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SUMMER 2013 \\\ ISSUE 45 \\\ QUARTERLY



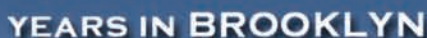
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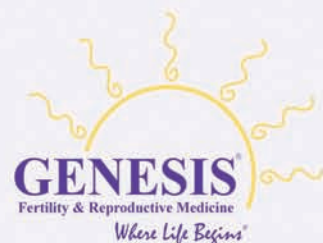
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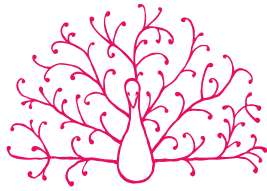
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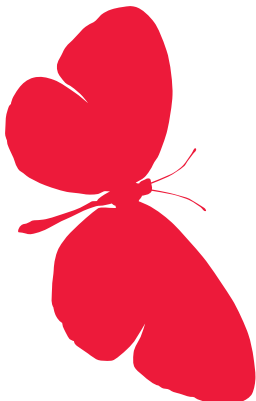
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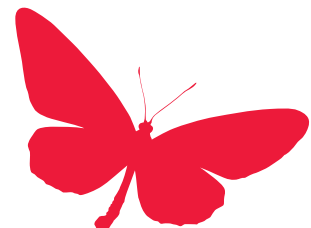


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IN THIS ISSUE

Industry legend has it that the very first restaurant opened in mid 1700s Paris donning the sign, "Boulangers sells restoratives fit for the gods." Whether or not this is fact or fiction, it certainly captures the spirit of what culinary professionals do here and now in Brooklyn. Our local chefs, brewers, artisans, and restaurateurs continue to restore us, comfort us, and excite our taste buds here in the borough of the Kings. We hope this special Food & Drink issue of Park Slope Reader will encourage you to sample local flavors this summer.

Till next season, Nancy

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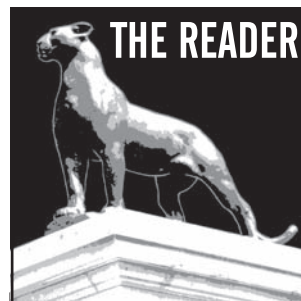
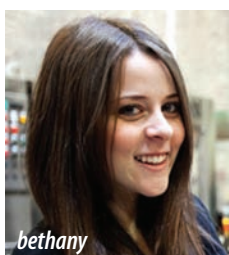
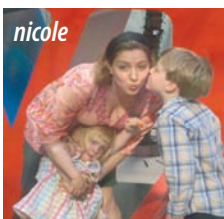
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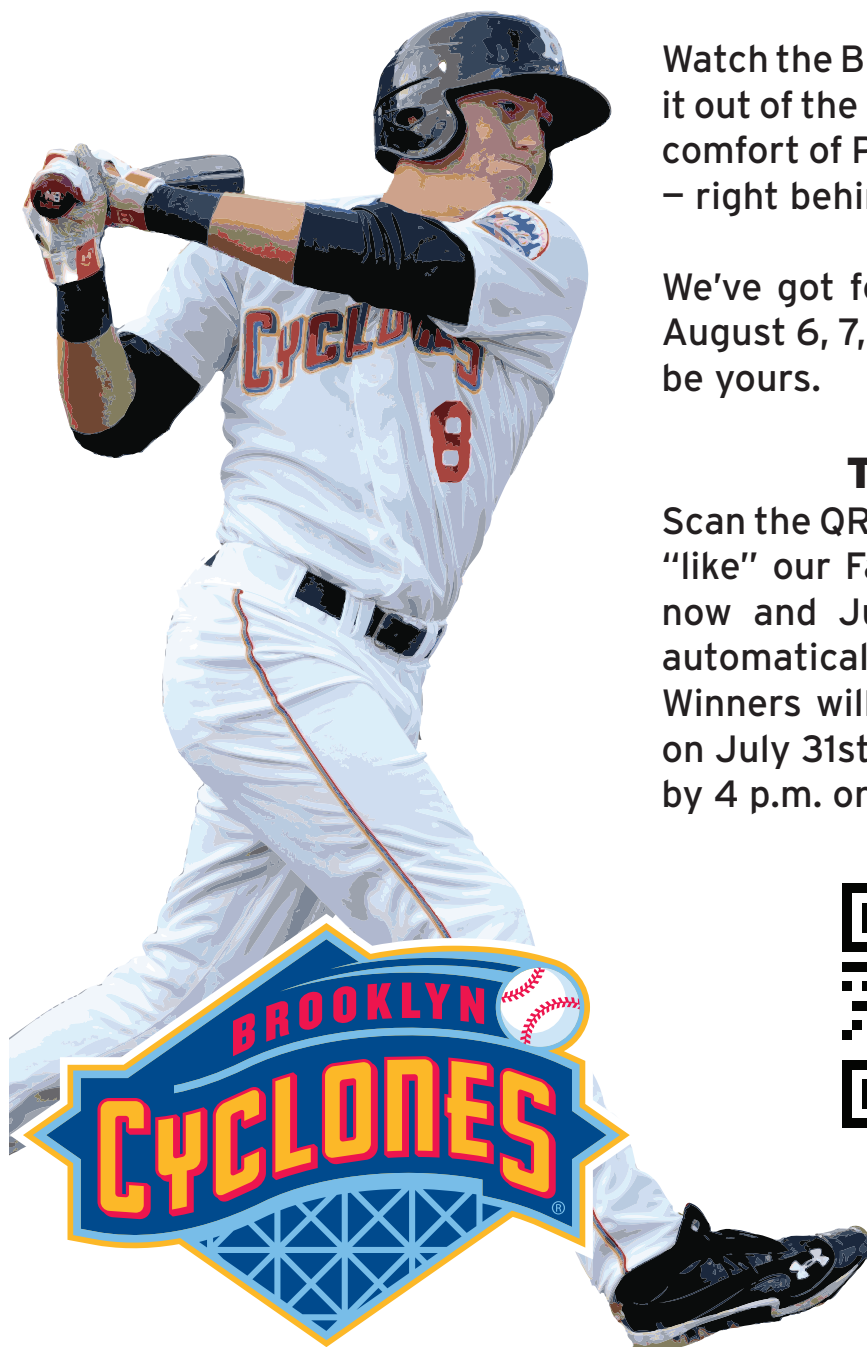


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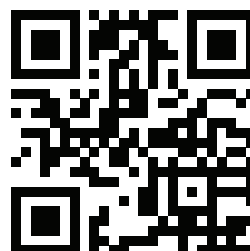


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inside brooklyn's bean belt

The Case for Coffee

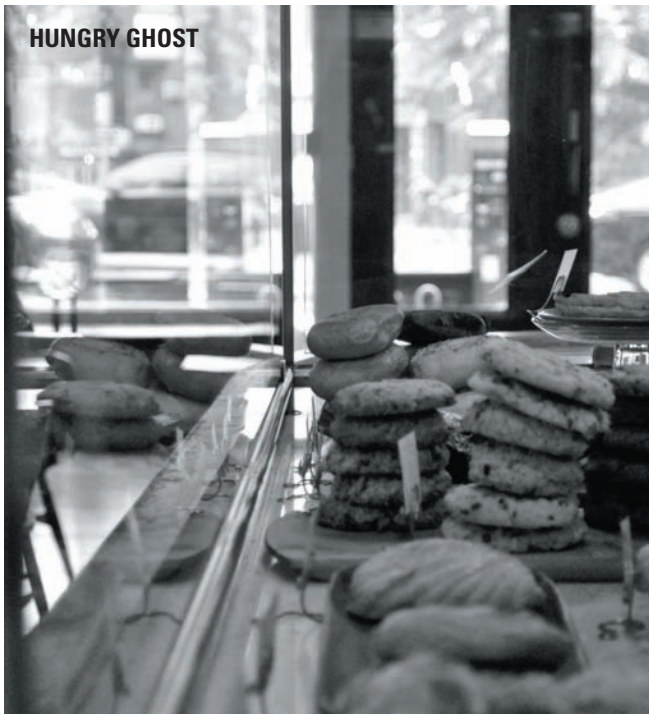
There's a case for coffee and it's making its argument with visual boxes, giving shelf space to edibles —sweet and savory—leaving no dispute that their company is a welcomed food compliment to coffee. Within the coffee district of Park Slope, Windsor Terrace, and Prospect Heights, a few specialty coffee shops are just as concerned with creating a beautiful cup of coffee as they are with displaying what locals have with their coffee. This case for coffee highlights local spaces buoyed by area food artisans, chefs, and bakers. Peer closely, it's not stones being thrown, but smells of savory and sweet.



LARK CAFE

Text & Photos by Chérmelle D. Edwards

HUNGRY GHOST



HUNGRY GHOST

253 Flatbush Avenue, Prospect Heights

The now one-year-old location in Prospect Heights is an American-Italian inspired space conceived by owner Murat Llyarog. And the Brooklyn king of Hungry Ghost's food program is Chef Pete Solomita, a neighborhood local in the business for fourteen years and of Little Buddy Biscuit Company fame.

"He has one hundred percent freedom to create whatever he wants—pastries, muffins, biscuits—which has to be as important as coffee," said Llyarog.

The importance given to food begins when customers enter the cafe front off the Flatbush thoroughfare. The space flows from window seats: tables for two, a communal table, Stumptown by way of a La Marzocco GB5, and then the counter's main attraction—a double glass case with stainless steel connections holds all the food glory that accompanies the Stumptown coffee program.

"I want you to be able to look in, if you want to. I want you to see what's in the case before the register and associate pastries with your coffee."

Chef Solomita's pastries tower delicately revealing options such as gluten-free muffins, maple walnut scones, cheddar and black pepper biscuits, quiche, and vegan goods. Baked daily in small batches, the flavors gathering around the Christian Hooker custom cabinets and tables inspire one to echo Llyarog's sentiment, "I'm hungry to keep this place just the way it is."

