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-ATTORNEYS AT LAW-

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DONALD M. BERNSTEIN
MARTHA M. REDO

BENJAMIN S. SAVITSKY

October 8, 2020

Sent via Electronic Mail: FArenas@cb.nyc.gov

Manhattan Community Board 2
3 Washington Square Village, #1A
New York, New York 10012
Attention: Florence Arenas, Community Coordinator

Re: Grupo Gitano, LLC. & Gitano NYC LLC (Serial 1309428)
76 Varick Street, New York, New York 10003
Support Letters for Renewal Application on 10/08/20 Agenda

Dear Ms. Arenas:

We represent the above-referenced entity that will appear before the Manhattan Community Board Two SLA Committee on October 8, 2020.

Attached, please find (i) letters and petitions in support from neighbors that live at 80 Varick Street, and (ii) recent articles written about Gitano.

Very truly yours,

Benjamin Savitsky
Benjamin Savitsky

Enclosures: (i) Letters and petitions in support;
(ii) Recent articles about Gitano

1. 80 Varick Street Letters and Petitions in Support

October 2, 2020

Sent via email

Dear James,

I hope this email finds you and those closet to you well. I live at 80 Varick [REDACTED] directly across the street from your restaurant.

I also wanted to express to you how impressed I am with all the changes you have made in Gitano this season. Your staff are polite, kind and considerate. The area in front is always being cleaned and looks nice, and that's great since my front door faces Gitano directly. As my neighbor you always listen to feedback and take action immediately. We have had no issues with Gitano this season, in regards to noise or music playing loudly you have been a good neighbor. Also, I have observed your staff taking safety regulations very seriously, team and guest wearing mask, keeping safe distance. I also like how you give back to the community in this day and age it's nice to see something positive.

Also, I am a breast cancer survivor because of that and some other issues, I will always have a compromised immune system. I have been to Gitano twice now and I feel very safe there, sitting and having a nice meal. The touch-less menu is great the staff is always cleaning and sanitizing.

I am speaking for myself and my personal experience, I can't speak for anyone else.

Kindest Regards,

Marilyn Galarza
[REDACTED]

October 5, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Drew Roth, and I am a tenant in 80 Varick St. [REDACTED] I definitely support Gitano at 76 Varick St. coming back for another season. I am the closest loft to the lot across where Gitano is located, so I would be the tenant with the most input on the subject since I overlook the space. I give Gitano a positive review for being a great neighbor. The restaurant has been a plus for the neighborhood and community, and I believe that Gitano has fulfilled its promises to the neighborhood, especially the concerns that the neighborhood was initially worried about. I have no issues with noise from the restaurant during the day or evening hours, and I do not find anything about their operation disruptive. I am able to keep my windows open without being disturbed. They have created a tropical paradise in New York City, which is truly nice to have in my backyard. Gitano is a classy, functioning, and safe restaurant. From my view point, they are following all safety protocols. Between the security, staff, and management, the restaurant is being closely monitored and is always very controlled. Yes, Gitano should be allowed to continue operating for another season. I do not understand the opposition. I have dined for dinner, and the food is absolutely delicious. They have provided a safe atmosphere where the staff and guests are all wearing masks, temperatures are checked, and the contactless ordering is effective. They seem to be attracting all segments of our society, including young and old adults, families, and overall friendly and respectful people. To not continue would be a shame, especially for a place that has done everything right.

Sincerely,

Drew Roth

Drew Roth

80 Varick St. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

September 30, 2020

Sent Via Email

To Whom It May Concern:

I'm writing to express my family's enthusiastic support for Gitano's presence in our neighborhood and our hope that the restaurant will be able to return for a fourth season next year. My husband, 5-month-old baby, and I are residents of 80 Varick Street, [REDACTED] - all windows in our apartment directly overlook Gitano. It's become a favorite pastime of ours to stand with our baby at the window to watch people come and go from Gitano. She loves all of the action and is mesmerized by the people and the palm trees. Especially during this time of social distancing, having something interesting for her to look at out the window has been a real bright spot in our day! The restaurant's lush greenery and well-maintained property add value to our view and neighborhood in an area that would otherwise be relatively desolate. We can also honestly say that in the past 5 months, our baby has never once been woken up by any noise or commotion at the restaurant (the traffic on Canal Street is another story! J). We have loved popping by the restaurant for lunch - the food is delicious! - or the café for coffee, and our dealings with Gitano employees have been nothing but positive. We have always observed the Gitano staff and guests wearing masks, observing social distancing, and following safety protocols inside the restaurant and outside around the restaurant. Gitano is a lovely family-friendly restaurant, not a bar or nightclub, which helps add to the welcoming neighborhood feel of the space. We look forward to continuing to enjoy the restaurant in our neighborhood for many seasons to come. Please feel free to contact us with any additional questions.

Sincerely,

Michela Keene

Michele Keene
Resident, 80 Varick St,
[REDACTED]

October 5, 2020

Sent via email

Hello James,

As a resident of 80 Varick st., [REDACTED] for the past three years, I wanted to share my experience with Gitano with you and with others you may wish to forward this note to.

Gitano's open air restaurant adjacent to our building provided our neighborhood with a much needed injection of fresh and vibrant life.

