

# Three Perfect Days: New York City

BY NICHOLAS DERENZO AND JUSTIN GOLDMAN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK HARTMAN

Everyone knows New York City. You've heard the names: the Big Apple, the City that Never Sleeps. You've heard Sinatra sing, "Start spreading the news," Biggie Smalls rap, "It was all a dream." You've seen King Kong climb the Empire State Building, Robert De Niro steer a taxi down Broadway, Meg Ryan moan in Katz's Deli.

And yet New York, perhaps more than any other city, is impossible to know, because it changes so fast. The last 15 years alone have seen downtown Manhattan rebuild and flourish, Brooklyn become so hip that it's now a cliché to use the borough as a cultural reference point, and the immigrant hub of Queens become lauded as a tourist destination.

Impossible to know? Maybe—but that's just what your humble correspondents have set out to do. We're both children of the outer boroughs (the Bronx for Justin, Staten Island for Nicholas) who spent our adolescent years in sunnier climes (California and Florida, respectively) but were drawn back here as adults. Each of us has spent the last few years rediscovering a city that both is our home and isn't, with the sort of hunger that only an outsider trying to establish himself as an insider can display. Can we call ourselves real New Yorkers? Who knows. But we can share what we've found—what's putting the *new* in New York—with you.

Artist Tom Fruin looks out from his rooftop sculpture *Watertower* at the Manhattan Bridge, the East River, and One World Trade Center



## Day One: Manhattan

IN WHICH NICHOLAS AND JUSTIN TAKE IN THE GALLERIES AT THE NEW WHITNEY MUSEUM, STROLL THE HIGH LINE, AND DRINK COCKTAILS IN AN OLD OPIUM DEN

It's early morning, and we're standing under the Washington Square Arch, Manhattan's own Arc de Triomphe. The world's greatest city is at our feet—where to go? We look up Fifth Avenue, at the Empire State Building, then south across Washington Square Park, at the new World Trade Center. Maybe let's start with breakfast.

We cross the park, passing a TV shoot where Paul Giamatti poses for photos with elderly fans. We stop for a bit at the West 4th Street basketball courts to watch an early game, then head up to Christopher Street, past the Stonewall Inn, recently named the country's first national monument to LGBT history. Finally, a couple of blocks up 7th Avenue, we reach Dominique Ansel Kitchen.

Inside the sunny patisserie, we meet Ansel, the French-born creator of the most talked-about baked good since, well, sliced bread: the Cronut. Three years after its invention, the doughnut-croissant hybrid still commands blocks-long morning lines at Ansel's Soho bakery, but at this year-and-a-half-old West Village outpost the only Cronuts in sight are the ones on the chef's iPhone case.

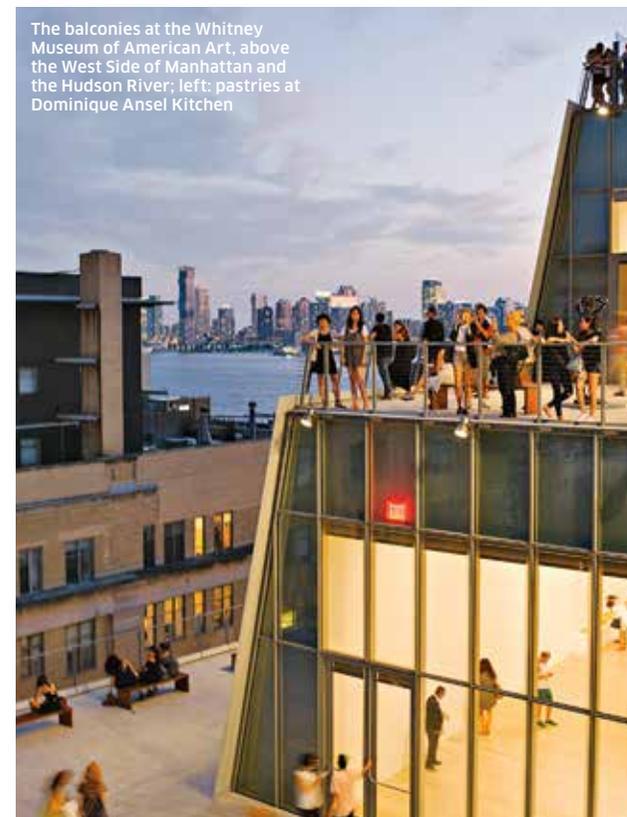
"I eat one of these every morning," Ansel says, handing us hot-from-the-oven brown sugar DKAs, or Dominique's Kouign Amanns—a caramelized croissant-dough Breton specialty. He follows this up with a warm Applejack-glazed cinnamon spun roll, meant to taste—from

end to end—like the center (read: best) part of a regular cinnamon roll.