SOUTHSIDE COFFEE

652 6th Avenue, South Slope

The five-year-old local space is a true spot for the simple things—great coffee, great treats. Joshua Sidis and Ben are its co-owners who convinced one of their regulars, Jen Shelbo—formerly of Tudors, Gramercy Tavern, and Per Se fame to name a few—to be their in-house purveyor of things non-coffee. Because of her connection to

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the kitchen at nearby Lot 2 where she also cooks, she is “able to have high quality produce and ingredients here at a reasonable cost for customers.”

Shelbo’s decision on what customers would like is determined by what’s in season, what’s popular with patrons, and what’s reasonable for the space. “I think a pastry is such a personal thing, so you should eat what makes you happy. For example, if it’s a muffin, then I’m trying to give you the best muffin, something textural and flavorful—a muffin that you can rely on,” said Shelbo.

It’s no wonder that the whimsy of Shelbo’s passion lends to a combination of far-reaching seasonal flavors and goods like the Lemon Ricotta Poppy Seed Scone, the Candied Ginger Cocoa Nib, a can’t-keep-in-the-case quiche, a homemade biscuit with ham from

Brooklyn Cured with caramelized onion jam, Bacon Cheddar Buns on Sunday, and everyday jam bars.

Such a diaspora of goods makes for a perfect marriage with Southside’s coffee program, which remains a Park Slope staple whose consistency remains the same amid an evolving seasonal food landscape.

LARK CAFE

1007 Church Avenue, Windsor Terrace

Newcomer to the specialty coffee shop scene, Lark Cafe is a one-stop space for all the things that any man, woman, or child could desire. “I was drawn to having a space that was a gathering place,” said co-owner Kari Browne upon arriving to the area with a new baby and craving new connections.

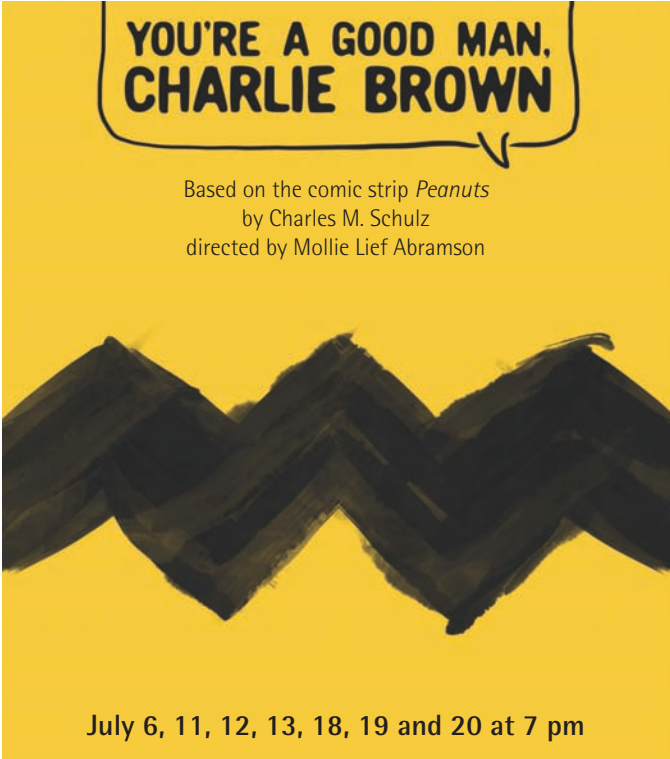


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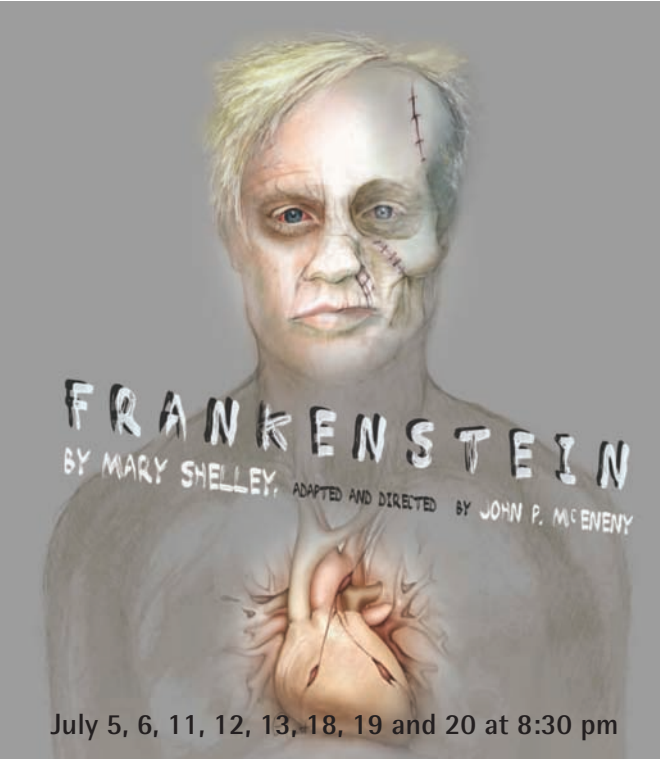
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The space plays between adult sophistication and childlike simplicity. The duality works as rounded edges and benches bring kid-friendly design to minimalist functionality evidence in concrete floors that whisper it's okay to let one's inner child come out to play.

Eyes will goggle too as they meet a case atop a Cesar stone counter supported by a chevron wood base made by a local woodworker. At thirty-six inches long, fourteen inches tall, and fourteen inches deep, Lark's case is the distillation of some of Brooklyn's finest food creators including doughnuts from Dough, jam from Anarchy in a Jar, magpies from Maggie Magpies, vegan salted chocolate chip cookies from Ovenly, pies from Four & Twenty Blackbirds, bagels



from Terrace Bagels, and quiche from Colson's Patisserie.

"We sampled food and treats from all over and there's a really amazing food revolution going on in this borough. It was a conscious effort to choose proprietors that were locally based," said Browne.

Addressing such a collective palette, it's indubitable that Browne should answer the oft-asked question, "Who is your customer?" with "Everybody."

ROOT HILL CAFE

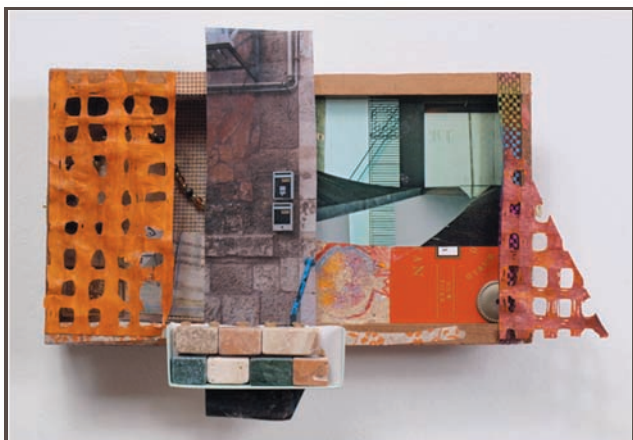
262 Carroll Street, Gowanus

Occupying space at the border of Gowanus and Park Slope, the half-decade-old space is far from being old at all. A rehabbed space and a full kitchen with Mississippi chef Josh Burnett at its helm, the café is sprouting on some solid gastronomical ground.

The background of Root Hill Café's owners—Italian and Lebanese—aspired to have a menu indicative of the neighborhood. "We're letting the roots of Root Hill and the neighborhood tell us where we should go," said Burnett.

To that end, their food case is a glass behemoth of options. Inset into a raised counter that greets one as they immediately walk up a slightly tilted ramp, it stands at four feet, six-and-a-half inches by two feet. Inside the wonder-food-land, one can choose from homemade sausage and buttermilk biscuits topped by strawberry, a chess pie made of cornmeal with white vinegar, and a savory tartlet shell. Atop the case sit muffins, cookies, and croissants baked fresh daily.

A coup for Root Hill Café's redesigned space is that it now has the space and ability to cook its meats in house and provide old school



Shantee Epstein, *Firetruck*, mixed media, 8"x 17", 2013

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The Case for Coffee

deli options. For many a post-noon and mid-evening visitor, the case is clear that the café is listening and providing options its patrons want.

"We want to stick to our roots while keeping an eye on the roots of the neighborhood as they change," said Bartnett.



TWO MOON ART HOUSE AND CAFE

TWO MOON ART HOUSE AND CAFE

315 4th Avenue, Park Slope

Danielle Mazzeo and Joyce Pisarello are a sweet food-de-force in their umbrella space along Fourth Avenue. Two Moon is an event/coffee shop space, with an ongoing roster of artists creating a cultural microcosm.

"We are not formal, but we are creating a holistic experience. Whether you need to be here to work, for a midday sing-a-long or are an artist performing, you've just walked into our living room, stay as long as you need," said Mazzeo.

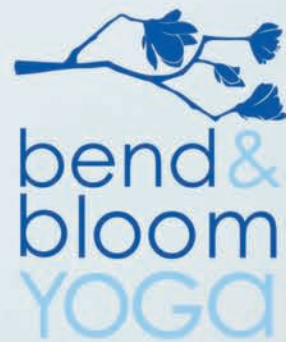
In an effort to fuel their patrons creativity, Mazzeo and Pisarello have chosen an unencumbered food program—goods encased in glass dishes, sartorial packaging for others—all baked by either of the ladies. Along with the home baked goods, a coffee program by 40 Weight Coffee buoys their minimalist format, and it works.

The home-inspired treats include muffins, cookies, brownies, shortbread, and frosted cupcakes. With such focus, there's no two ways about Mazzeo's summary of Two Moon: "It's a Brooklyn experience, a gathering, a place where you can sit for two hours and just have a cookie." A *good* cookie, one might add. ♦

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FAMILY DINNER

My kids put the “din” in dinner. I don’t mind the cacophony, most of the time. Being a city girl, I’ve always found the sound of silence deeply unsettling and if I had to choose, I’d opt for a vibrant racket over a tense, quiet meal any day. Of course, if there were a middle-of-the-road option, a little-light-conversation-peppered-with-soft-chuckling option, I’d go with that.