Our building is surrounded by heavy traffic heading to the Holland tunnel, with intersections jammed and horns honking loudly from early in the morning and often long past midnight. In this dreary and noisy urban landscape, GITANO's garden is truly a haven. return there often and always have a beautiful experience and superb food.

The atmosphere at the restaurant is very relaxed and the music is never too loud. The food is always super fresh and the chef makes innovative combinations that are exceptionally tasty. To top it all, the staff make every dinner feel like a special occasion and every guest feel like a celebrity.

Our windows overlook the garden and we never had a noise, smell or any other issue. There are often guests outside the restaurant and they are always polite, quiet and –recently – wear masks and maintain social distancing. There was never an incident of disturbance or drunk behavior by GITANO's guests. In fact, the presence of the restaurant, guests and staff make the area feel much safer at night.

It is a pleasure to have such an elegant and unique establishment in close proximity to our building – we hope to be able to enjoy it for many years to come!

Best regards,

Amichai & Inbar Vardi
[REDACTED]

October 6, 2020

Sent via email

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Natalie Rivera, a Manhattan native born and bred. I have lived at 80 Varick St. [REDACTED] for nine years. I have worked on and off in SoHo in the arts and fashion fields since 1989.

I am writing to advocate for Gitano and below are my points:

- I have been one of the few tenants that have actually been residing in the building since the pandemic began. Many left with their families to their second home and many units are Airbnb units.
- I was happy Gitano reopened and provided an outdoor dining experience that was COVID-19 aware and went further than most restaurants in Soho do for safely measures.
- I have gone a total of four times since they opened this summer with my friends and have had a lovely and safe dining experience.
- I feel it's a community obligation to help support the struggling restaurants in NYC whether that includes outdoor dining or delivery. Our neighborhood looked like we had a war without the rubble. So many much loved and iconic restaurants have closed in my neighborhood including:
 - Mooncakes Food
 - Lucky Strike
 - Ecco
 - Tealala
 - China Blue
 - Aqua grill
 - Pegu Club
 - West Bourne
 - Mariachi's
 - VCafe
 - Fedora

To name just a few.

Also With the increasing amount of crime we have been experiencing in our neighborhood, it's comforting to me that there is a restaurant right next door with a security detail which I am positive deters criminal behavior so I feel safe walking on Grand Street to get home in the evening.

This is a time we all need to pull together to get the NYC, the Manhattan I was born and raised in and have chosen to live my entire adult life of 53 years, back to its thriving metropolis and Gitano is part of that. They could have easily walked away from Soho but they didn't. I look forward to seeing at least one more season before new construction begins on the property.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

[REDACTED]

IAB Management Inc.

80 Varick St, [REDACTED] • NY, NY 10013 • [REDACTED]

October 1, 2020

Dear James and the Gitano Group,

I write to you as the building owner and member of the management team of 80 Varick Street. Thank you for being excellent neighbors. I had an enjoyable experience eating at your restaurant. The members of your team were welcoming and professional. The food was delicious and the ambiance exceeded any restaurant I know in New York City.

The residents in the building have expressed their enjoyment in dining at your restaurant as well. Luis the building superintendent and his wife reside in the building and have only positive things to say. The restaurant interior and exterior are consistently clean. We are supportive of your presence in the community.

Sincerely,



Ben Saperstein

gitano

**Petition to Support GITANO NYC's
Seasonal Liquor License Renewal for 2021**

DATE: 10.7.2020

The following undersigned resident acknowledges that they support the issuance of the 2021 renewal of the full, on premise liquor license to the applicant Grupo Gitano LLC:

Address of Restaurant: 76 Varick St., NY, NY, 10013

Business Operation: Restaurant & Bar serving Modern Mexican Cuisine

Months of Operation: April – October 2021

Hours of Operation: Serving Brunch & Dinner Daily, Café Opens Daily 9am, Brunch Served Daily from 10am, Dinner Served Daily from 5pm.
Close 12am (Sunday – Wednesday), 1am (Thursday – Saturday)

Music: Music is turned off 2 hours before closing, no D.Is.

NAME: ~~Marilyn~~ Marilyn Gularzy

ADDRESS: 80 Varick St [REDACTED]

SIGNATURE: [Signature]

I, Alana Udwyn state that the person that has signed this petition sheet signed their name in my presence on the date indicated above and identified themselves to be the same person who signed the sheet. I understand that this statement will be accepted for all purposes as the equivalent of an affidavit, and if it contains a materially false statement, shall be subject to the penalties of perjury.

Date: 10/7/2020

Signature of Witness [Signature]

gitano

Petition to Support GITANO NYC's Seasonal Liquor License Renewal for 2021

DATE: 9-29-20

The following undersigned resident acknowledges that they support the issuance of the 2021 renewal of the full, on premise liquor license to the applicant Grupo Gitano LLC:

Address of Restaurant: 76 Varick St., NY, NY, 10013

Business Operation: Restaurant & Bar serving Modern Mexican Cuisine

Months of Operation: April – October 2021

Hours of Operation: Serving Brunch & Dinner Daily, Café Opens Daily 9am, Brunch Served Daily from 10am, Dinner Served Daily from 5pm.
Close 12am (Sunday – Wednesday), 1am (Thursday – Saturday)

Music: Music is turned off 2 hours before closing, no DJs.

