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# Brooklyn, baby

From Williamsburg to Red Hook - for an avid gourmand, a trip over the bridge (or below ground) to the hippest part of New York is well worth the journey

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS **JONATHAN CANE** ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS **TBC**

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New Yorkers used to call Brooklynites ‘bridge and tunnel’ people, poor unfortunate souls who’d have to commute all the way across the Hudson just to eat a hip brunch. Now it’s the Brooklynites who talk about ‘going to town’, when they do, and a visitor may think about never setting foot on the island. Manhattan, you see, makes such a great backdrop for a foodie life in Brooklyn.

I’m in Williamsburg, searching out the proto-hipster bar Marlow & Sons to meet Anna Dunn, editor-in-chief of *Diner Journal*, a quarterly food magazine. Both the bar and publication are owned by the indefatigable Andrew Tarlow, who also owns Marlow & Daughters, Diner, Roman’s, Achilles Heel, and the Wythe – the newest, coolest hotel in Brooklyn – as well as its restaurant, Reynard, and The Ides Bar on the rooftop.

I walk through the shtetl past bored-looking yamaka-ed boys peering out of apartment windows – it’s Saturday afternoon and they have shabbat cabin fever. It’s late autumn, ‘fall’ as they call it here; not quite an Indian summer. I head toward Manhattan and the sun is perpendicular to me. I think how much more I prefer summer here; fall in New York, like everywhere, is melancholic.

I can’t find the bar but I do happen upon local grocer Marlow & Daughters just as the meat delivery is happening. I make the acquaintance of two ex-vegetarian butchers – clean, white, 26-ish, hip, carrying carcasses. I know a couple of ex-vegetarians, and they’re bloodthirsty but still squeamish around raw meat. These crafty meat nerds are gleefully butchering a quarter of a cow. I feel

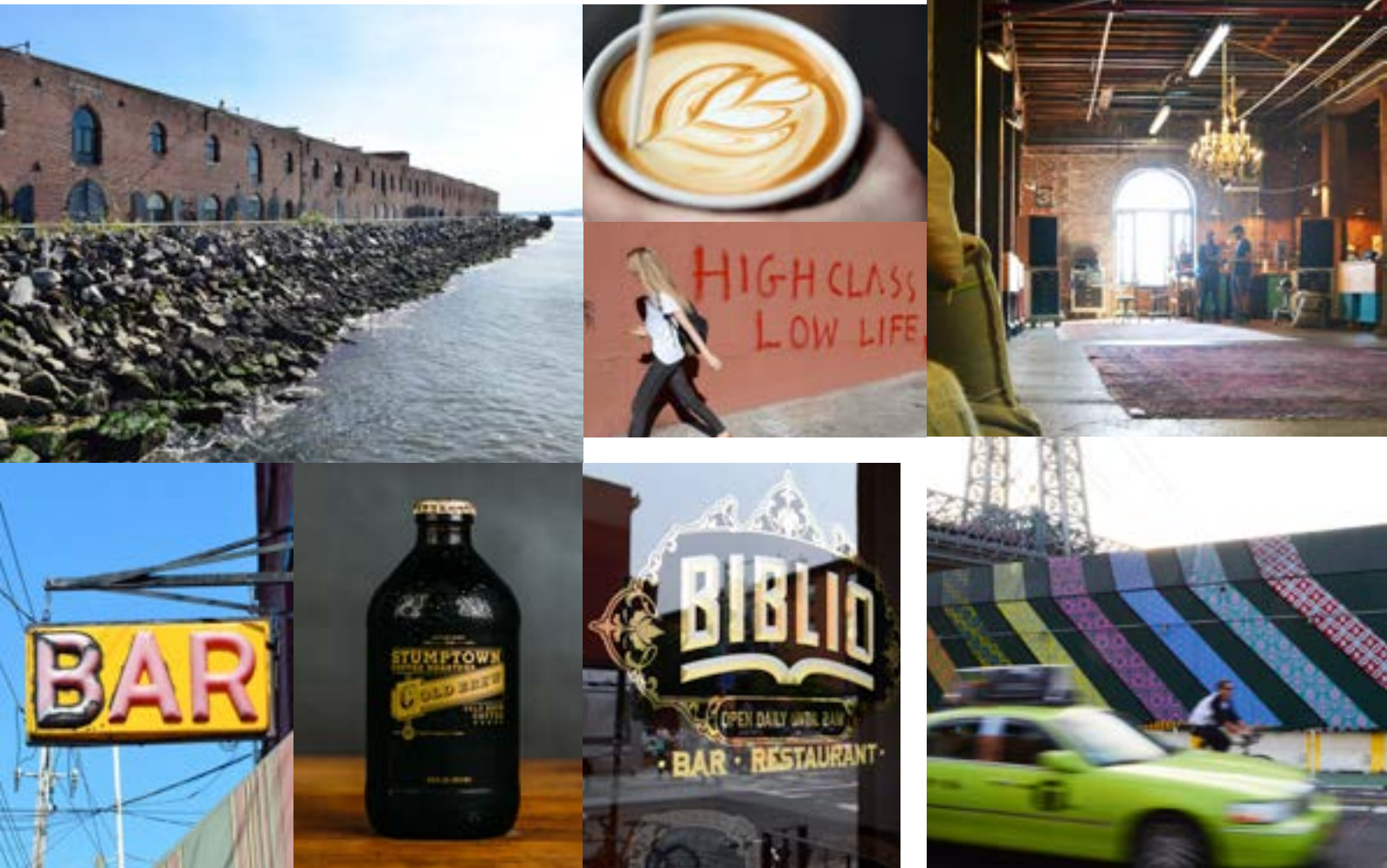
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like being a butcher but I can’t – I’m late for Anna – and so the blood-stained, bespectacled butchers point me in the right direction.

