying the area’s street patterns and the daily and nightly routines of locals and visitors.

“It’s such a tedious work,” he said, noting that it took seven years of study before he opened Red Rooster. He has been surveying Newark for only three years.

This time, he said, “Hopefully it will be faster.”