"I've been in New York for a little over 10 years, so I'm officially a New Yorker!" Ansel says with a broad smile. "New Yorkers are so well traveled, so open-minded, really curious, and not afraid of trying new things. It doesn't matter where they're from or what they grew up eating, they're here to explore, and that's the beauty of New York."

Along with having great taste in food, New Yorkers are famously attuned to the arts; Manhattan alone is home to at least a half dozen world-class museums. The one garnering the headlines lately is the Whitney Museum of American Art, which moved last spring from its stodgy Upper East Side digs to a \$422 million, Renzo Piano-designed structure in the trendy Meatpacking District. The current main exhibit, *Human Interest*, is a multimedia survey of portraiture from the museum's permanent collection, such as Rosalyn Drexler's *Marilyn Pursued by Death* and Urs Fischer's eight-foot-tall melting-candle sculpture of Julian Schnabel.

In front of Andy Warhol's *Double Elvis*, we meet the museum's chief curator, Scott



The balconies at the Whitney Museum of American Art, above the West Side of Manhattan and the Hudson River; left: pastries at Dominique Ansel Kitchen



Chinatown's apothecary-style bar Apothéke

Rothkopf, who tells us about the Whitney's recent move. "We feel like we have not just expanded our museum but have become part of a hugely changing psychogeography of New York," he says. "The way people think about the city has really changed, and the way they move around it and the places they visit."

A few steps from the museum exit, we ascend the steel stairs of the High Line, a park built atop a mile-and-a-half-long stretch of abandoned railroad track, which has revitalized Manhattan's West Side and inspired urban planning throughout the world. We stop into Friends of the High Line co-founder and executive director Robert Hammond's office, a glass box suspended over the edge of the old railway. After waving to a group of schoolkids below, he tells us about the unexpected success of the park that he started working on in 1999 and which opened a decade later.

"We hoped it would have 300,000 visitors a year, and we get 7.5 million," Hammond says. "We were ambitious, but we weren't thinking it was going to be one of the top tourist destinations in New York." He glances out at the Standard Hotel, which straddles the park. "The reason the High Line works is it's not an escape from the city. You feel the city, but you're slightly removed. It's a different way of thinking about New York."

We're starting to feel peckish, so Hammond directs us beneath the tracks to Santina, another glassy Piano-designed space, which is owned by the park but run by the restaurateurs behind über-popular Italian red-sauce joints Parm and Carbone. Murano-chandeliered

Santina proffers lighter fare: *cecina*, or chickpea pancakes, with Calabrian tuna tartare; a show-stopping *crudité* served in a terra-cotta cauldron; and a crispy sea-bass sandwich with capery tartar sauce.

Feeling *contento*, we reenter the High Line and stroll uptown, thick prairie grass and flowers on either side. We pass tourists wiggling their toes in a fountain, photographers shooting models for magazines, and *Sleepwalker*, a sculpture of a somnambulant man in tighty whities that's so lifelike a teenager exclaims, "Is that guy real?" At 17th Street, we perch for a few minutes on the amphitheater-style seating before a large window, looking down on the yellow cabs streaming up 10th Avenue—"like Space Invaders," as Hammond says.

Red-brick apartment buildings and warehouses soon give way to the blue-glassed towers of Hudson Yards, an ongoing \$20 billion redevelopment of old railyards. Here, we take the long escalator down into the Hudson Yards subway station—the city's newest, but not its most opulent. That distinction belongs to the Oculus, where we exit after a brief ride downtown. The centerpiece of glossy new transit centers and a high-end Westfield mall, the Oculus is a \$4 billion, Santiago Calatrava-designed terminal that looks like a hockey rink wearing the Statue of Liberty's crown. Visible through a long skylight is One World Trade Center, or the Freedom Tower, a 1,776-foot monument to the city's resilience.