NAME: DREW ROTH

ADDRESS: 80 VARICK ST. [REDACTED]

SIGNATURE: DREW ROTH

I, Alana Wolwin state that the person that has signed this petition sheet signed their name in my presence on the date indicated above and identified themselves to be the same person who signed the sheet. I understand that this statement will be accepted for all purposes as the equivalent of an affidavit, and if it contains a materially false statement, shall be subject to the penalties of perjury.

Date: 10/1/2020

Signature of Witness [Signature]

gitano

**Petition to Support GITANO NYC's
Seasonal Liquor License Renewal for 2021**

DATE: 10-1-20

The following undersigned resident acknowledges that they support the issuance of the 2021 renewal of the full, on premise liquor license to the applicant Grupo Gitano LLC:

Address of Restaurant: 76 Varick St., NY, NY, 10013

Business Operation: Restaurant & Bar serving Modern Mexican Cuisine

Months of Operation: April – October 2021

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Close 12am (Sunday – Wednesday), 1am (Thursday – Saturday)

Music: Music is turned off 2 hours before closing, no DJs.

NAME: Michel Bonacci

ADDRESS: 80 Varick St. [REDACTED]

SIGNATURE: Michel Bonacci

I, Alana Udwin state that the person that has signed this petition sheet signed their name in my presence on the date indicated above and identified themselves to be the same person who signed the sheet. I understand that this statement will be accepted for all purposes as the equivalent of an affidavit, and if it contains a materially false statement, shall be subject to the penalties of perjury.

Date: 10/1/2020

Signature of Witness Alana Udwin

gitano

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Seasonal Liquor License Renewal for 2021**

DATE: 9/29/2020

The following undersigned resident acknowledges that they support the issuance of the 2021 renewal of the full, on premise liquor license to the applicant Grupo Gitano LLC:

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Hours of Operation: Serving Brunch & Dinner Daily, Café Opens Daily 9am, Brunch Served Daily from 10am, Dinner Served Daily from 5pm.
Close 12am (Sunday – Wednesday), 1am (Thursday – Saturday)

Music: Music is turned off 2 hours before closing, no D.Js.

NAME: Michele Keene

ADDRESS: 80 Varick St, [REDACTED]

SIGNATURE: Michele Keene

I, Alana Udwin state that the person that has signed this petition sheet signed their name in my presence on the date indicated above and identified themselves to be the same person who signed the sheet. I understand that this statement will be accepted for all purposes as the equivalent of an affidavit, and if it contains a materially false statement, shall be subject to the penalties of perjury.

Date: 9/29/2020

Signature of Witness Alana Udwin

gitano

Petition to Support GITANO NYC's Seasonal Liquor License Renewal for 2021

DATE: 9/29/2020

The following undersigned resident acknowledges that they support the issuance of the 2021 renewal of the full, on premise liquor license to the applicant Grupo Gitano LLC:

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Close 12am (Sunday – Wednesday), 1am (Thursday – Saturday)

Music: Music is turned off 2 hours before closing, no D.Js.

NAME: Eli Williams

ADDRESS: 80 Varick St, [REDACTED]

SIGNATURE: Eli Williams

I, Alana Udwin state that the person that has signed this petition sheet signed their name in my presence on the date indicated above and identified themselves to be the same person who signed the sheet. I understand that this statement will be accepted for all purposes as the equivalent of an affidavit, and if it contains a materially false statement, shall be subject to the penalties of perjury.

Date: 9/29/2020 Signature of Witness Alana Udwin

gitano

**Petition to Support GITANO NYC's
Seasonal Liquor License Renewal for 2021**

DATE: 10/6/2020

The following undersigned resident acknowledges that they support the issuance of the 2021 renewal of the full, on premise liquor license to the applicant Grupo Gitano LLC:

Address of Restaurant: 76 Varick St., NY, NY, 10013

Business Operation: Restaurant & Bar serving Modern Mexican Cuisine

Months of Operation: April – October 2021

Hours of Operation: Serving Brunch & Dinner Daily, Café Opens Daily 9am, Brunch Served Daily from 10am, Dinner Served Daily from 5pm.
Close 12am (Sunday – Wednesday), 1am (Thursday – Saturday)

Music: Music is turned off 2 hours before closing, no DJs.

NAME: Inbar Vardi

ADDRESS: 80 Varick St., [REDACTED] New York, NY 10013

SIGNATURE: 

I, Alana Udwin, state that the person that has signed this petition sheet signed their name in my presence on the date indicated above and identified themselves to be the same person who signed the sheet. I understand that this statement will be accepted for all purposes as the equivalent of an affidavit, and if it contains a materially false statement, shall be subject to the penalties of perjury.

Date: 10/6/2020

Signature of Witness 

gitano

**Petition to Support GITANO NYC's
Seasonal Liquor License Renewal for 2021**

DATE: 10/6/20

The following undersigned resident acknowledges that they support the issuance of the 2021 renewal of the full, on premise liquor license to the applicant Grupo Gitano LLC:

Address of Restaurant: 76 Varick St., NY, NY, 10013

Business Operation: Restaurant & Bar serving Modern Mexican Cuisine

Months of Operation: April – October 2021

Hours of Operation: Serving Brunch & Dinner Daily, Café Opens Daily 9am, Brunch Served Daily from 10am, Dinner Served Daily from 5pm.
Close 12am (Sunday – Wednesday), 1am (Thursday – Saturday)

Music: Music is turned off 2 hours before closing, no DJs.