But when you have three firecracker children—aged eight, six, and one—and one high-strung Italian grandmother—aged eighty-three—any family gathering is likely to be loud. Particularly when this gathering happens at your grandmother’s one bedroom apartment, which it does, in our case, two or three times a week.

My grandmother, Nonny, could out-cook Mario Batali. Stick the two of them in front of a hard surface with fire, water, flour, and tomatoes and she’d have him begging for tricks of the trade within the hour. When you pair her skill in the kitchen with her indefatigable work ethic and a post-retirement lack of work, what you end up with is an open invitation to dinner. I like to think it’s a win-win situation—that she benefits from the arrangement by seeing her great-grandkids and feeling purposeful—but really it’s me who wins twice, being able to give my kids a home-cooked meal without having to cook any of it myself. And the only price I have to pay is a raging headache.

Nonny sets the volume level for dinner and her lowest setting is “blaring.” This is not because she is hard of hearing—she can perceive a child’s sniffle from fifty feet away: “I TOLE you to put a schweater on dat baby!”—it is just because she, like every other member of my family, only knows how to communicate via shouting.

“WAT KINDA PASTA YOU WANT?” she bellows to my eight-year-old son, affectionately known as Primo, who is doing his cursive homework at the coffee table.

You’d think this kind of yelling would be impossible to ignore, but Primo’s accustomed to it by now and does just that.



“Primo!” I call from the couch, where I’m attempting to change the baby’s diaper, “Primo! PRIMO!”

Finally, I extend my foot and nudge him, which gets his attention. “Yes?” he inquires casually, as if we haven’t been shouting his name for three minutes.

“YOU WANNA RAVIOLI OR TORTELLINI?” Nonny repeats.

“Tortellini! Tortellini!” my six-year-old, aka Seconda, chants as she tears through the living room.

“But I want ravioli!” Primo protests.

“BUT RAVIOLI MAKE ME NAUSEOUS!”

“BUT SHE GOT TO CHOOSE LAST TIME!”

“EE-AI-EE-AI-OOOOO!” yells the baby, Terza, not be outdone just because she lacks all vocabulary. She is frantically trying to roll off the

couch to escape the crushing indignity of having a fresh diaper put on.

In the middle of the debate, Nonny’s home phone rings, so loudly it surely wakes at least a couple of dead people over at Green-Wood.

“WHERE’S DA PHONE??” Nonny shouts. I’ve tried to get her to screen her calls, have tried to demonstrate that the answering machine will take a message, but she is not comfortable with this laissez-faire approach. As soon as the phone rings, she drops everything to find it—no small feat considering that Terza’s life’s mission is to hide the handset. Once she tossed it in the garbage. Once, in the freezer. Usually, though, it’s behind the couch.

“GET OFFA DA COUCH!” Nonny orders, “I GOTTA MOVA DA COUCH!”

Which she does, despite me yelling, “You’re going to break a hip!”



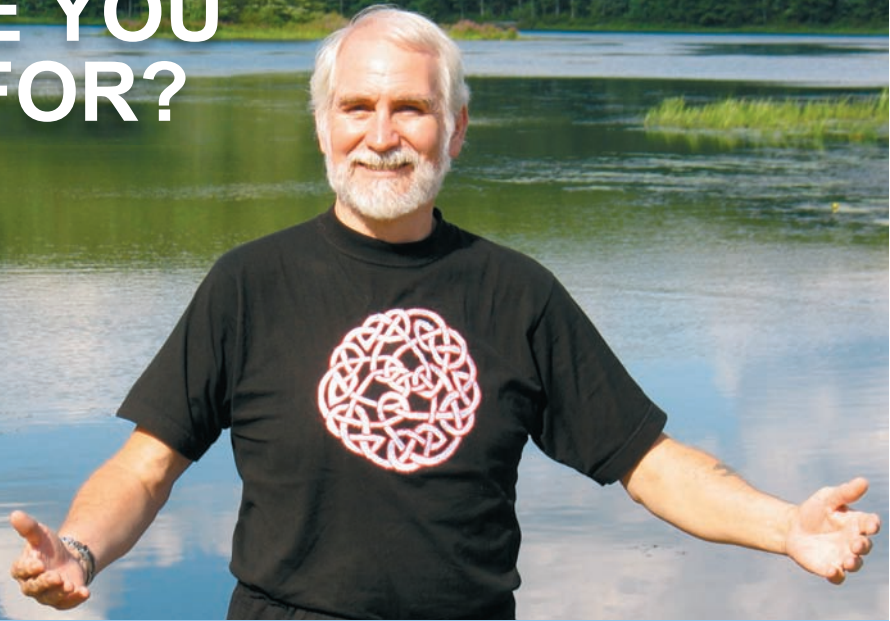
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She locates the handset, just as the answering machine picks up, which means we get to hear her conversation on speakerphone.

"OH MARIA!" she shouts, "CIAO BELLA! CHE ME DICI?"

"OH VERA! INDOVINA CHE E SUCCESSO CON QUELLO FIGLIO DI PUTANA!" her best friend Maria shouts back, at which point I hit the off button on the machine.

Ten minutes later, the pasta is ready (ravioli—we had tortellini the night before), the places are set, Nonnie's deeply entrenched in the story of Maria's good-for-nothing son-in-law who had an affair with a younger woman, and also, it is suspected, has a gambling problem. My husband, David, walks through the front door as I'm strapping the baby in her high chair and pulling her over to the crowded kitchen table, which seats three comfortably but is forced to seat six.

Primo is sitting to my right, providing *Ein Klein Nachtmusik*.

"Just a city boy," he croons, "born and raised in SOUTH DETROOOOIT—"

"Its MY turn to sing!" Seconda runs up to the table and furrows her brow to form her patented Hell-Hath-No-Fury-Like-A-Little-Sister-Skipped-Over face.

"It goes ON and ON and ON—"

"Someday you'll FIND it," she bellows louder than one might think possible for a child with her size lungs, "The RAIN-bow con-NECT-tion—"

"MAKE HER STOP! SHE'S ANNOYING ME ON PURPOSE!"

"NO, HE'S ANNOYING ME!"

The baby lets forth a barbaric yawp which I take to mean, "Dude, they are BOTH annoying me," and frankly, I could not

agree more.

"NO SINGING!" I proclaim, "NO ONE IS ALLOWED TO SING!" Then, envisioning the kids relaying these words to their therapists in fifteen years, I hasten to add, 'Until further notice!"

"MADONNA!" Nonnie shrieks, the phone cradled under her ear as she sprinkles Parmigiano on the ravioli: "She should spit in his face! She should throw him in the street like an animal!"

So much for a little light dinner conversation.

"So, kids," I say, taking a deep breath and channeling the spirit of June Cleaver, "what'd you do in school?"

Then the singing is replaced with talking. From the way the words pour of my children, you'd think it was the first words they'd spoken after taking a year-long vow of silence.

"No, no, *Horrorland* is a series he developed much later. This is something TOTALLY different. I am talking about *Night of the Living Dummy* which is a Goosebumps classic. I can't believe you never read that Dad, I just can't believe you never heard of Slappy the dummy!"

"Disgraziata! Stronzo che non e altro!"

"It was a COCKROACH!!!! I am NOT kidding you! Right in the middle of Center Time! Well, it's really called a 'water bug,' actually, that's what my teacher said. And then all the kids starting screaming like this: AAHHHHHHHHHHH!"

"AAHHHHHHHHHH!" parrots the baby. This much, she can say.

"The baby's interrupting me!" Seconda protests, "And that is VERY rude."

Somehow, even with all this talking, the children manage to eat, though I can't say the same for myself, since I'm refilling plates of

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pasta and forcing people to eat their spinach and wiping up juice spills and handing out napkin after napkin. Oh, and feeding the baby.

Terza, a year old, is not a big fan of food: At every bite, she clamps her mouth shut, arches her back, and shakes her head violently back and forth like a person having an exorcism. it sometimes feels like she is in the clutches of a paranoid delusion that I am trying to poison her food. If she could talk, I am fairly certain she'd say: "Do you think I'm BLIND? I saw you sprinkle arsenic on these beans—and don't you even TRY to tell me it was salt! I may be a baby but I am no moron!"

In order to feed her, David and I have to, literally, put on a show. With puppets. With one hand I make funny little gestures with the wizard puppet, and then when she's laughing I shove a spoonful of spinach in her mouth with the other hand. Half the time she'll be outraged and spit the spinach out right in my face, but half the time she'll chew it suspiciously, agree to swallow, realize she is ravenous and beg frantically for more. Even if the kids weren't hogging the dinner conversation, I couldn't take part since I'm focused on tricking the baby into not starving to death.

Feeding the baby is not just stressful but messy, since in her fight-to-the-finish she hurls large handfuls of pasta and spinach and fruit all over the kitchen/living room. Including in my hair.

"MOMMY!" laughs Primo, "You have [chortle chortle] BANANA [chortle chortle] in your HAIR!"

Seconda throws her head back and laughs, too. The report of it sounds vaguely like a shotgun.

"HA HA, ha, HA HA, ha, ha ha, HA!"

The baby's not sure what the joke is, but she's always up for a good guffaw, so she crinkles her nose up and laughs, a little tinny giggle.

Everyone is laughing in a loud, discordant chorus, even David and I. Only Nonny abstains and that is because she is too busy yelling expletives, which are thankfully in Italian: "PUTANA! VAGABONDO!"

The children are quiet when eating dessert, so I use this opportunity to shovel as much food as I can into my maw as quickly as possible because it's getting late and if I don't toss these kids into bed soon the threadbare fabric of my sanity will rip to shreds.

Then I make a show of putting some dishes in the dishwasher and Nonny yells: "PUT DA DISHES DOWN! I tole you I don't lika da way you do it! Please just letta me do it!" So instead, I pester the kids into collecting their homework and headbands and My Little Ponies and beloved comic books that don't seem so terribly beloved when they are abandoned on the floor by the bathroom.