Resilience requires energy, which requires sustenance, so we're off to thrumming Houston Street—the pronunciation of which is perhaps the truest test of local vs. tourist—for dinner at Estela, which fed President Obama in 2014 and is one of only three NYC spots on this year's World's 50 Best Restaurants list. Unlike most of the jacket-required establishments on that list, Estela, set above a dive bar, is decidedly unstuffy. But who needs outsized ambience when you've got Uruguayan chef Ignacio Mattos working his magic?

“The High Line is a microcosm of what's happening in New York. It was built as a freight line, then it was wild, now it's back to the public. Why the park really works is it kept some of that industrial history. It gives an authenticity and a connection to the industrial heritage of New York City. The city's always changing, but keeping some of those connections is important.”

ROBERT HAMMOND,  
CO-FOUNDER  
AND EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR, FRIENDS  
OF THE HIGH LINE



We ask our waitress for a recommendation, and she launches into a monologue: “You must have the cured fluke with sea urchin. You must have the mussels escabeche. You must have the beef tartare. You must have the fried *arroz negro*. You must have the ricotta dumplings.” She grimaces at her last two suggestions: “They’re both starches, but I can’t imagine coming here and not getting either of them.” The preparations are simple,

“The way people think about the city has really changed, and the way they move around it and the places they visit.”

but every dish comes with a surprise. The tartare is leavened with crunchy fried bits of sunchoke; the mussels sit atop a verdant cilantro jus that’s bright and refreshing enough to slurp by the spoonful.

Nightfall has locals swarming into theaters. While Broadway gets all the press (and tourist bucks), downtown is full of cool shoebox spaces and experimental companies. We skip *Hamilton* and head to the hit musical’s birthplace: the off-Broadway Public Theater, a city institution since 1954 that runs programs like free Shakespeare in the Park. We enter the theater’s cabaret space, Joe’s Pub, for performance artist Taylor Mac’s *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music*, a work-in-progress that will eventually dedicate an hour to each decade from 1776 to today. Mac, who was named a 2016 Guggenheim Fellow, represents the best of new New York: steeped in history but squarely focused on the future.

For a post-performance drink, we cab it to Chinatown’s Doyers Street, a crooked alley once known as “the Bloody Elbow” for the unwholesome activities that took place here. We step through an unmarked doorway and into Apothéke, a sultry lounge in a former opium den. We order cocktails from the prescription-themed menu: From the “Stress Relievers” section, we get a Siren’s Call (Ford’s gin, roasted seaweed, cucumber, squid ink, ginger, black smoked sea salt); from “Pain Killers,” it’s a Catcher in the Rye (rye, amaro



Museum patrons on a balcony at the Renzo Piano-designed Whitney



Inside the Oculus, the Santiago Calatrava-designed transit hub at the World Trade Center; right: locals and tourists at the High Line

Nonino, honey cordial, chamomile bitters, peated scotch mist). They taste so good that we don't notice how strong they are until it's too late.

In need of something to sop up those drinks, we pop next door to Apothéke's Mexican-themed sister bar, Pulqueria, for roasted jackfruit tacos and tuna crudo tostadas. It would have been a great preemptive hangover remedy—except that the cantina also serves a mean mezcal Negroni. Oops.

“New Yorkers are so open-minded. It doesn't matter where they're from—they're here to explore.”

From here, it's a 15-minute stumble to our hotel, The Beekman, which debuted this summer in a 19th-century office building on the site of the theater that staged the North American premiere of *Hamlet*, back in 1761. A few drinks deep, we gaze at the night sky through the pyramidal skylight that tops the hotel's nine-story Gilded Age atrium, which is fretted with ornate ironwork. Shakespeare would have loved this place.



## Day Two: Queens

**IN WHICH THE GUYS SEE THE CITY IN MINIATURE, MUNCH THEIR WAY THROUGH AMERICA'S MOST DIVERSE NEIGHBORHOOD, AND MEET THE NEW METS**

We start today the way millions of New Yorkers do every day: on a train. Specifically, we ride the 4 up to Grand Central Terminal, where, after a quick glance up at the famed constellation-decorated ceiling, we hop on the 7 and cross under the East River into the booming Queens neighborhood of Long Island City.

We're both flagging, so we grab brews and croissants at Birch Coffee, and then drop our bags at the Boro Hotel. The family-owned property, which opened last summer, plays up the industrial-chic feel of the neighborhood with steel beams wrapping around the building like stylized scaffolding. We pause on the balcony of our 12th-floor corner room to take in the view of the city, from the skyscrapers of Midtown to the low-slung buildings of Queens and the elevated train tracks that cut through them. Time to get back on one of those.