NAME: Ali Vardi

ADDRESS: 80 Varick St. [REDACTED]

SIGNATURE: [Signature]

I, Alana Udwin, state that the person that has signed this petition sheet signed their name in my presence on the date indicated above and identified themselves to be the same person who signed the sheet. I understand that this statement will be accepted for all purposes as the equivalent of an affidavit, and if it contains a materially false statement, shall be subject to the penalties of perjury.

Date: 10/6/2020

Signature of Witness [Signature]

gitano

Petition to Support GITANO NYC's Seasonal Liquor License Renewal for 2021

DATE: 10/6/2020

The following undersigned resident acknowledges that they support the issuance of the 2021 renewal of the full, on premise liquor license to the applicant Grupo Gitano LLC:

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Business Operation: Restaurant & Bar serving Modern Mexican Cuisine

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Close 12am (Sunday – Wednesday), 1am (Thursday – Saturday)

Music: Music is turned off 2 hours before closing, no DJs.

NAME: Yotzi Vardi

ADDRESS: 76 Varick St. [REDACTED]

SIGNATURE: [Signature]

I, Alana Udwin state that the person that has signed this petition sheet signed their name in my presence on the date indicated above and identified themselves to be the same person who signed the sheet. I understand that this statement will be accepted for all purposes as the equivalent of an affidavit, and if it contains a materially false statement, shall be subject to the penalties of perjury.

Date: 10/16/2020

Signature of Witness [Signature]

gitano

**Petition to Support GITANO NYC's
Seasonal Liquor License Renewal for 2021**

DATE: 10/06/2020

The following undersigned resident acknowledges that they support the issuance of the 2021 renewal of the full, on premise liquor license to the applicant Grupo Gitano LLC:

Address of Restaurant: 76 Varick St., NY, NY, 10013

Business Operation: Restaurant & Bar serving Modern Mexican Cuisine

Months of Operation: April – October 2021

Hours of Operation: Serving Brunch & Dinner Daily, Café Opens Daily 9am, Brunch Served Daily from 10am, Dinner Served Daily from 5pm.
Close 12am (Sunday – Wednesday), 1am (Thursday – Saturday)

Music: Music is turned off 2 hours before closing, no DJs.

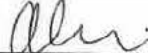
NAME: Amichai Vardi

ADDRESS: 80 Varick St., [REDACTED] New York, NY 10013

SIGNATURE: 

I, Alana Udwin) state that the person that has signed this petition sheet signed their name in my presence on the date indicated above and identified themselves to be the same person who signed the sheet. I understand that this statement will be accepted for all purposes as the equivalent of an affidavit, and if it contains a materially false statement, shall be subject to the penalties of perjury.

Date: 10/6/2020

Signature of Witness 

gitano

**Petition to Support GITANO NYC's
Seasonal Liquor License Renewal for 2021**

DATE: 10/5/2020

The following undersigned resident acknowledges that they support the issuance of the 2021 renewal of the full, on premise liquor license to the applicant Grupo Gitano LLC:

Address of Restaurant: 76 Varick St., NY, NY, 10013

Business Operation: Restaurant & Bar serving Modern Mexican Cuisine

Months of Operation: April – October 2021

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Close 12am (Sunday – Wednesday), 1am (Thursday – Saturday)

Music: Music is turned off 2 hours before closing, no DJs.

NAME: Natalie Rivera

ADDRESS: 80 Varick St. [REDACTED], NYC

SIGNATURE: Natalie Rivera

I, Atana Udwin state that the person that has signed this petition sheet signed their name in my presence on the date indicated above and identified themselves to be the same person who signed the sheet. I understand that this statement will be accepted for all purposes as the equivalent of an affidavit, and if it contains a materially false statement, shall be subject to the penalties of perjury.

Date: 10/5/2020

Signature of Witness Atana Udwin

gitano

**Petition to Support GITANO NYC's
Seasonal Liquor License Renewal for 2021**

DATE: 10/5/20

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Close 12am (Sunday – Wednesday), 1am (Thursday – Saturday)

Music: Music is turned off 2 hours before closing, no DJs.

NAME: Domin Pedraza

ADDRESS: 80 Varick St. [REDACTED]

SIGNATURE: Domin Pedraza

I, Alana Uwin state that the person that has signed this petition sheet signed their name in my presence on the date indicated above and identified themselves to be the same person who signed the sheet. I understand that this statement will be accepted for all purposes as the equivalent of an affidavit, and if it contains a materially false statement, shall be subject to the penalties of perjury.

Date: 10/5/20

Signature of Witness Alana Uwin

gitano

**Petition to Support GITANO NYC's
Seasonal Liquor License Renewal for 2021**

DATE: 9/30/20

The following undersigned resident acknowledges that they support the issuance of the 2021 renewal of the full, on premise liquor license to the applicant Grupo Gitano LLC:

Address of Restaurant: 76 Varick St., NY, NY, 10013

Business Operation: Restaurant & Bar serving Modern Mexican Cuisine

Months of Operation: April – October 2021

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Close 12am (Sunday – Wednesday), 1am (Thursday – Saturday)

Music: Music is turned off 2 hours before closing, no DJs.