Dinner is over. It was delicious—I think. Really, I'm guessing because I didn't taste much as it shot down my gullet. Regardless, we spent precious time together. Yelling about whose turn it was to talk mostly, and listening to Nonny advise her friend on retribution tactics, but still, together, all of us. Side by side. Breaking bread.

If I could lower the volume a few notches or dial down the chaos, I would. But then, I'd probably miss it too. Not the ulcer I'm likely developing, but the fullness of it all. Full mouths, full stomachs, full hearts.

Read more of Nicole's adventures in Mommyland—all of them loud—on her blog A Mom Amok at amomamok.com.

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THE BREWERS GRIMM

Rules were made to be broken—or at least bent—according to Joe and Lauren Grimm, Gowanus’ newest pair of craft microbrewers. It’s evident as we scurry across Grand Army Plaza, six pack in tow for an impromptu (albeit illegal) tasting in Prospect Park of their soon-to-launch craft brew line.



“I know how much the ticket is—it’s twenty-five dollars. It’s worth it! Just think about all the times you had beer in a bar and paid twenty-five dollars.” It’s this healthy skepticism of rules and ends-justifies-the-means mentality that has defined the past eight years for the couple as they honed their craft of small-batch, Belgian style brewing.

It all started about eight years ago in Providence, Rhode Island. They picked up a copy of *Wild Fermentation* by Sandor Katz and began experimenting with this natural black art of transformation, with some wickedly gone-wrong batches of mead, and more successful goes at sauerkraut, kombucha, and finally beer. As artists by trade—Lauren is a sculptor, and Joe is a musician—they came to realize that beer making was the perfect outlet for their creative impulses. When Joe came home from touring in Belgium, the couple was inspired to learn everything they could about beer, from sampling every available variety to

voraciously reading up on home brewing.

Their years in Providence was a time of discovery and experimentation, but when the couple moved to Chicago, they were ready to start showcasing their creations to the public. Joe recalls: “One of the great things about Chicago is it’s filled with these do-it-yourself-gallery spaces and art shows. So we would talk to our friends and say we just made five gallons of this [beer], serve it at the art show, and people were really into it. We got a lot of great feedback from people who said we should start a brewery, and eventually we listened to it.”

They made their first sale at “Nightmarket”, an informal pop-up marketplace where people could sell what they made in their kitchens—away from the prying eyes of the FDA. Nightmarket reached a whole new level of illegal when Joe and Lauren showed up with a batch of their homebrew and started slinging it for three dollars a pop. While it’s one thing to sell homemade pickles



and cupcakes without a license, it's entirely another to peddle homemade booze. No one at the market wanted ATF agents pounding down the door, so eventually the Grimms found a loophole by selling four-dollar Oreos that came with a free beer.

The operation has come a long way since those days—both figuratively and geographically—when the couple moved and settled into their home in Gowanus. As I sit with them in Prospect Park, I am one of lucky ones to get a preview.

The couple plans to coordinate the release of each beer with the every new season, each batch being a one-off limited edition. Think saisons in the summer, ryes in autumn, and rich, soul-warming porters in the winter.

Our informal tasting starts with From The Hip, their debut beer slated to release this July. It's a Belgian blonde with a lively spiciness and a citrusy, slightly floral undertone resulting from the addition of organic rose hips. It's light, clean, and packs a bit of a punch at 8 percent alcohol. But unlike many American interpretations of Belgian brews, this one has crisp finish. Joe and Lauren point out the unfortunate, prevailing trend of making overly spiced and cloying ales. According to Joe the addition of sugar and sweetener are often confused: "It's like getting a shot of hazelnut syrup in your coffee. It doesn't make it more complex! It's sweet and fake and tastes disgusting!" Paradoxically, the Grimms found that adding more sugar during fermentation will result in a higher alcohol content and drier finish. It's something they've picked up straight from the Belgians and make them unique in style here in the States.

When it comes to their favorite style, though, saisons are what gets the Grimms really excited. As Joe explains, it's a process-driven brew. While saisons characteristically exhibit spiciness and complexity, these flavors are usually entirely derived from the alchemy that takes place between the yeast and its food. Lauren bashfully confesses: "We actually have about six saisons brewing at home right now. They are all identical, except for the yeast. We're trying to isolate which one is the best, and there's definitely an early contender."

This hands-off brewing philosophy reflects the personality of the two Grimms. Joe and Lauren have done things their own way from the get go. Apparently, starting your own brewery isn't as easy as strolling up to the Small Business Administration and saying, "Hey, people like our beer, give us a million dollars"—although that's almost exactly how they started off.

Originally they thought they could get a loan and set up a

brewery in Brooklyn. They began working with a non-profit affiliated with the SBA, but according to Joe, "All they did was shatter our hopes and dreams." Undeterred, the couple explored a new way to launch their line: contract brewing. "We realized we didn't need a million dollars in stainless steel brewing equipment to start a line," explains Lauren.

They watched other microbrewers invest in the expensive equipment and facilities and dig themselves deeper and deeper into debt. After a little research, however, they realized there was a way around it all. They could lease space from another brewer and instruct them on how to carry out the fermentation according to their recipes, and in the meantime, save themselves a lot of money. This practice is actually quite common in the world of craft beer; even bigwigs like Sixpoint and Brooklyn Brewery have outsourced some of their production due to the exorbitant cost of real estate in the borough.

Joe and Lauren are taking the concept and running with it. Every batch of Grimm beer will be unique. As Joe puts it, it's kind of like putting out an album: "We're the band, the brewery is our recording studio, and the beer is our album." Just like every recording studio produces its own unique sound, every brewing facility has its own nuance. All brewing equipment is different and requires the brewer's finesse to a certain point. No matter how precise the recipe, there will always be slightly different results depending on where the beer is made.

The couple plans to coordinate the release of each beer with the every new season, each batch being a one-off limited edition. Think saisons in the summer, ryes in autumn, and rich, soul-warming porters in the winter. The brews will retail in twenty-two ounce bottles for around twelve to thirteen dollars, and you will also be able to find them on tap lists throughout the borough. Grimm Artisanal Ales will make their official Brooklyn debut with From the Hip on July 19th at the Double Windsor in South Slope.

While the couple undoubtedly is a little run and gun, like any good artists or craftsmen, they still believe that there are certain rules that exist for a reason. While some of the best beer bars still serve their drafts in straight-walled, chilled pint glasses, Joe and Lauren earnestly make a case for a room-temperature goblets. As I quaff the final beer from the tasting, a black IPA, I understand. It would be a loss to anyone drinking this unique treasure in a frosted glass at a freezing temperature. It's peaty and earthy—smells kind of like Prospect Park did right before the sky opened up and rained out our beer tasting. ♦





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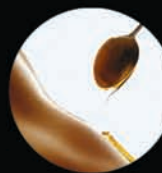
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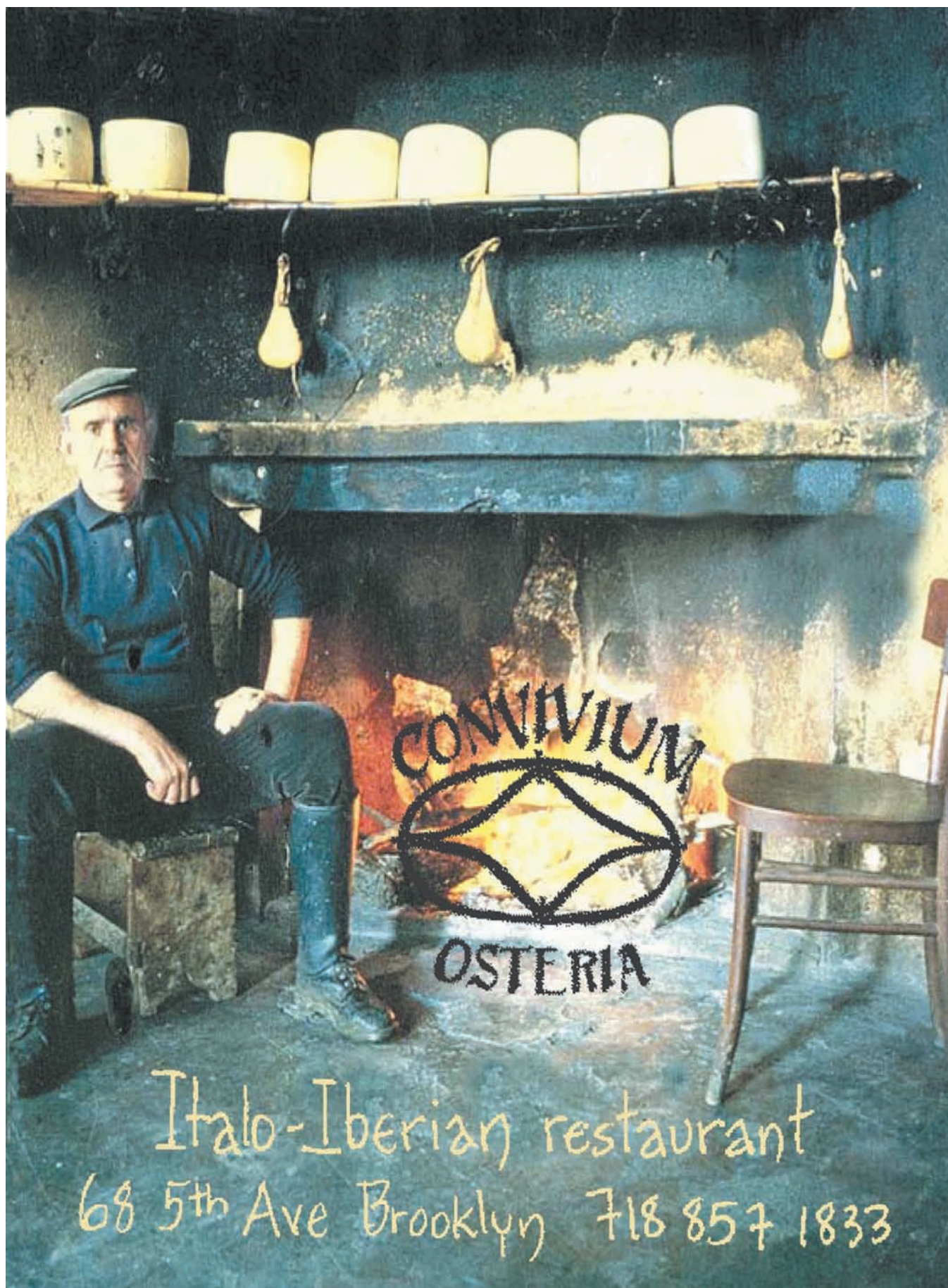


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EATING LOCAL

While supporting local farms is central to the locavore movement, it's also important to acknowledge the small business owners that keep Park Slope's culinary scene unique and delicious. This summer, break free from the food chains and sample what is cooking up here by our neighborhood's best.