After 40 minutes of watching the world whip by through the 7's windows, we arrive at Flushing Meadows Corona Park. A short walk takes us to the site of the 1939 and 1964 World's Fairs. It's already hot, but the mist from the fountains below the Unisphere, a 120-foot-tall steel model of the Earth, offers a cooling respite. Three fellow parkgoers climb right in, but we restrain ourselves.

Just past the Unisphere, we find the Queens Museum, in a building that was constructed for the 1939 fair and underwent a

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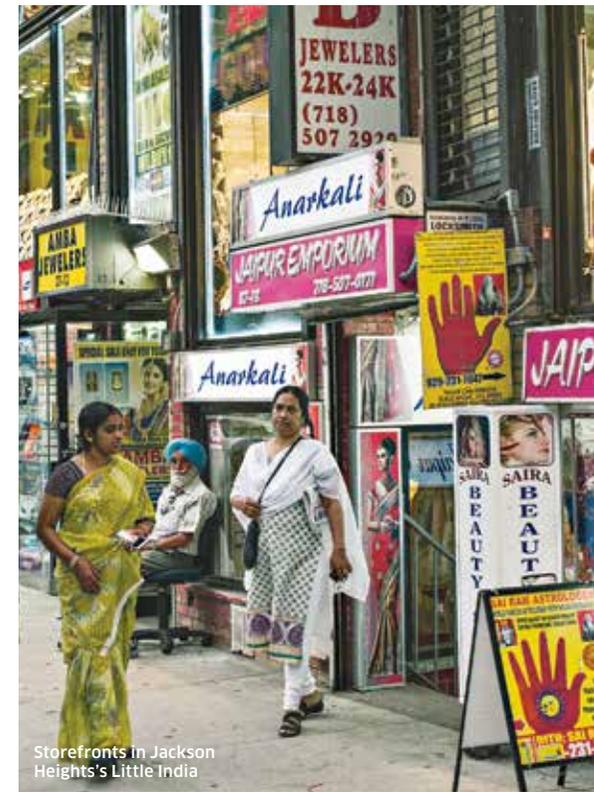
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\$69 million renovation a few years ago. The centerpiece of the collection here is the *Panorama of the City of New York*. Championed by controversial city planner Robert Moses, the *Panorama* is a detailed rendering of the five boroughs built to a 1:1,200 scale (so the Empire State Building is only 15 inches tall). We circle the glass walkway above the model, pointing out personal landmarks—the Bronx and Staten Island neighborhoods where we were born, our current Brooklyn homes—punctuating most sentences with, “This is awesome.”

For lunch, we take a short train ride to Jackson Heights. This is one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the country—167 languages are said to be spoken here—and with that diversity, of course, come great eats. To help us sift through those offerings, we’ve enlisted Jeff Orlick, a CBS news production crewman and restaurant beverage director who organizes an annual Tibetan dumpling tasting contest here.

“I moved here because of the food,” Orlick says as we stroll along Roosevelt Avenue, his home of nine years. He pauses as a train rattles overhead. “Food is the best way to put yourself into another culture.” The first culture we encounter is Filipino, in the one-block Little Manila. We stop at Fiesta Grill, a *turo turo* (Tagalog for “point point”) counter, named for how you order. First we point at the *turon*, a sweet banana and jackfruit eggroll, then we point at the *bopis*. “That’s for the adventurous,” the guy behind the counter says as he spoons a hash of pig heart and lung into a bowl. It turns out fortune does favor the bold, because the chopped offal is actually delicious.

From there, we pass a clutch of Thai spots and cross Diversity Plaza, the storefronts now bursting with colorful Bangladeshi signs. We grab a *jhal muri* (puffed rice, chickpeas, spicy mustard oil) from an 87-year-old street cart vendor and eat as we walk, the signage around us changing



Storefronts in Jackson Heights's Little India



“Everyone in the world wants to come to the United States. Where do you go in the States? New York. There’s nothing like Queens’s Roosevelt Avenue in the world. It’s so intimidating. Everyone’s speaking a different language, and it’s just so much. But the people are really open.”

JEFF ORLICK  
BEVERAGE DIRECTOR,  
LITTLE TIBET;  
ORGANIZER,  
MOMO CRAWL

to Tibetan and Nepali. We eat Tibetan beef dumplings, or *momos*, while leaning against the Amdo Kitchen food truck, the winner of last year’s Momo Crawl, then cross the street to Bhanca Ghar, where we eat *sel roti*, a sort of cross between naan and a doughnut. “This is like the food you get in Kathmandu,” Orlick says. “Meeting the people here inspired me to go there. It was incredible.”