NAME:

Robert Whitman

ADDRESS:

80 Varick St [REDACTED]

SIGNATURE:

[Signature]

I, Alana Udwin state that the person that has signed this petition sheet signed their name in my presence on the date indicated above and identified themselves to be the same person who signed the sheet. I understand that this statement will be accepted for all purposes as the equivalent of an affidavit, and if it contains a materially false statement, shall be subject to the penalties of perjury.

Date: 9/30/20

Signature of Witness [Signature]

2. Recent Articles and Gitano

BUSINESS INSIDER

Take a look inside this exclusive, socially-distanced tropical restaurant pop-up that has a fully automated ordering system



With indoor dining still a distant dream for New York restaurants (and increasingly restaurants across the country), optimizing outdoor dining space has never been more important. *Irene Jiang/Business Insider*

- **We visited the Garden of Love, a restaurant pop-up in Manhattan that has 24,000 square feet of lush outdoor dining space and a fully automated ordering system.**
- **James Gardner, the founder of Grupo Gitano, the company behind the pop-up, walked Business Insider through the restaurant's pandemic-era design and technology innovations.**
- **"COVID gave me the opportunity to reimagine the guest experience," Gardner said. "I think hospitality is one of the last industries that people say technology can't touch."**
- **Take a look inside the Garden of Love and its socially distanced dining experience.**

The value proposition of Gitano's Garden of Love is simple: spend an evening drinking and eating in a tropical-inspired garden, all with minimal unwanted human interaction.

Grupo Gitano, a Tulum, Mexico-based hospitality group founded by Goldman Sachs alum James Gardner, has transformed a Tribeca parking lot into an outdoor restaurant pop-up for the third summer in a row. The Garden's 24,000 square feet of outdoor dining space make it the ideal setting for a pandemic-savvy restaurateur's social distancing experiment.

With indoor dining still a distant dream for New York restaurants (and increasingly, restaurants across the country), optimizing outdoor dining space has never been more important. This year, the Garden's automated dining experience is designed for the pandemic-era diner.

On the sweltering evening of July 3, we made our way to the Garden of Love to meet with Gardner, tour the space, and sample a shrimp taco or two. Here's what it was like.

We arrived at the Garden of Love at around 5:00 pm, when the first guests were just beginning to arrive.



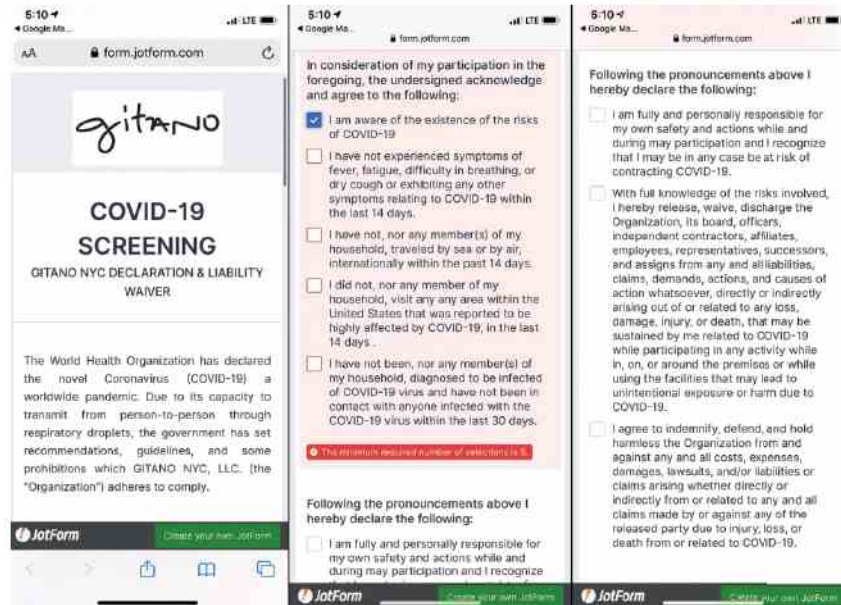
Irene Jiang/Business Insider

In order to prevent lines and crowding, those waiting for a table were able to join the waitlist by scanning a QR code.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

Before entering the space, guests are required to fill out a COVID-19 waiver form accessed, again, via QR code.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

Once the waiver is filled out and signed, guests' temperatures are taken.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

Upon entering, guests are informed that they have to keep their masks on at all times when not at their tables. They're also not allowed to wander around and take pictures.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

Before checking in with the host, guests can wipe down their belongings and sanitize their hands. Gardner said that he implemented many of his entry safety measures after watching what restaurants in Hong Kong did when reopening.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

We met up with Gardner and his assistant, Xavi De La Mora, who he'd met four years ago while operating his restaurants in Tulum.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

Gardner had moved to Tulum, Mexico in 2013 with his husband after a career in finance and luxury fashion technology. While in Tulum, Gardner started a high-end restaurant business that turned into Grupo Gitano.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

Every year since 2017, Gardner has turned the same parking lot into a Tulum-themed outdoor restaurant. Usually, the sprawling garden holds up to 450 guests. This year, because of the pandemic, only 200-300 guests are permitted in the space at once.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

Aside from spaced-out tables and widely available hand sanitizer, the core concept of the Garden remains the same.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

While all of the Garden's staff are based in or from New York, the plants are carted in from Florida, while the planters and some decor are shipped all the way from Tulum.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

We went into the kitchen, where Chef Julio and Chef Bruno were preparing guacamole for one of the Garden's first guests.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

Only three people are allowed in the back area of the kitchen at a time. "It's a more delicate process than usual because there are less people working the line," Julio said.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

Gardner's experience in fashion shone through in his design decisions, among which was the choice to give bartenders mirrored visors as part of their personal protective gear uniform.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

According to Gardner, the visors' rainbow theme is a display of LGBTQ pride and support.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

"COVID gave me the opportunity to reimagine the guest experience," Gardner said. "I think hospitality is one of the last industries that people say technology can't touch."