Marlow & Sons is dark, with tongue-and-groove-panelled walls, wooden benches and jovial barmen. I order a craft beer; this one is kind of pumpkiny, autumnal, like making out with a ginger-bearded logger called Sean. Anna and I talk about the magazine, about food illustration, about eating, about Mr Tarlow. I ask what to expect next from his empire. Anna doesn’t like the word ‘empire’ – it sounds too nefarious, doesn’t it? Ms Dunn works the bar at Achilles Heel, partly because she enjoys the community and partly because editing hip food mags isn’t as lucrative as you’d think.

*Diner Journal* is a favourite among the so-called foodie mags or ‘foodieodicals’. Others to look out for are *The Gourmand*, *Fool Gastronomica*, *Gather Journal*, *Swallow Magazine*, *Alla Carta*, *Brother*, *Put A Egg On It* and *Lucky Peach*. Williamsburg is something of a food-publishing hub, now hosting the Food Book Fair every April.

In a category characterised by pretension, Anna’s magazine doesn’t take itself too seriously. It’s terribly Williamsburg.▷



ANNA SENDS ME UP THE ROAD TO THE SANDWICH SHOP SALTIE, OWNED BY ONE OF HER FRIENDS, WHERE I EAT THE 'BALMY' SANDWICH, WHICH, I MUST ADMIT, IS ABOUT THE BEST SANDWICH EVER: CHICKEN LIVER PÂTÉ, HAM, JALAPEÑOS, MAYO, SESAME SEEDS.

obviously, with recipes such as 'Dennis's red flannel hash', rabbit aspic terrine, vermouth clams, and cover designs with deers and watercolour paintings of bone marrow on toast. But it has a great sense of humour (like Anna herself) and the journal manages an easy, uncontrived aesthetic that actually seems as though it was fun to make. Anna sends me up the road to the sandwich shop Saltie, owned by one of her friends, where I eat the 'Balmy' sandwich, which, I must admit, is about the best sandwich ever: chicken liver pâté, ham, jalapeños, mayo, sesame seeds.