Across 75th Street, Spanish signs prevail. Roughly half the people on the street are wearing Colombian soccer jerseys. “During the last World Cup, Colombia was doing well, and the street was going crazy,” Orlick recalls. “People were throwing bags of flour and stuff.” We stop into the Arepa Lady restaurant, which grew out of an immensely popular street cart, and we have *arepas de queso* and *chocolo*, two preparations of the fried corn and cheese staple, which we wash down with the juice of the South American *lulo* fruit.

We’re done, right? Nope. Orlick steers us into a bodega, and we squeeze down a narrow aisle to a seafood counter, La Esquina del Camarón Mexicano, for shrimp and octopus cocktail in a sweet tomato sauce. Then we all agree to never eat again.



A barista at The Lot Radio

Understandably, we need to sit for a while, and we've got just the place: Citi Field, the Flushing home of the New York Mets. The Yankees may be the iconic local baseball team, but the Mets have recently surpassed the Bronx Bombers in popularity thanks to their superior stadium—which was inspired by Ebbets Field, the long-ago home of the Brooklyn Dodgers—and their exciting squad, which made it to the World Series last year. Today, the Mets have a Fall Classic rematch with the champion Kansas City Royals, and they win 4-3 behind Noah Syndergaard, a 24-year-old pitcher nicknamed Thor for his long blond locks, 6-foot-6 frame, and 98-mph fastball.

Evening is coming on as we file out of the ballpark, surrounded by happy throngs in blue and orange. We head back to the waterfront and Socrates Sculpture Park, home to a collection of inspired installations, highlighted by Jessica Segall's *Fugue in Bb*, which transforms an upturned piano into an active beehive.

We watch the sun dip behind Manhattan's snagged skyline, then head off to break our halfhearted fast. Dinner is at Long Island City's Mu Ramen, a 22-seat space that reflects the area's avant-globalism. South Korean-born, Orthodox Jewish-raised, Per Se-trained chef-owner Joshua Smookler tweaks the noodle-bar formula on his menu, which includes foie-gras-and-brioche-stuffed chicken wings and a nontraditional cornmeal and scallion okonomiyaki with smoked trout, tobiko, and foie maple syrup. Under wooden slats that call to mind the ribs of a ship, we tuck into bowls of oxtail-and-bone-marrow broth served with corned beef and addictive "crack kimchi," washed down with a few green-tea-and-wasabi-infused Baird Wabi-Sabi Japan Pale Ales.

In search of a nightcap, we walk across Long Island City to Dutch Kills, a speakeasy



## By the Numbers

**8.5 million**  
Population of New York City (larger than 40 U.S. states)

**2.6 million**  
Population of Brooklyn, which would make it America's fourth-largest city (at 2.3 million, Queens would be fifth)

**1 million**  
Estimated pigeon population of NYC

**800**  
Languages spoken (approximately) in NYC, according to the Endangered Language Alliance

**520**  
Miles of coastline in NYC (longer than the coastlines of nine states)

**846**  
Miles of track that link the MTA's 469 subway stations (the distance from NYC to Birmingham, Alabama)

**879**  
Shoe size of the Statue of Liberty

**9.5**  
Width, in feet, of NYC's narrowest house (pictured), at 75½ Bedford Street in the West Village

from the team behind Milk & Honey, the now defunct lounge that spurred the city's cocktail revolution. Outside, there's simply a sign that says "BAR." Inside, it's all atmospheric candlelight and dark wood booths shrouded by heavy red curtains. As we're ordering Tiger Chilled Coffees (rum, cinnamon syrup, allspice liqueur, cold-brew coffee, whipped cream, absinthe) we notice that the menu offers meat pies from M. Wells, the acclaimed Québécois steakhouse nearby. We've already consumed 10,000 calories today, so what are a few more? Bring us the pies.