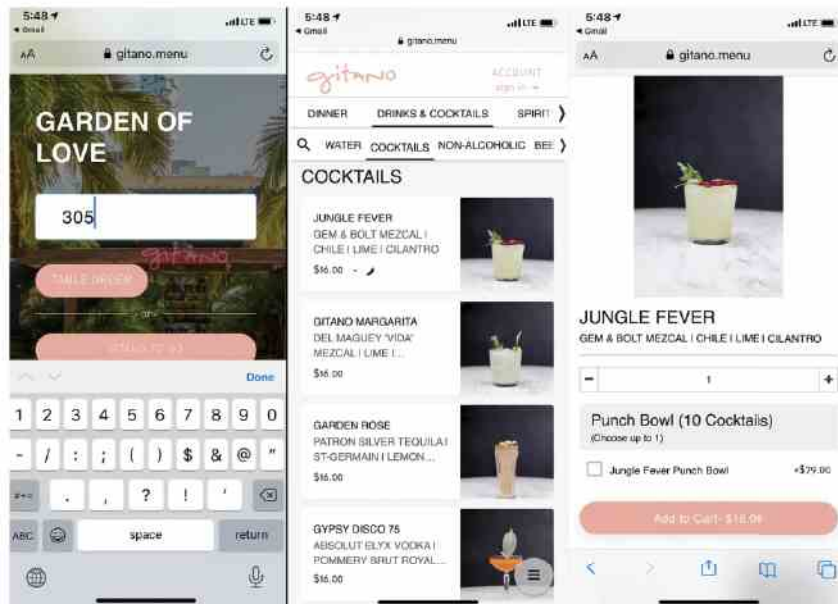
Irene Jiang/Business Insider

At the core of that reimagining: fully automating the dining experience. To order and pay, guests can use their phones to scan the QR code at their table.



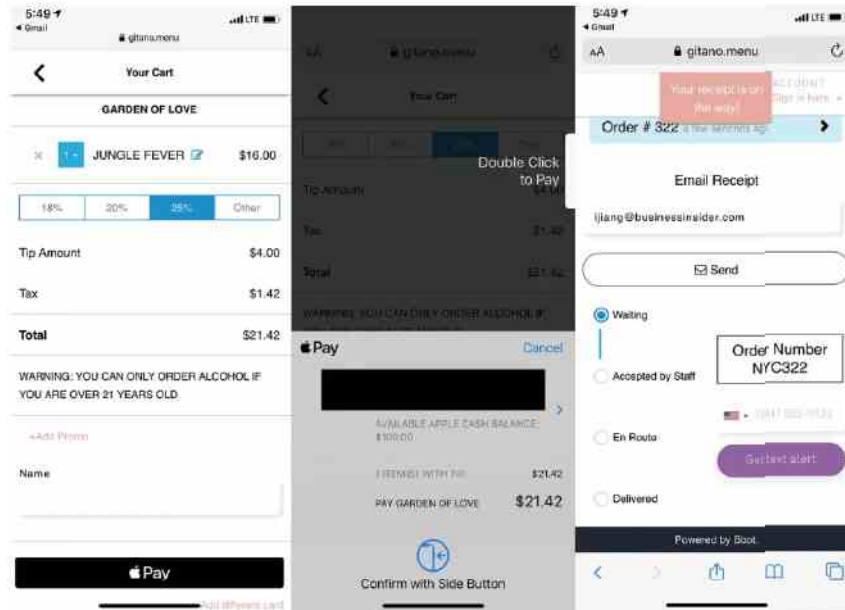
Irene Jiang/Business Insider

Upon entering their table number, guests have access to the entire Gitano menu. Gardner recommended we try a Jungle Fever cocktail.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

Guests can select their tip and pay with Apple Pay, and are able to send their receipts via email.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

Once the kitchen receives an order, the staff is able to update the guest on the status of their order: accepted, en route, or delivered.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

Not long after we'd ordered, a server dropped off the Jungle Fever at our table.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

Not only does the automated ordering system minimize contact between servers and guests, but it also solves a major issue the Garden had faced in its first two seasons. Before, Gardner said, "it was hard to flag someone down."



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

Another major change this year: the culinary brains behind the food. In previous years, the menu had been designed by white celebrity chefs such as Mike Bagale of Alinea fame and Mads Refslund of Noma in Copenhagen.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

But this year, at the urging of his husband who previously worked in the restaurant industry, Gardner hired Mexican-American chef Antonio Maldonado to redesign the menu.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

"The pandemic has made people more open to change," Gardner said.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

More than anything, this year's Garden is a proof-of-concept for new technologies and design aspects he hopes to implement in Grupo Gitano's other restaurants.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

"Hospitality is about giving guests what they want," Gardner said. And for the pandemic era, Gitano's guests want their stylish dinner with as little human interaction as possible.