On the other side of Brooklyn, at the western peninsula that overlooks New York Bay and the Statue of Liberty, is Red Hook, an area entirely the colour of rust: solid Dutch warehouses made of oxidised bricks flank the Hudson, a steadfast rampart that has been lashed by the sea for almost 400 years. The up-and-coming neighbourhood has managed to remain out of the mainstream because it is Brooklyn's most inaccessible borough (it has no

subway and is barely serviced by bus) and was all but obliterated by Hurricane Sandy in 2012. I cycle to a coffee-roasting guild called the Pulley Collective, recently established in one of the neighbourhood's iconic umber brick warehouses in the historic shipping yards. The interior is a Vermeer painting: an industrial-sized arch window admits light reflecting off the bay water; roasting machines in chiaroscuro, alongside fixie bikes, a skateboard against a brick wall and pallets of coffee beans; brass chandeliers interspersed with neon lights in the wooden rafters, and all the way down the centre of the large space are massive, appropriately worn Persian carpets. It's all light and smell – bittersweet, floral – with no distinguishable sounds. I want to live here, I think to myself. (In fact, Red Hook is about the only place left in the tri-state area where 'affordable' loft living is possible; but note that these are very big scare quotes.)

I'm exploring Red Hook with Billy Keniston, a New York-based author who writes about South African history and is also a barista.



He converses intelligently with the master roaster; he knows what the machines do and he's very excited. Billy is also a member of the famous cooperative grocery store Park Slope Food Coop, where participation in running the supermarket (in shifts, like working the till or packing shelves) means consumers participate as active agents and benefit from huge savings, with organic and local produce discounted by about 30 per cent. Billy explains that the cooperative structure of the roastery affords smaller coffee shops and some private coffee connoisseurs who don't have their own industrial roasters the chance to roast small batches with the best machines and support from master roasters. It allows for tinkering and experimentation, for the production of less commercial coffees and more variety – this way, smaller coffee shops don't have to rely on generic coffees roasted by a monster brand.

Red Hook is home to a number of other roasters, off-the-beaten-track bars like Sunny's, with its famous store-front sign that simply announces 'BAR', and Hometown Bar-B-Que, the rudest, meanest smoke pit in Brooklyn. I limp into Hometown in need of beer and brisket. It looks as though Hurricane Sandy has washed through the eatery and left behind some hipster detritus it had picked up in Williamsburg, depositing flotsam and jetsam: an old weathered American flag, band and beer memorabilia and driftwood wall panelling. From the surly smoke master, Billy orders smoked beef brisket and artisanal sausage with mac-and-cheese, and I order short rib and a craft beer. The presentation is suitably pretentiously unpretentious: meat on brown paper on metal tray.

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While Hometown has by far the best barbeque sauce I've ever tasted (I eventually squirt it onto my fingers and lick it off with relish), it definitely isn't my favourite smokehouse. BrisketTown in Williamsburg has a much softer edge – a side of coleslaw and irony. In the back of the shop there's a giant red neon-lit cow; it has rick walls, a Pitchfork.com-worthy soundtrack, better flavours and friendlier faces, which are attached to strangely miniaturised Lilliputian lumberjacks with round Oliver Peoples frames and carefully shaped beards – hipsters.

What I've been describing is a cuisine some have called 'New American' cooking, which in some ways really is just Old American cooking with (a) reduced portion sizes, less sugar, less fat, less corn syrup, fewer calories, less maple syrup, no free refills, no supersizing; and (b) an added pastoral flourish: nostalgic farm life bathed in the warm glow of organic, locally grown, artisanal maple-syrup sunshine. Just old-fashioned goodness (read with a Southern drawl: ol-faa-shi-nd goodness, yawl). The three Bs of ▷



## IF YOU HAVEN'T EATEN BLUEBERRY PANCAKES WITH 'HANDCRAFTED' MAPLE SYRUP AND FRIED CHICKEN, FRANKLY, YOU JUST ACTUALLY SHOULD.