## Day Three: Brooklyn

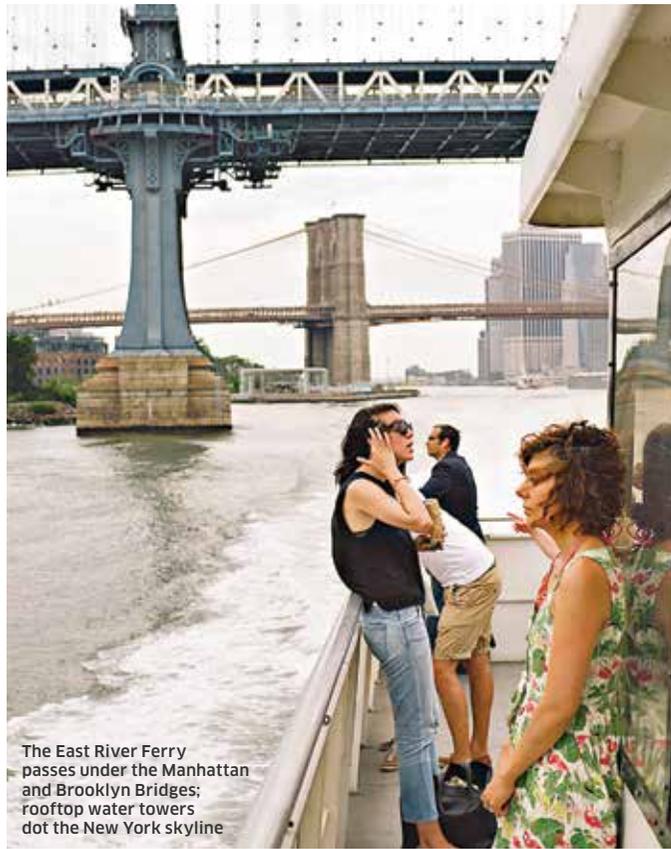
**IN WHICH THE GUYS SEE THE CITY'S BRIDGES FROM ABOVE AND BELOW, YUK IT UP WITH AN SNL CAST MEMBER, AND FIND A BAR AT THE END OF THE WORLD**

We shouldn't have had the pies. Lumpenly, we make our way across the Pulaski Bridge and down into the world's trendiest neighborhood: Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Our first stop is the William Vale Hotel, a 22-story angled white tower that opened this summer. Situated across the street from Brooklyn Bowl and the Brooklyn Brewery, two early harbingers that "cool" could cross the river, the hotel is a symbolic final step in the Manhattanization of the neighborhood. But it's hard to find fault with this when you're standing on the hotel rooftop, with no other building to obstruct your view, the whole of the city at your feet.

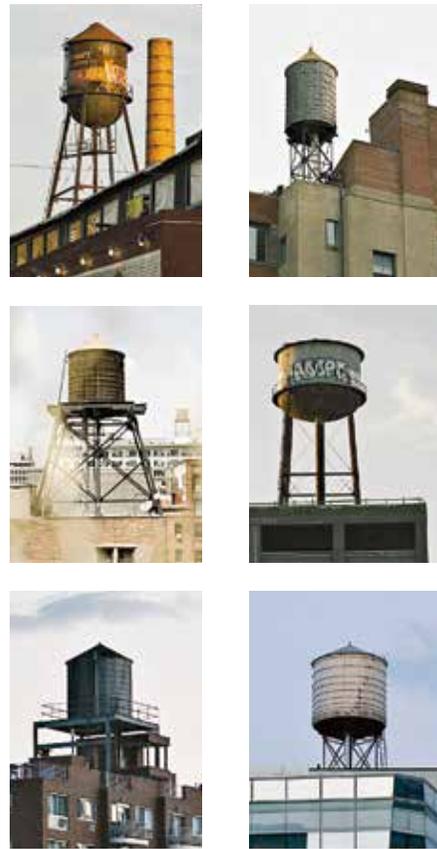
To get our wheels turning, we walk along the edge of McCarren Park to the most "Brooklyn" coffee shop imaginable. The Lot Radio is a black shipping container plunked down in a flamingo-studded, triangular gravel lot. One side of the container sells coffee from Brooklyn roaster Luft; the other has a booth where a rotating cast of DJs spin records.

For breakfast, we head up Bedford Avenue and cross into Greenpoint, a Polish neighborhood that has seen its own cool quotient rise in recent years. (HBO's zeitgeisty *Girls* films here.) At the corner of Manhattan Avenue, across from a graffiti mural of *The Simpsons* sax player Bleeding Gums Murphy, we find Frankel's Delicatessen. The restaurant is the work of two Jewish brothers from the Upper West Side—one a chef, the other an indie pop musician—who wanted to recreate the classic

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The East River Ferry passes under the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges; rooftop water towers dot the New York skyline



“  
The way New Yorkers speak is very funny, because it’s a lot of honesty and also, like, no time. None of us has time, for whatever reason. We’re all very busy and have to go, so everything is succinct and to the point. It’s very truthful, and you get right to the heart of whatever you’re saying.”