Illustration by Andrea D'Aquino

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Brooklyn deserves to be celebrated for everything new that it's bringing to the table, but it's still the mom and pop stores that continue to make this city great. Our favorite finds in this issue strike the perfect balance of these philosophies vying for our attention. These businesses have been in the family for generations, yet have brought something new to our community.

A FEW OF MY FAVORITE THINGS

More than a hundred years ago, Esteban Santos Prieto Casas arrived in the Dominican Republic with his new wife and settled on a sugar cane plantation. The plantation stayed in the family for three generations, until Daniel Prieto's parents came to New York. As Daniel grew up, he explored other options—notably as an inventor and aerospace engineer—until he rediscovered his roots and Cacao Prieto was born. The bean-to-bar operation sources their cacao from the same family plantation, Coralina Farms, and produces small-batch chocolates and liquors in Red Hook, Brooklyn.

It starts with the chocolate machines—a streamlined Willy Wonka-esque production line, if Wonka had been raised in Brooklyn. Prieto's background as an aerospace engineer surprisingly came in handy as he took to redesigning the standard machinery responsible for turning the hard little cacao beans into sinfully delicious chocolate bars and bonbons. The journey begins with the Vortex Roaster, where the beans are suspended on a bed of swirling hot air at a

By Celeste Kaufman
Photos by Kristen Uhrich
Illustration by Yevgenia Nayberg



much higher temperature than standard roasters. This roasts the beans rapidly and evenly, and the higher temperature creates a more intense level of flavor. After this first process, the beans make their way to the winnower to separate the cacao nibs from their husks. While industrial winnowers often allow too many husk stowaways into the chocolate, Prieto's Vortex Winnower uses centrifugal force to separate the parts by differentiating between the kinetic energies of the nibs and husks. If that's too high-tech for you, never fear; the next step brings some vintage charm with their *mélange* from 1895, which grinds the nibs into a paste with stone rollers. Old Brooklyn meets New Brooklyn, indeed.

The intensive process yields nothing short of amazing results. Their selection of bars are simple, which allows the quality of the chocolate to shine. Besides their plain option, their 72 percent dark chocolate is mixed with almond and salt, hazelnut and raisin, pecan and sour cherry, pistachio and apricot, and cashew and cranberry. Their deliciousness is celebrated with the beautifully illustrated wrappers by Brooklyn artist, Sophie Blackall. Each of these flavors can also be found in bonbon form, along with several other enticing options like Orange and Bergamot, Fall Flower Honey, and Spiced Rum. Speaking of rum, what really sets Cacao Prieto apart is their liquor—the only spirits in the world distilled from cacao. Their hand-roasted cacao beans are distilled and aged in oak with organic cane sugar from their farm to create a rum and liqueur with a uniquely complex profile. Don't worry about whipping up a cocktail with one of their products—Prieto claims that their distilling process enables the cacao to retain its antioxidants. Clearly, that means it's healthy.

Visit their shop and factory at 218 Conover Street in Red Hook, or find their chocolates and liquors throughout the city.



LESKE'S IS MOVING ON UP

In 1961 when Hans Leske opened up Leske's Bakery, Bay Ridge was home to a Scandinavian community. Quickly developing into the gold standard of the neighborhood, Leske's later stood out with their unique offerings for baked goods as the area became more Italian. With a loyal clientele, Leske's served the community until 2011 when, to much dismay, the shop shuttered their windows. All seemed lost until rumors started to circulate in early 2012 that they were reopening—the speculation soon confirmed by a sign appearing in the window saying “Coming Soon: Same recipes, same bakers, same Leske's.” More than one thousand fans celebrated Leske's return on the opening day, and less than a year later were treated to news that they were expanding. Earlier this year, Leske's opened a second shop farther up the street at 588 Fifth Avenue to service their customers that had been making the trek from Park Slope, Prospect Heights, and beyond.

Over the years Leske's had become known for Brooklyn standards, despite their international appeal. Their Black and Whites are some of the best around, with a perfect cakey foundation and a soft, thick layer of frosting that's not teeth-achingly sweet. Donuts are another big draw, with a nice balance of lovingly made classics (try the jellies), and fun, modern flavors that aren't as precious as the trendier offerings in town. But where Leske's still shines is in their Scandinavian specialties, which separates them from the pack of Italian and French bakeries. Hoping to make the Danish the new It pastry, their versions are not to be missed, especially the Kringle, filled with raisins and ground almonds. Another favorite is the Wales Kringle—a cream puff-like offering with whipped cream and custard between puff pastry, topped with vanilla or chocolate glaze. The custard—which is also featured in éclairs and donuts, among

others—is airier and more subtle than most. For a savory option try the Limpa bread, a Swedish rye made with molasses, anise, and orange peel. And unlike most of the competition, you'll be amazed at how reasonable the prices are—not the other way around. Those delicious donuts? Most are less than two dollars. Danishes are typically two dollars or less, and even the more typically chichi pastries are around two or three dollars. The only downside is it makes it more difficult to practice some restraint.

The selection and quality of the treats themselves aren't the only things that have helped Leske's stay strong for all these years, though. Both locations strive to have that classic community-driven feel of your favorite neighborhood spot. Just look at the resurgence of their Free Cookie tradition as an example. Longtime customers, who were now bringing their children to Leske's, would often reminisce about the free cookies they'd get on their visits as kids—a tradition going back all the way to Hans's wife, Ella. Soon enough, Leske's began their Free Cookie promise again, where every "pre-adult" gets a cookie just for coming in. For us old folks, other options include free coffee with a purchase between 5 a.m. and 7 a.m., up to 25 percent off for seniors, and the Kringler Klub, which offers discounts on everyday purchases and specials throughout the year. So whether you've been a lover of Leske's for years and want to shorten your trip, or are a newcomer looking to see what all the fuss is about, treat yourself to a visit for something sweet.

GELATO FOR GROWNUPS: FOR KIDS

L'Albero dei Gelati's popularity in Italy is apparently so huge that it gets described as "cultish." With three stores in Italy, we New Yorkers will now be getting a taste with their first American outpost on Park Slope's Fifth Avenue. We'll start at the beginning: with their gelato. Passionate believers in fresh, organic ingredients, husband-and-wife team Monia Solighetto and Alessandro Trezza have some exciting options for gelato in store. Seasonal and carefully sourced ingredients will elevate simple flavors like pistachio, hazelnut, and strawberry to the highest level, but the most intriguing aspect of L'Albero dei Gelati is their more unique flavors on tap. One level up are more comforting bets like Candied

Cherries and Meringue, Pumpkin and Amaretto, and Mascarpone and Chocolate Chip. But where it really gets interesting are their experiments with savory flavors from vegetables, wines, cheeses, and more. Their Italian shops have offered everything from Radish to Smoked Salmon to Mushroom Risotto. The idea for these more outlandish takes on gelato is to pair them with everything else they have to offer. How about a scoop of Yellow Bell Pepper Gelato paired with a sharp slice of cheese?

L'Albero dei Gelati won't just be your standard frozen treats shop. There will be beautifully crafted pastries, yes, but also panini (with homemade sourdough), wine, espresso, and cheese plates. Everything in the shop will follow the philosophy of appreciating the beauty of nature when it isn't toyed with into submission. No artificial flavors or colors, additives, or preservatives allow the ingredients to shine. The menu will be ever-shifting with the seasons and allow for a wide range of clientele. For, while it may be sounding rather upscale up to this point, the hope is for L'Albero dei Gelati to be a family-friendly place.

Monia and Alessandro chose Park Slope specifically for its community-oriented atmosphere and strive to be a neighborhood place that everyone can enjoy. Monia is the second-generation gelato heir and moved to Brooklyn with her family for the opening of the shop. With a young child of their own, they knew it was important to create a welcoming environment for kids. (Park Slope tots may be refined, but I'm sure even their idea of getting ice cream doesn't involve Robiola gelato.) Special features will include a corner of the shop where kids can play and draw, and kids of all ages will enjoy the backyard with a special garden table where the featured ingredients of the season will be growing. Keep an eye out for classes on making gelato, which will cover everything from what "seasonal ingredients" even means, to prepping the ingredients, and of course, testing the finished product. Overall, L'Albero dei Gelati manages to provide a near-complete representation of the neighborhood as a whole and should be able to offer up something to please everyone. ♦



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WE'RE HERE, WE'RE VEGAN

By Bethany O'Grady | Photos by Nancy Lippincott

Good news dairy cows, and farm pigs! In April, *The Huffington Post* reported that interest in vegan diets are on the rise in 2013, as Google Trends noted a 22 percent increase for the search word “vegan” over the course of a year.

From celebrity endorsements (Bill Clinton, included), insanely informative documentaries, and the emergence of vegan-friendly restaurants all over the place, it is only natural that vegans are sprouting up like carrots across the country. Despite the fact that America is saturated by Cool Ranch Doritos Shelled Tacos and GMO-added sugar cereals, I'd like to think that veganism is gaining popularity because the benefits of a animal byproduct-free diet are truly all-encompassing and cannot be denied. Those who succeed in nixing meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and dairy from their diets can attest to the many advantages that come with maintaining a plant-based meal plan. Ask any vegan—I'm sure you know at least one, I mean, this is Brooklyn after all—and they'll tell you all about how the way they eat has either improved their health, aided in weight loss, helped the environment—slaughterhouses are a huge contributor to pollution—or all of the above.