Irene Jiang/Business Insider

How A Restaurant Can Safely Transport You With More Than Just Cuisine



The GITANO NYC Garden of Love is a 24,000-square-foot garden restaurant in SoHo. GITANO

With indoor dining still banned in New York City, restaurants have clamored to claim additional sidewalk space while still respecting social distancing guidelines—a nearly impossible balancing act, especially in tightly packed and heavily trafficked Manhattan. But one restaurant was fortuitously built for the occasion, born just a couple of years ago as an all-outdoor, tropical oasis with 24,000 square feet of al fresco dining on the edge of SoHo and Tribeca. GITANO NYC Garden of Love was an ambitious project when it launched in 2018 as a seasonal restaurant bringing upscale Tulum simplicity to chic New York, but no one could have guessed it would soon be the city’s savior for safe pandemic dining with an abundance of New York’s most precious commodity: space. Inside, where the menu and ambiance both come straight from one of Mexico’s trendiest destinations, New Yorkers can get more than just a longed-for night out; they can practically travel. Within the sprawling garden, sheltered by 30-foot palms and enveloped by lush vegetation dotting private nooks and a tented bar (ideal for inclement weather), it’s hard to remember you’re still in the city, or even in the country, bringing both dining and travel to a summer-starved population. Here, James Gardner, founder and owner of Grupo Gitano, the group behind the Tulum pop-up and several other restaurants, discusses the group, the Garden, and the extensive safety protocols making Garden of Love a secure night of indulgence in an unsure era.

The Group

How many restaurants does Grupo Gitano have?

We have three locations in Tulum, where we started: GITANO Tulum, a modern Mexican restaurant and mezcal bar; MEZE Tulum, our new Aegean Taverna concept; and GITANO Beach Tulum, our beautiful beach club set in a dramatic, private white sand cove. We also have GITANO Miami, located inside the beautiful Casa Faena, that opened on Miami Beach during Art Basel last year. And we have GITANO NYC Garden of Love, which is our seasonal restaurant that opened in 2018.

What's GITANO's mission?

Our mission is simple but powerful: sharing love and happiness. We do this by surprising and delighting our guests through transportive, elevated hospitality experiences that balance pure health and pure fun. We are building a new kind of hospitality brand that is elegant, fun, inclusive, diverse and driving positive change. We believe strongly in giving back to our community in need. In the first two seasons of the Garden of Love we taught over 2,000 public school students about urban farming and nutrition in our farm at the back of the property. This year we have focused on giving back to the Black trans community with a benefit opening event raising awareness and money for the [Marsha P. Johnson Institute](#) and [Destination Tomorrow](#). We have two cocktails on the menu, Connie Girl and S-Express, from which we continue to donate \$2 per cocktail to these organizations.



Grilled Chicken Pastor wit achiote, pineapple and roasted tomato [bravo](#)

- Hand washing: We built new outdoor hand-washing stations with three sinks so guests and team members can frequently wash their hands without even needing to go inside the bathroom. We have sanitizing stations at key locations including the host stand, bar, service bar and kitchen.
- Cleaning and logging: We implemented additional cleaning measures and protocols. Support staff have spray bottles to spray down tables after every table turn. Our cleaning staff completes a deep clean every night.
- Limit reservations and groups, and no mingling: We have limited the number of people that can book groups, especially in the lounge, and reduced the number of reservations even below our allowed capacity at all time slots to make sure we don't have lines in the front. We strictly enforce that there can be no mingling. Even within a group, guests must remain seated and can only standing, wearing a mask, to go to the bathroom or leave.
- No alcohol without food: We do not take groups or parties that only want to drink. We only sell alcohol to people dining with us.

want to go out and see people, to have fun and to enjoy delicious food and cocktails.

Has it been hard to get the word out to guests, or are they beating down doors to get in?

We did not know what to expect as we were getting ready to re-open in June but, come July 1st, New Yorkers who had been stuck inside for months were eager to get out again and were happy that we reopened the Garden. We are grateful to have been busy every day since re-opening. The first week we had lines around the block, but we have tightened and limited our reservation numbers to prevent this.

What can restaurants do to encourage and assure diners that they should come back?

Our approach has been to strictly follow the rules and regulations and use this as a time to innovate and make other creative changes. Every guest and every team member completes a health screening and temperature check every time they arrive at the property. Everyone must wear a mask unless seated at the table and we do not serve alcohol without food. We strictly enforce these rules, to the annoyance of some guests, but overall we believe it makes people feel safer and wanting



Watermelon Salad with heirloom tomato, fresno chili, red basil, lime juice and tajin

GITANO

to come back. We are seeing higher repeat guests this season which is a great sign. We have also taken things a step further and automated the ordering process, reducing contact with printed menus and even with servers. Focus on food and service obviously remains important to keep diners coming back.

The Garden



All tables at GITANO NYC Garden of Love are at least six feet apart, and masks must be worn when ... [+]. GITANO

Miami isn't too far from Tulum, but what brought you all the way to New York City?