SASHEER ZAMATA,  
COMEDIAN,  
SATURDAY  
NIGHT LIVE

New York Jewish deli. They’ve certainly got the look right: The storefront recalls the restaurant from *Seinfeld*, and the back-lit signs inside are a tribute to Lower East Side mainstay Russ & Daughters. And the food? *Oy gevalt!* We split a pastrami, egg, and cheese sandwich; an everything bagel with pastrami-cured salmon and scallion cream cheese; and mini latkes with applesauce and sour cream. As we eat, co-owner Zach Frankel comes out from behind the counter to tell us why Jewish delis matter.

“There’s a grittiness to the Jewish deli that resembles New York,” Frankel says. “People of every single race and religion have a relationship with this food. It’s not just white Jews from New York. I get black dudes who grew up going to Katz’s with their dads, Asian dudes who grew up eating this food. Being able to provide that to another generation makes me really happy.”

A short stroll takes us to the condo-lined Williamsburg waterfront, where we board the East River Ferry. Alongside sailboats and Jet Skis, we cruise beneath the steel Williamsburg and Manhattan Bridges and the stately stone Brooklyn Bridge. There’s something

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Diners sit amid the backyard planter boxes at Olmsted; right: pickup hoops at Brooklyn Bridge Park; bottom: Martin Creed's *Understanding*



magical about seeing the city from out here, but it's short-lived. Within minutes, we're stepping off at the Fulton Ferry Landing and into 85-acre Brooklyn Bridge Park, which opened in 2010 with a mission to revitalize a blighted stretch of East River piers. The park is filled with visitors snapping shots of the bridges, but it's the locals that are out in droves today. Kayakers skirt the rocky banks. Pickup ballers shoot hoops on the repurposed piers. Climbers scale artificial rock walls. Kids ride the restored 1922 Jane's Carousel. At the park's southern end, we stop at Martin Creed's 25-foot-tall rotating red neon *Understanding* sign, then reward ourselves for a walk well done with cones from Ample Hills Creamery, a local mini-chain that takes its name from a poem by long-ago Brooklyn resident Walt Whitman—who might be the only self-conscious-artist type who can honestly claim that he was into the borough before it was cool.

In search of something a bit more substantial, we retrace our steps to cobblestoned Old Fulton Street and one of New York's best pizzerias, Juliana's. Patsy Grimaldi's place is the product of one of the city's most bitter feuds, sparked when he sold his longtime restaurant, Grimaldi's, and then, years later, after it moved next door, opened Juliana's in the original space. Nowadays, tourists line up for Grimaldi's, but locals go to Juliana's. Under a white brick wall adorned with Sinatra kitsch, we try a prosciutto-and-arugula-topped pie. It's hot, crunchy, and wafer-thin, and goes great with our Brooklyn-brewed Sixpoint ales. "So," says our waiter at the end, "you'll be back tomorrow, right?" Considering that the *Hemispheres* office is right down the street, yeah, probably.

In need of another post-gorge constitutional, we take a cab down Flatbush Avenue to Grand Army Plaza. We hop out and walk under the Soldiers' and Sailors' Arch—Brooklyn's answer to the Washington Square Arch—and into Prospect Park. The 585-acre greenspace was designed in 1865 by the fathers of Manhattan's Central Park, one of whom, Frederick Law Olmsted, is rumored to have called the

wilder Brooklyn version his masterpiece. The meadows are packed with picnickers, so we head for the quieter Brooklyn Botanic Garden, along the park's eastern edge. Standing on a footbridge watching carp swim in the Japanese garden's pond, it's easy to forget that the horn-honking chaos of Flatbush is barely a stone's throw away.

We skirt the northern border of the park, past the Beaux-Arts Brooklyn Museum, and stop to admire the 40-foot gateway of the Brooklyn Public Library. We compete to see who can identify the Art Deco bronze reliefs that decorate the entrance—Moby Dick, Tom Sawyer, Poe's Raven—then continue along Vanderbilt Avenue and into the tree-lined neighborhood of Prospect Heights, where we grab happy-hour Champagne cocktails at subway-tiled Weather Up.