So if you want to lose a couple pounds this summer and get the beach bod of your Montauk dreams, or just want to eat better in general, I recommend you head to some of the many vegan restaurants right here in Park Slope. They'll show you how it's really done.

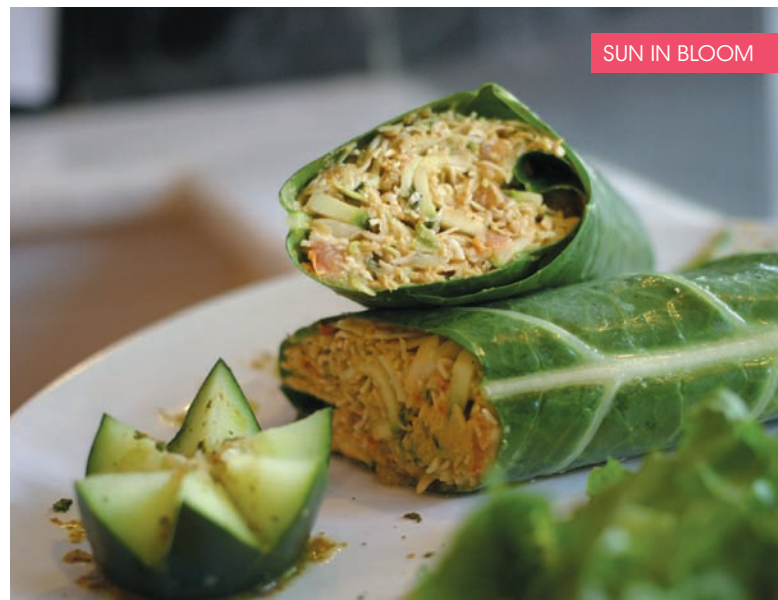
VSPOT | 156 5TH AVENUE

Orgasmically good, VSpot is the definitive G-spot for vegans in the Slope. Maybe you've tried some of their pre-packaged empanadas or breakfast burritos at health-food inclined delis in the neighborhood, which are pretty tasty, but nothing beats the real deal, served fresh at their Fifth Avenue



VSPOT

location. The menu is ripe with Latin-inspired, animal byproduct-free dishes like the Chipotle Seitan Wrap—with seitan, avocado, chipotle refried beans, tomato, vegan mozzarella and cheddar cheese, coddled in a whole wheat wrap—and the gluten-free Portobella Spinach Tacos, in soft corn tortillas with mushrooms, spinach, chipotle refried beans, and avocado, served with a side of black beans, vegan cheese, and sweet plantains. The menu also includes some comfort food favorites like Quinoa Macaroni and Cheese and Eggplant Parmigiana, which is cooked with Kosher wine. I recommend the Kale Tostadas and the Whole Wheat Lasagna, which I once made the mistake of sharing with one of the 4-year-olds I babysat for as he ended up finishing the whole thing!



SUN IN BLOOM

SUN IN BLOOM | 460 BERGEN STREET

As a vegan it can be hard to date omnivores. Mostly because you want to cook together, you want to go out to dinner together, and above all, you want to brunch together. When I was dating a pescatarian bro in Park Slope a couple of years ago, Sun In Bloom was our go-to brunch spot. Right over on Bergen Street and Flatbush Avenue, the kitchen serves up super fresh and delicious plant-based meals. He would order the Irresistible Granola Delight with Goji Berries (homemade raw granola, coconut kefir, and fresh fruit), and I took a liking to their famous Vegan Apple Pancakes. While that romance has fizzled out, I still have a burning lust for

the Western Burrito, with sunflower pâté, salsa, avocado, zucchini, and cabbage smothered in sunflower dill dressing, tucked in a collard green wrap. Clean, satiating, and zesty as ever.

'SNICE | 315 5TH AVENUE

When you go vegan, you don't have to give up the food you love most, and by "the food you love most" I obviously mean sandwiches. 'Snice on 5th Avenue and 3rd makes seriously incredible meat-free and also dairy-free subs. For a fair \$8.75 you'd be silly not to order their Thanksgiving Leftover Sub which is comprised of Tofurky, sweet potatoes, brussel sprouts, cranberry relish, and "gravy" sauce. I'm also a fan aof their grilled cheese, made with Daiya (a tapioca based cheese alternative). They also deliver, which rules when you want to order lunch and are too lazy to make it yourself as I often am.

TOFU ON 7TH | 226 7TH AVENUE

Similar to Vegetarian Palate, Tofu on 7th's menu bills all of your best-loved vegan-style Asian dishes, prepared with soy-based meat substitutes. Don't let the name mislead you though—Tofu on 7th also serves beef, pork, poultry, and seafood, so this restaurant is an appropriate dining option when you're trying to chow down with a carnivore. Their Vegetarian Triple Delight—with bok choy, tomato, tofu, and black mushrooms in brown garlic sauce served on a sizzling platter—is equal parts healthy and scrumptious, as is my dish of choice, the Buddhist Heaven—with shredded soy chicken, leeks, and bean sprouts, swimming in ginger brown sauce.

PIZZA PLUS | 359 7TH AVENUE

How many times have I heard, "How do you do it? I could never give up pizza!" Little do all these pizza-heads know, vegan pizza is a thing. And guess what? You can get it in Park Slope. Pizza Plus on Seventh Avenue may seem like your run-of-the-mill Italian joint, but the dairy-free crowd in the area can delight in the fact that a small vegan pie can be theirs for the low-low price of nine dollars. A large will run you fifteen dollars. Hook yourself up and order broccoli, mushrooms, tomatoes, and onions on top!

BOGOTA LATIN BISTRO | 141 5TH AVENUE

If I can speak frankly, every day of the summer should be a guacamole-laden fiesta. To reach vegan Mexican food heaven, I suggest popping in to Bogota Latin Bistro on Fifth Avenue and ordering a quesadilla ASAP (made with soy cheese, of course). Not only is this a great date spot in general, but the menu includes both meat and plant-based dishes. Many menu items can be prepared vegan upon request. Their salads are super fresh and made with intriguing ingredients like the Pom Palm, with hearts of palm, pomegranate, avocado, mango, watercress, cilantro dressing. Another great option for the cruelty-free crowd at Bogota is the BBQ Tofu Steak, mainly because the grilled slab of tofu is drenched in fierce mango barbecue sauce. Basically what I'm saying is... *la comida está muy buena!*



BOGOTA

CHILLED WATERMELON TOMATO SOUP

By Ronna Welsh

You know the perfect melon when you read one—food writers are hopelessly poetic in the face of hyper-seasonal food. But what happens when the food we pay homage to falls short of expectations? What do we do when perfectly ripe produce is anything but?

Few things are as disappointing as a mealy piece of fruit, particularly if you've waited all year for it.

Of course, you chance disappointment when buying a single piece of fruit, but with a huge watermelon, say, your gamble is greater. The good thing is, your options expand, too. The following recipe is my recent rescue work of watermelon that sat too long in the fridge. Of course, the soup is even better with watermelon at its prime.

One last note: don't think about letting the rind go to waste. At Purple Kale Kitchenworks, we find delicious ways of using parts of food that we'd otherwise throw away. We use the white part of the watermelon rind in a salad with corn, green pepper, olive oil, and cumin. We substitute this same rind for cucumber in a white gazpacho, with almonds, sherry vinegar, bread, and herbs. We use it on its own for granita, mixed with lemon and cardamom syrup. We even pickle the tough, green part of the rind alone for snacks and for a salad with cured meats, red onion, and parsley vinaigrette. Enjoy.

Serves 4 to 6

- 3 tablespoons or more of extra virgin olive oil
- 1 small red onion, finely diced, about ½ cup
- 1 small watermelon (about 2 pounds) cut in indiscriminately thick slices
- 2 pounds ripe tomatoes
- 1–2 teaspoons salt
- 1 tablespoon or more sherry vinegar
- 5 or 6 large mint leaves, julienned
- 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded, minced
- 1 tablespoon capers, minced
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice

Heat a couple of tablespoons of oil in a medium sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add onion and cook, stirring frequently, until onion is completely tender and lightly browned. Season lightly with salt.

Meanwhile, place a large-holed grater over a large bowl. Grate the melon directly into the bowl, down to the rind. Pick out the black seeds. Do the same with the tomatoes. Discard the core, if it is large, woody, and tasteless. You may be left with tomato skins that resist grating. Toss those



into the bowl, too, or reserve them for draping over garlic-rubbed, grilled bread.

When onions are cooked, add them to the tomatoes and watermelon. Season with 1 teaspoon salt and the vinegar. Add 1 tablespoon of olive oil and stir gently. Let sit another few minutes, then adjust the salt, vinegar, and oil to taste.

FOR THE GARNISH:

Combine the mint, jalapeno, capers, and lemon juice in a small bowl. Add oil until a salsa consistency. Serve, spooned over the individually-portioned soup.

*Recipe courtesy of Purple Kale Kitchenworks
www.purplekale.com. Copyright, Purple Kale Kitchenworks, 2013*

MEZCAL, COFFEE, & CHOCOLATE

THE PALATE OF INDULGENCE

By Louis E. V. Nevaer

Pull up a chair, and sit yourself down. I'm going to tell you something you already know, but you need to be reminded.

If mezcals reflect the flavor, scent, and smokiness of the earth in which they are crafted, then there must be complementary tastes that can be paired with each mezcal. In the same way that, for instance, various grapes grown in Oregon share a familiar flavor profile because of the soil, weather, latitude, altitudes, and environment, so do the distant varieties of grapes throughout southern France. In consequence, Oregon wines have a distinct flavor palate, as do the ones from southern France.

The same applies to the flavors of southern Mexico. When pairing mezcal, the two perfect complements are coffee and chocolate.