I have lived and worked in NYC since 1994 so it's my home and I know the city well. When the very unique opportunity arose to bring GITANO to a 24,000 square foot empty city block that just happened to be two blocks from where I lived for years on Grand Street, located in Hudson Square between Tribeca and Soho (an area that I knew was underserved), I couldn't resist. We designed the GITANO NYC Garden or Love in early 2018 with the intention to bring New Yorkers something they didn't have too much of: outdoor dining with lots and lots of space, as well as rain and shade protection, set in a topical jungle oasis. It so happens that this design was almost perfect for the new world that we are now living in and made sense to reopen as soon as we were allowed to do so.

How do you describe the atmosphere in the Garden of Love?

Gypsy-Disco Tropical is our core concept and the overall atmosphere is that of being transported to another time and another place, far from the bustle of downtown NYC. Fun and glamorous, understated and elegant. We celebrate the perfection in imperfection.



"Gypsy-Disco Tropical" is the Garden's core concept. GITANO

Who's the current chef?

At the end of 2019 we hired Chef Antonio Maldonado from Puebla, Mexico, as our Executive Chef at GITANO Miami and GITANO NYC. He has done a fantastic job taking our food to the next level of authenticity, depth of flavor and deliciousness. We have a second, and very talented, chef in Grupo Gitano, Alexandros Gkoutsi from Athens, Greece. We brought him in to open and run our new restaurant concept, MEZE Aegean Taverna. The kitchen and menu are front and center and Gkoutsi is quite the showman! He has taken our concept of simple and sophisticated to a whole new level and people are raving about the food at MEZE, from the local community to big celebrities in the fashion and music industries. We are bringing MEZE to the GITANO NYC Garden of Love in September so you have to come!

What are some of your favorite menu highlights?

The Chorizo Con Queso is so simple but completely delicious and was inspired by dishes served in small towns outside Tulum. The King Crab Tostada is a sophisticated combination of flavors that delight the senses with English peas, egg white and serrano chili. The Fish in Banana Leaf is the most succulent and delicious branzino. We love all of the sides—they stand alone as dishes. The Wild Mushrooms . . . Purple Cabbage . . . and you can't miss the Churros with Jalapeño Chocolate.

What's the primary influence for this menu?

We are inspired by Mexico and, specifically, the small colonial towns of Yucatán, like Valladolid, and our habitat, the tropical jungle of Tulum Beach. We love the way everything is served with tortillas and salsas, essentially make-your-own tacos. Everything is served family style.

What's the centerpiece of your cocktail program?

We started in Tulum as one of the first mezcal bars in 2013 and mezcal culture and cocktails remain at the core of our offering, layered with our core concept of simple and sophisticated.

Must-try cocktails?

The Jungle Fever and GITANO Margarita are our most iconic cocktails and are served in all locations. The Jungle Fever is spicy with mezcal, fresh lime juice, cilantro and chili. The GITANO Margarita is mezcal, lime and cucumber.



Alma Vieja: Maker's Mark bourbon, Vago Elote mezcal, orange cordial . GITANO

What specific changes have been made for the Garden of Love to operate safely in a Covid world?

We developed a detailed Safety plan that was required as part of our rigorous process to get DOB permits to reopen this season and we have implemented safety changes above and beyond these requirements:

- **Social distancing:** We reconfigured the floor plan, removing tables and chairs to ensure that there is 6 feet between tables. We have markers on the street at the entrance to keep guests waiting to come in 6 feet apart, too.
- **Health screening and temperature checks:** All team members scan a QR code and complete a health screening and temperature check every day. All guests are required to complete an online health screening and temperature check also.
- **Face masks:** All team and guests must wear face masks at all times. Guests can remove their masks when seated at their table. It's an immediately dismissible offense for a staff member to not be wearing a face mask.

- **Hand washing:** We built new outdoor hand-washing stations with three sinks so guests and team members can frequently wash their hands without even needing to go inside the bathroom. We have sanitizing stations at key locations including the host stand, bar, service bar and kitchen.
- **Cleaning and logging:** We implemented additional cleaning measures and protocols. Support staff have spray bottles to spray down tables after every table turn. Our cleaning staff completes a deep clean every night.
- **Limit reservations and groups, and no mingling:** We have limited the number of people that can book groups, especially in the lounge, and reduced the number of reservations even below our allowed capacity at all time slots to make sure we don't have lines in the front. We strictly enforce that there can be no mingling. Even within a group, guests must remain seated and can only standing, wearing a mask, to go to the bathroom or leave.
- **No alcohol without food:** We do not take groups or parties that only want to drink. We only sell alcohol to people dining with us.
- **Contactless menu, ordering and payment:** We have implemented a new system allowing our guests to be completely self-dependent, if they so choose, and order everything on their phone without any interaction with a server. Our servers are still there to guide and support, if required, but contact is much reduced.

How do you think the experience helps inspire travel?

We definitely see that people are inspired by the experience in NYC, feeling that they are transported to Tulum without even having been there. We know many people that go to check Tulum out as a result. We are perhaps a big billboard for travel to Tulum! Tulum locals and those who love and frequently visit Tulum also tell us they feel at right at home here, which is good validation that we have created something authentic. Every piece of wood, the floors, the pergolas, the furniture and even the concrete banquetts and bar were all made in Tulum and transported on trucks from Tulum to SoHo.



It's hard to recall you're not in Mexico within the Garden. GITANO