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Tone Johansen (left) leads the bluegrass jam at Sunny's Bar; below: Ilana Glazer performs at the Bell House



Prospect Park's famous designer lends his surname to the borough's buzziest new restaurant, just a few blocks down Vanderbilt. At Olmsted, chef Greg Baxtrom turns the farm-to-table model on its head, bringing the table to the farm. We start in the backyard garden, which features such rustic trappings as a quail coop and a crawfish-filled bathtub. As we snack on tempura-fried fiddlehead ferns, our dreadlocked waitress pours glasses of Azienda Agricola Denavolo Catavela, a white wine from Emilia-Romagna that boasts a barnyard funkiness that fits the surroundings. "Grandpappy's boot' is a hard descriptor for some," she says, smiling, "but I love those skunky, funky, suitcase-and-rubber-band wines."

Back inside, we grab seats next to the open kitchen, where we chat with literary-minded line cooks about Richard Price and Jonathan Franzen as they prep radish-top gazpacho with smoked trout, dry-rubbed scallop skewers with creamed corn and green garlic, and guinea hen served two ways—roasted and confited—with morels and ramps.

From this eco-friendly spot, we take a short taxi ride to an infamous Superfund site. While the Gowanus Canal has tested positive for unimaginably foul pathogens (seriously, don't Google it), a major cleanup is now underway, and the neighborhood named after the industrial waterway has become a spawning ground for creative endeavors. One of these is the Bell



## Old School in the Outer Boroughs

Apart from the Lady Liberty-skirting Staten Island Ferry and the Bronx Zoo, our home boroughs often get left off tourist itineraries. But after three days of new New York, these corners of the Big Apple offer some of the best places to commune with the city's history—especially of the red-sauce variety. Boasting the highest concentration of residents of Italian descent of any county in the country (55 percent in 2013), Staten Island is a hub for pizza pilgrims, thanks to favorites like Joe & Pat's, opened in 1960 and beloved for its cracker-thin crust, and Denino's Pizzeria and Tavern. Meanwhile, Bronx denizens claim that Arthur Avenue and East 187th Street is New York's "real Little Italy." This area provided the setting for Robert De Niro and Chazz Palminteri's classic film, *A Bronx Tale*, and the best place to eat here is the half-century-old restaurant Dominick's. Order like the regulars, by skipping the menu and asking the waiter what's up that day. Bring cash—and an extremely healthy appetite.

House, a comedy club and music venue set in a 1920s printing warehouse. Inside, we meet Sasheer Zamata, a *Saturday Night Live* cast member who lives nearby, in Fort Greene.

"I'd been doing comedy in Brooklyn for years before I got on *SNL*, so it feels like a nice routine," she says as we settle in backstage. "Also, I love days that I don't have to leave the borough." And, because Brooklyn is such a ripe source for comedy, she really doesn't need to. "There's a man who rides a bike with a cat on his head and holds the leash in case it falls or something," Zamata says with a chuckle. "Just the other day, I went to the park and a man brought a fake tree to put in the ground so his two parrots could perch on it."

Zamata takes her leave to complete her pre-show ritual: reciting a sonnet from Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*. We join the sellout crowd, and soon she and an all-star cast of local comics—*Broad City*'s Ilana Glazer, *Horace and Pete*'s Liza Treyger, *The Daily Show*'s Roy Wood Jr.—have us howling in our seats.

As our fellow comedy fans wander off to the trendy bars of Gowanus, we hail a cab, because there's really only one place for this night, this story, to end. We ride into the isolated waterfront neighborhood of Red Hook—under the highway, through a housing project, over cobblestones—to Sunny's Bar. The watering hole was once a haunt for the stevedores who plied Red Hook's long-forgotten docks, and it later became an unlicensed social club for artists and weirdos. Sunny Balzano, the bar's beloved owner, died earlier this year, and it's now run by his widow, Tone Johansen, who hosts a raucous bluegrass jam in the back. After we sing along to a klezmer-inspired, minor-key version of "This Land Is Your Land," we step outside to see the Statue of Liberty shining in the harbor. New York may be changing faster than ever, getting newer all the time, but this old bar and that old statue are here to remind us that this city was made for you and me.

*Like most New Yorkers, Hemispheres editors Nicholas DeRenzo and Justin Goldman often talk about moving to a calmer town. But they never will.*



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