There is nothing as tantalizing as a cup of strong Mexican coffee or hot Mexican chocolate that is spiked with mezcal. Oh right, it's possible to overdose on caffeine, but what a way to go! You probably caught wind of this dilemma while contemplating the high alcohol content in your favorite mezcal, and the idea of pairing it with coffee or caffeine might be *demasiado*—Spanish for too much.

Let's forgo the notion that excess is a sin when it comes to mezcal, coffee, and chocolate. That's like saying there's such a thing as being too cool, or too camp, or that the vibe can be too laid back. But one of the virtues of being cool and camp and laid back is that you have the luxury of being cool and camp and laid back precisely because someone else has done the research for you.

That's where I come in. I have saved you the hassle of crisscrossing Oaxaca, logging in at 2,836 miles, and sampling 176 mezcals to present to you a selection of the best of the best. I'll do the same thing when it comes to sampling coffees and chocolates and just tell you which coffee and chocolate—Thanks be to God the Merciful—are available in the United States with which to pair a delectable mezcal.

Coffee: **El Eden Organic Coffee** is 100 percent Oaxaca Pluma Altura, and it is sublime. Its intense, sweet aroma and smooth flavor is perfectly paired with mezcal. Pour mezcal into an espresso, or even a strong brew of drip coffee, and you will overwhelm your senses with pure joy. This is the kind of coffee so rich, the aroma itself perks you up. The preferred way of preparing is to pour the mezcal into the coffee or espresso cup first, then into the coffee and to stir

gently. Some prefer to hyper-caffeinate the beverage further by adding a touch of cacao liqueur.

Chocolate: **Ki' Xocolatl Criollo Chocolate** is made from 100 percent Criollo beans, organic. Better than bean-to-bar, this is tree-to-bar, since the artisans who make this gourmet chocolate have their own cacao groves where they grow the ingredients. What makes this chocolate so special? That it's made with 100 percent Criollo beans, first and foremost. And that it's grown among in cacao groves perfectly attended for quality control. Pour mezcal into a cup of hot chocolate, and it is like discovering something for the first time. Enjoy some of the dark or dark chocolate with spices, and it is sure to lead to multiple orgasms.

El Eden coffee and Ki' Xocolatl are available at select gourmet shops throughout the U.S. If your favorite shop doesn't carry these products, perhaps you should be shopping elsewhere? That aside, El Eden can be ordered from www.eledencoffee.com and Ki' Xocolatl is available from the gourmet Amazon.com's Gourmet Food department, or from www.mexican-chocolate.com.

A note on Kahlúa. Here is an observation freely offered, so please take note: Any drink that calls for Kahlúa can be fortified with a shot of mezcal. Ice cream can be enriched with a shot of Kahlúa and mezcal. Your sex life can become messier in all the right ways with mezcal. I will leave it at that.

Excerpted from Mezcal: Under the Spell of Firewater, available on Amazon.com



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READER INTERVIEW

A Q&A with Denise and Meadow Linn, authors of *The Mystic Cookbook*

The Secret Alchemy of Food

Illustration by Allison Healy

Why did you feel it was important to write *The Mystic Cookbook*?

We wrote *The Mystic Cookbook* because we wanted to share the myriad ways that you can harness this pulsating power and infuse it into every dish you prepare. These meals can be transformative and can profoundly inspire and uplift the energy of anyone who eats them. Over the years, we've discovered that by embarking on such a culinary journey, you can activate the deepest spiritual wellsprings within you that can lead to powerful transformations and breakthroughs.

By living deliciously, you savor your life. By celebrating the vast array of colorful, flavorful, and delicious foods available to you, you celebrate yourself more fully. Food is both physical and spiritual nourishment, and we wanted to share some of what we've learned over the years about the way we eat being a metaphor for the way we live our lives.

I've heard you say that *The Mystic Cookbook* isn't a cookbook in the traditional sense. What do you mean by that?

Although *The Mystic Cookbook* contains a number of delicious recipes, it's actually more of a cookbook for your life. In addition to the recipes, there are also suggestions, activities, and meditations you can do to find the optimal ways to nourish not only your body but also your soul. Research has shown that when you enjoy your food, you actually metabolize it better. So not only is it more fun to relish a meal, but also it's better for all aspects of your being!

Believe it or not, the way you approach food can have a dramatic impact on your life. While we often think of food as fuel, it sustains us on deeper inner and spiritual levels. By harnessing the secret alchemy of food, you can indeed bring increased joy, health, happiness, and balance into your life. In this way, *The Mystic Cookbook* is more than simply a recipe book; it's a gateway into the inner recesses of your soul.

So, what is the secret alchemy of food?

Albert Einstein said, "Concerning matter, we have been all wrong. What we have called matter is energy, whose vibration has been so



lowered as to be perceptible to the senses. There is no matter." This means the universe is filled with pulsating energy, whose vibration can be raised or lowered by our thoughts. Scientific studies have even been conducted that show that plants respond to different types of music and some even respond to human emotion. It makes sense then that the food we eat is filled with life-force energy. It's influenced by the wind, rain, and sun, but also the energy of the land and the energy of the people who grew and raised it, as well as those who transported it, stocked the grocery shelves, and cooked

and prepared it.

It's said in India that a mother's food is the most nourishing of all, because when she feeds her child, she's feeding him love and nurturing, and not just the base elements necessary for fueling one's body. Although this concept may challenge the way you typically perceive food, this is not a particularly new idea. For centuries ancient peoples have honored and prayed in gratitude to the plants and animals that provided for their sustenance. In France, the term *terroir* is used to explain how the land and every other aspect that makes a particular region unique add to the specific characteristics of a certain food. For instance, although cabernet grapes are now grown across the globe, they only taste like French cabernet when grown in Bordeaux.

In our modern society, most of us don't have the time, space, or ability to grow our own food and often we don't know the provenance of the ingredients in the meals we consume. However, all is not lost. Throughout *The Mystic Cookbook*, we offer a number of practical suggestions on how you can infuse your food with energy, raise its vibratory rate, and honor the people, plants, and animals that made your meal possible. For example, simply holding your hands over your meal before digging in or saying a simple grace can dramatically affect not just your energy, but also that of the food. Cherishing your food means cherishing yourself. This is the secret alchemy of food.

What is the relationship between foods and our spiritual path?

We tend to think of the food we consume as separate from us;



however, as both ancient mystics and modern physicists have come to understand, everything is made up of swirling energy, which means that we are not separate from the universe around us. By understanding the secret alchemy of food and treating your daily meals as something hallowed, you can indeed deepen your spiritual path.

When you take time to savor the flavors, textures, and colors of the foods you consume, you take time to savor your life. Spending a few moments each day cherishing the seemingly small or mundane things, such as the crunch of a juicy autumn apple or the red and white patterns on the interior of a strawberry, you not only are appreciating your sustenance more deeply, but also you when you slow down enough to appreciate, your breathing slows and you become more relaxed. Not only is this good for your health as it will aid in digestion and metabolism, but also when you slow your mind, you're more open to hear the whispers from God, Spirit, Creator (whatever you choose to call it).

How do our choices about food limit or expand our consciousness?

Believe it or not, many of us from a very young age make decisions about food that can greatly impact our lives in a myriad of ways both physically and spiritually. Research has shown that children, even as babies, can pick up cues from their caregivers about food preferences, and this can lead to lifelong feelings about particular foods. Additionally, without even knowing it, we often have physical or emotional reactions to certain foods based on decisions we made long ago, both early on in this life and sometimes even in a past life. For instance, if as a child your grandmother told you that eating spinach would make you strong like Popeye, as an adult you might find yourself subconsciously drawn to spinach when you need more physical and emotional strength. Alternatively, if you hold the belief that a certain food, such as French fries, is bad for you, regardless of its actual nutritive value, you will find ways (subconsciously, of course) to prove yourself right. When you eat that food, you might even feel ill, not necessarily from the French fries themselves, but because your belief system is so strong.

We live in a society in which many people think very little about their food choices and as a result have poor health and are not nourishing body and soul in accordance with their highest good; yet, there are others who think so much about what they eat that they become stuck in a rigid mindset.

Many people believe that growth comes from suffering, but in *The Mystic Cookbook* you say that spiritual breakthroughs can come simply by the way you eat. How is this possible?

Simply put, food is much more than, well, just food. By following a few simple steps and understanding the principles laid out in *The Mystic Cookbook*, you really can eat your way to a deliciously enlightened life! For instance, simply spending a few extra minutes truly enjoying and experiencing your morning coffee can change the entire direction of your day. Alternatively, creating a meal dedicated to abundance can open you to accepting

and welcoming the bounty of the Universe to flood your life.

When we think of a spiritual path, we often envision meditation, yoga, fasting, chanting, or prayer. We don't usually consider our everyday meals as a potential gateway to mystical transformation. Yet, the food you eat and your approach to it can be one of the most powerful pathways to spiritual renewal. Plus, it can be fun and delicious!

How can the color of our food, plates, and dining room affect our consciousness?

Believe it or not, the colors of the food you eat have a compelling impact on your life. Color in fruits and vegetables is an indicator of specific phytonutrients. For example, red fruits such as tomatoes contain lycopene and orange vegetables such as carrots have beta-carotene, both necessary for a healthy, balanced diet. However, color can also dramatically affect your emotions, your demeanor, and even how much you eat.

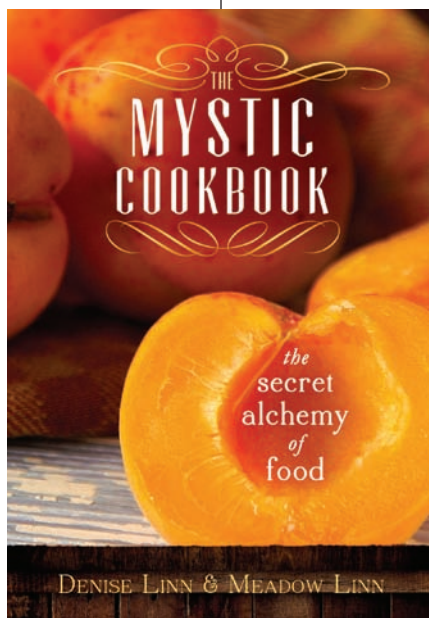
People who are angry or upset will often calm down in a pink room. Your pulse and blood pressure will go up in a red environment and go down in a blue environment. Certain shades of both blue and yellow can affect the way neurons connect in the brain. Some studies suggest that certain disorders, such as chronic pain, brain injury, and Parkinson's disease, can be affected in a positive way by color. To enhance your life, eat a colorful diet for both nutritional and metaphysical purposes. Color alchemy works exceedingly well if you hold the intent, as

you're eating a food of a particular color, that the associated qualities of the color are being absorbed into your body. In *The Mystic Cookbook* there's a detailed list of each color and its associated properties. We also give some suggestions on which colors bring about which moods in a dining room. For instance, orange can be a great color to inspire creativity and community.

