

# Saint may be godsend among Hub night spots

These days, the old **Cafe Budapest** space is an eerie place. After turning out the lights almost two years ago, tables are still set for service and liquor bottles gather dust behind the bar. Even late owner **Edith Ban's** glorious gowns still hang in dry cleaner's plastic in the closet.

But the once-beloved Old World Boston boite, which couldn't compete in a New World of celebrity chefs, snotty servers and 20-something CEOs who weren't weaned on chicken paprikash, has found a **Saint**.

**Brian Lesser**, former partner of **Boston Hops**, and owner of Boylston Street watering holes **Vox Populi** and **Barcode**, has elaborate plans for a devilish lounge-like spot. Which, thankfully, will cater to what his partner, ex-**KISS 108** mastermind **Rich Balsbaugh**, likes to call the "25-54 demo."

"This is something different," said Lesser, who plans to open Saint by Nov. 1. "It's not another celebrity chef restaurant. It's a place where you can eat, but the food, which (chef) **Rene Michelena** is doing, isn't the star. There's also some entertainment and the very best service in the city."

Balsbaugh said he got involved in the deal because he was tired of telling his high-flying 50-something friends who landed in town there was no place to go after dinner.

"Where do you go in this city if you're not 22? **Avalon**?" he said, relaying a recent story about **Cher**, who rang him up during her Boston dates and wanted to hang. "Where was I going to take Cher?" Our guess is **Club Cafe**, but what do we know?

We're told the cavernous Saint space in the basement of 90 Exeter St. is being designed by Newbury Street architect **Steve Sousa**. He's bringing it up to 2002 standards with higher ceilings and a more open floor plan with three separate bar areas. But Sousa's adding a contemporary "sexy" sleekness to it without trashing the old stained glass, wood paneling, hand-painted "angel" ceiling or veined marble bar.

The main room with all the Old World touches will have banquettes, couches, tables and a small stage area for a DJ or special guests who may



## Inside Track



By **GAYLE FEE** and **LAURA RAPOSA**



STAFF PHOTO BY MATTHEW WEST

**THE PLACE TO BE:** Saint restaurant owner **Brian Lesser**, right, partner **Rich Balsbaugh**, center, and chef **Rene Michelena** are planning a great late-night hotspot to open in November.

want to give an impromptu performance (see Cher, above). A lush bordello-like lounge with VIP "pods" is in the old Budapest bar. And a more private room in the back will have a separate entrance for Saint's stealthier patrons.

"Imagine what the opening night party will be like with Richie getting the talent," said Lesser, who claims his new spot is named for an old underground bar in London.

Do leave the Track's all-access passes at the door!

Miss Thang for years.

"We knew about two years ago that Marc knew her," she said. "We were at Christmas Eve dinner at my mother-in-law's and Marc was there because we're Italian and you just have to be at Christmas Eve dinner. And he told us that he met Britney at a volleyball tournament in Florida.

"And we were like, 'yeah, yeah,' back then," said Sandy. "But from what I've heard, she's been to the taping of his videos and they've seen each other in their travels."

But on the tabloid TV show, "Extra," the other night, Marc didn't definitely see her and the "Austin Downer"