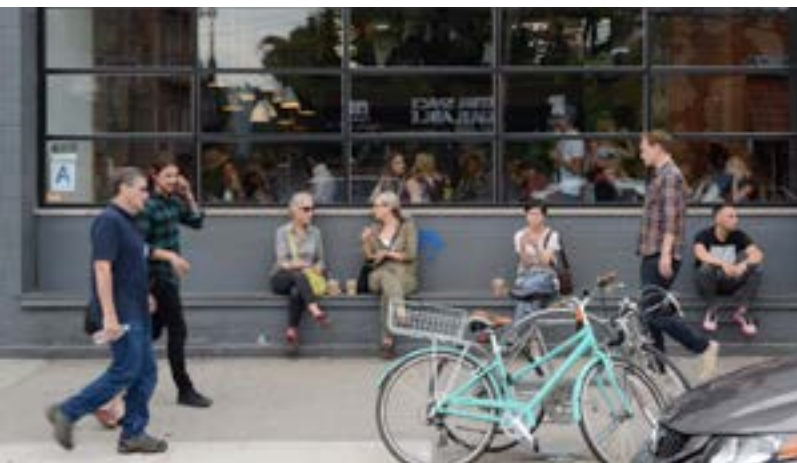
New American food – barbeque, baking, brunch – reinvented: B1 is for wood-smoked, free range, 'grass-finished' meats; B2 is for salted caramel apple, cranberry sage, salty honey, and grapefruit custard pies from Four & Twenty Blackbirds bakery in Gowanus; and B3 is for the hour-long queue for any brunch worth eating in Brooklyn. Brunch at Five Leaves is too sceney, Egg is a little too designy, but Sweet Chick on bustling Bedford Avenue serves shrimp and grits, blueberry pancakes, and chicken and waffles with a smile and some style. Sweet Southern-style brunches may not be at the top of your menu and chicken may indeed not be a breakfast favourite, but if you haven't eaten blueberry pancakes with 'handcrafted' maple syrup and fried chicken, frankly, you just actually should. Make it this Saturday – drench the thick, feathery pancakes with the best maple syrup, fry chicken with a home-made coating, and serve with a minty lemonade or a gin cocktail. Even better, if you can stomach it: load up the pancake mixture with white chocolate and macadamia nuts, and serve with a side of cured bacon.

Brooklyn is also home to many close-knit immigrant populations who cook up the most unusual diasporic 'Un-American' food. There are entire streets where only Farsi is spoken, neighbourhoods where you can eat eggs and soup and honey bread with Moroccan

Muslims as they break their fast, others where you buy 17 types of bamboo shoots and as many types of mirin, and ones where you could eat dishes from every country that was once part of the USSR. In fact, Brighton Beach is also called Little Odessa. Orange old ladies with swept-up hair in one-piece bathing suits sit next to frightening-looking young men with dogs and tattoos. Along the promenade is a cornucopia of bakeries and cafés with plastic plants and waitresses with yellow hair.

Georgian food is all the rage in Brooklyn currently – it's the new Polish, I'm told. A Georgian feast or *supra* looks like a table straight out of an Ottolenghi cookbook. Pomegranates, walnuts, yoghurt, eggplant, soft cheeses, breads like *shoti* (a Georgian style Baguette), *mchadi* (corn bread) and, best of all, *khachapuri* (a warm, gooey cheese-stuffed bread). The messiest dish is *khinkali*, oversized pleated dumplings filled with beef and broth, eaten by hand. (Check out Apani, Berikoni Brick Oven Bread, Taste of Georgia, Mtskheta Cafe, Pirosmiani and Tbilisi.)

The best way to finish another day of eating your way across Brooklyn is back at the Wythe Hotel, right on the roof at The Ides Bar, drinking a champagne cocktail watching the sun set over Manhattan. ☐



## GETTING THERE

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