In *The Mystic Cookbook* you use the phrase, "from nourishment to nirvana." What does this mean?

Many people think of eating in the same way that they think of getting gas for their car. It's something you have to do in order to keep going. Some view food as medicine and create strict guidelines for themselves about which foods are "good" and which ones are "bad." And others yet, think of food as a treat, reward, or some form of hedonistic pleasure. Yet,

there's a place in the middle where the meals you consume can feed your mind, body, and soul and nourish your physical and spiritual appetites. These types of meals can, indeed, sometimes feel spiritual. However, it doesn't necessarily have to be time intensive to eat in a way that transcends your physical need for sustenance. By taking a few moments to honor the plant or animal that gave its life for your meal or even by taking a few extra seconds to inhale the intoxicating aroma of a sun-ripened peach or sharing a meal with friends rather than eating at your desk at work, can indeed take your snack or meal from simple nourishment to a state of nirvana. ♦





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RANTING

unleashing the inner pitbull

We went to the theater the other night. We got to our seats right before curtain, but there was some commotion on the aisle of our row. An usher was checking the ticket of a large boy/man in hipster attire holding a huge piping hot cup of coffee. A middle-aged woman clutching a purse stood nearby waiting anxiously. The usher declared that boy/man was in the wrong; his seat was about a dozen rows back. It was clear the boy/man hadn't made a mistake, he just was trying to better his experience. He didn't apologize or explain why he was there, he just gathered his things, which included a backpack, a laptop bag and that cup of coffee, half of which he spilled on the seat as he was getting up. The woman with the correct ticket for the seat was as steaming as the coffee, and while the usher did his best to blot up the coffee with a huge wad of toilet paper, she launched into a monologue far better than any we would see on stage in those next few hours. It went a little like this:

"I'm so sick to death of all the entitled creeps out there that think we all live in their world. They think they deserve better seats, better clothes, better furniture, better food, all without paying the price for it. I blame their lazy parents. Don't they



know that we all have to suffer for their crappy parenting? They released their selfish brats into the adult world yet they're hardly adults. They might dress, have jobs, and drive cars like adults, but they don't take responsibility for anything and have never been taught how to apologize. I fear for the fate of the world when it lands in the hands of these ungrateful selfish jerks. We are doomed. Lord in Heaven, we are doomed."

(I might have added a little dramatic flair at the end but I think if you had been there you would agree that I captured the essence of her speech.) The whole thing lasted about two minutes.

I had a couple different reactions to this. First off, I admired

the woman's passion. I haven't delivered a monologue like that since last weekend when I learned that the parking lot across from my kid's school is getting turned into...wait for it, wait for it...luxury condos!! I'm sure you're not surprised. What else do things turn into in Brooklyn these days? Zeus Almighty! I am so sick of luxury condos. Those two words together are ripping Brooklyn and me apart, I tell you. Don't get me wrong, I still have those moments where I'm convinced I live in the best city in the world, but my relationship to said city is being threatened by its compulsion to turn every remaining

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square inch of land into stacks of boxes filled with stainless steel
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with the tiny one-person balconies for the street facing units?
And can we stop calling homes UNITS? Ugh!

I'm a fan of the well-structured rant and that lady with the
purse delivered a top-notch. It's always cathartic and enjoyable
to see someone unleash his or her inner pitbull. (And yes, I know
pitbulls can be very cuddly. You don't have to write in to tell
me.) Lady, I really appreciate the spark within you. There are
many, many factors at work conspiring to turn us into hollow,
emotionless, apathetic drones. You let your fiery rage out and
I felt honored to be there to witness it. You, my purse clutching
friend, are very much alive and I feel more alive for knowing you.
Or for sitting four seats down from you.

Another reaction I had to the lady's speech was specific to the
content. Amen, sister! I know brats. I see them all the time:
brats who clean out their cars on my street and leave their coffee
cups on the fire hydrant, brats who cut in line at Rite Aid, brats
who don't pick up their dog poop, brats who take the Macy's
circular out of the bag on our stoop and leave the others all over
the sidewalk, brats who pick up their kids late from school every
single day, brats who won't move their bag off the seat on the
subway, brats who idle in their car in front of my house blasting
music with profanity while my kids are chalking the sidewalk.
There are many, many slobs, ingrates and idiots walking around
Brooklyn who never think for one moment how their actions
impact others. I curse them! (But I do it quietly, so no children
can hear.)

Wait. Am I sounding a little
grouchy? A little intolerant?
A little like a person you
would never want to go
on vacation with?

Here's my third reaction to the woman in seat C1 which I have
entitled "Whoa, Nellie!" Let's look at the facts. It was curtain.
No one was sitting there. Boy/man wrongly concluded that your
seat hadn't been sold. Let's suppose that when you approached
he could see that hellfire in your eyes so instead of engaging with
you, he opted for slithering away. Tragically and completely
accidentally, he spilled his coffee. I know how bad it looks, but
maybe, just maybe, boy/man is not the gremlin you pegged him
to be. Perhaps boy/man is an overworked hospice nurse looking
to spend his only night off at the theater. (Horrible choice of
show, btw. Next time see *Once*.) Or perhaps boy/man has been
searching for his birth mother for fifteen straight months and he
suspects she might just be the lead in the play we were about to
see. He just wanted to get closer just to see if he could see the
color of her eyes or detect a familiar facial expression. Or is it
possible that boy/man is deaf or blind or just had a stroke? I
could go on but you get my point. So often we assume so much
about each other and very often, we assume the worst.

What do we say we just give this guy a break and grant him a

free get out of theater jail card? We'll keep an eye out for him, of course. He won't be pulling the old seat switcheroo on our watch again, no sir. But for now, let's let him walk with just a warning. Oh, we'll take his coffee away, you betcha! He shouldn't be drinking such a big coffee before bed anyway. Even his birth mom coulda tell him that.

That's a lot of thoughts about a two-minute kerfuffle at the theater. I really want to pull some wicked good conclusion out of the whole matter. I tried. Oh, how I tried! At first I wrote that the lesson is to give other the benefit of the doubt, to assume that everyone has had the worst day of their lives and they're just barely making it to the next place they need to be. But I'm not sure that's the way to go. People can be brats and sometimes, brats need to be schooled. (Always check that brats are not packing heat first. My lawyer asked me to say that and it's a not a bad idea.) I also think we should strive to get more in touch with our rage. Historically, any kind of change, social or political, has happened due to a few people who mobilized others around things that pissed them off. Lets all get together for a rant-a-thon. Tuesday at noon, Grand Army Plaza? We'll rant like crazy people. We'll let our faces turn red! We'll embarrass our kids! Shock our siblings! Tuesday at noon!

And let me know how it goes. If I weren't such a hypocrite, I wouldn't miss it for the world.

See you next time.

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WORLD CUP / BAR GIGOLO

This bar is in Park Slope, Brooklyn and it is called The Black Horse Pub. I went there to watch a soccer game which is a qualifier for the World Cup to take place in Brazil in 2014. Everyone in the world is playing soccer in order to be one of the thirty-two qualifiers. It is a big thing.

I noticed a fellow who was talking with one of the female bartenders. He looked familiar so I sat next to him. We recognized each other. His name was Tony and he lives in Park Slope. “Are you here for the games?” I asked him.

“I am here for the babes,” he replied.

“Well, I’m here to watch Peru vs Ecuador” I said.

Then our conversation took a different course. I began to talk about Sepp Blatter who is head of FIFA, the governing body of soccer. I compared him to the Pope because of the amount of power he has when designating heads of soccer federations around the world, just as the Pope designates cardinals. “They, in effect, control the way the game is played.”

Tony responded by talking about the women in the bar, or “the babes” as he called them. He said his desire was to seduce one of the female bartenders as he had done before in a different bar. He then talked about his desire to become an international bar gigolo. Meanwhile, I watched the screen and paid attention to the Argentina vs Colombia game. “Messi is not playing,” I said.

Then Tony tried to enlighten me about where these bartenders lived. “Most of these female bartenders are from Bay Ridge...they are very friendly.”

“Falcao almost scored, for Colombia,” I said.

“The ladies from Bay Ridge are less complicated than the ones from Park Slope,” Tony continued, just as Gonzalo Higuain from Argentina was



expelled from the game. Tony looked at me and said “Cuatro,” a name given to me in another bar. “Cuatro...do you think I can be an international bar gigolo?”

I took a bite of my Cuban sandwich. I sipped my Corona and said loudly (because a number of Colombian fans were screaming *goal!*): “Look Tony, you have the looks to be one, but if you are dating someone from Bay Ridge, you have already become an international bar gigolo—you don’t need to go to Peru.”

The Argentina vs Colombia game ended scoreless. Peru beat Ecuador one to nothing, but that was a game I watched in another bar in Brooklyn. At least it wasn’t Nevada Smith, where they pour beer on your head after a team scores. ♦

By Vicente Revilla | Illustration by Samuel Ferri



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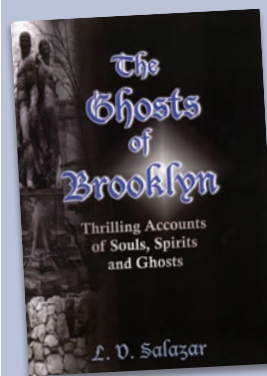
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