

Luscious bites of the Big Apple

NYC, home to nearly 8½ million, caters for every culinary taste imaginable. To experience the best food, find out where the locals go

Story & Photography **Christine Manfield**

New York is magnetic and seductive with a frisson of high-octane energy that is palpable and addictive. It is a city that seems to be under constant reinvention while, at the same time, there are many things and places that anchor it, constants that symbolise the very essence of NYC. One thing's for certain, it's a city that it's impossible to tire of.

I agree with the locals that the most exciting development of 2009 was the opening of the High Line – a public garden space on a disused elevated train track that was a former blight on the landscape. We walk its length after dinner one evening. This is urban design at its very best, the aesthetic is simply wonderful. The curved lines of the concrete, stone and wood that reflect a symmetry and connection to the garden's former life are inspired. The park stretches from Gansevoort Street in the Meatpacking District (MePa) up to 20th Street. (That's stage 1, there are 10 more blocks to be completed.) It has become an instant landmark and is an ideal place to take in the ambience of NYC from a different perspective. Walking through it makes you feel the city has suddenly come alive and reconnected with nature. West-facing wooden benches and "chaise-longue" chairs that slide along the old train tracks are ideal for taking in the sunset over the Hudson River.

I hit the streets as soon as I arrive in search of good food, relishing the thought of tasting the best this city has to offer, unravelling some of its hidden treasures. There is also reason to celebrate: NYC is finally growing up in the coffee stakes. Espresso bars are popping up all over the place downtown; no longer do you have to walk for blocks and blocks to track down a few addresses to get a fix of the real stuff. Fair Trade organic coffee is the latest craze, some places even boast organic raw milk (Australia, take note); baristas are gaining recognition and popularity – finally – in a city that thought it acceptable to give away dishwasher-brown liquid as a matter of course. That remains a common practice however.

Manhattan has many districts, each with its own personality and cultural mix and while the geography may appear small and close, it takes an age to explore and discover the local secrets, the hidden delights within



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each. Local expertise is vital, not just of the island, but of each district. Residents provide a direct conduit into the pulse and energy of their zone. I have stayed in various parts of the city during the past 30 years and my preference lies definitely with downtown – now spoilt for choice with a proliferation of cool boutique hotels that were not there 10 years ago (the Gansevoort, Cooper Square, Thompson, Crosby, Standard, Hotel on Rivington, Bowery and the Mercer, to name a few). My NYC affair started with Greenwich Village, the West Village and Chelsea, followed soon after TriBeCa, SoHo and NoLita (Mott Street is home to several Australian designer shops), then MePa became hot and remains that way. Just recently, we stayed with friends in the East Village, on 1st Street, better known from the 1960s to '80s for its rock 'n' roll then punk culture – this was the music and artistic hub that spilled across 1st Ave to Alphabet City. Some of the most significant and famous American music and art has its roots here. Art galleries and subterranean bars and clubs were the norm, some still exist. It was and is the best example of New York's diverse melting pot. You can feel its energy.

From our window, we look downtown over the Lower East Side (LES), the last district to be radically altered from its legacy of tenement slums and gritty crime. Like the rest of the city, it has been cleaned up and gentrified. Some claim this means the city has lost its soul, its edginess and wildness and that those elements have been pushed out of town, off the island even. We visit one of the last remaining Jewish pickle shops for supplies only to be told that it is relocating to Brooklyn next month. There's a whole new breed stamping its style on the ground, bringing with it a renewed vitality and opportunities to take advantage of the downtrodden economy to negotiate attractive rent deals and for small businesses to grow and flourish.

Several LES shops are now more than one thing – they mix it together – clothes, tattoos, bars, music, flowers, jewellery. Small collectives of people with the same aesthetic and design ideas are meshing together, taking their own bites from the Big Apple. We drop into the Dressing Room, a little basement on Orchard Street, where the small bar is set up amid racks of indie labels and vintage pieces. Some predict it won't be too long

before mainstream gloss makes its presence felt but hopefully the unique character and eccentric bohemian charm can be preserved in spite of sweeping changes. We have more than enough homogeny in the world.

We spend our entire time downtown exploring the East Village and the LES. Only once do we take the subway uptown, to spend a day at MoMA gazing at the Bauhaus and Tim Burton exhibitions. Both amazing. That's what I love about this city: there is always so much happening, so much to see and do. It's impossible to do it all so it demands return visits.

Like a true bloodhound, I sniff out some good food and we discover a few interesting and funky wine bars along the way, all within a 10-minute radius – so we know we are in the right area. We plan our walking route each day around what we want to see and taste, block by block. Being flexible with time means we can book a table at any of our chosen restaurants the day before or on the day. The easiest way to reserve a table is online – no lengthy waits on the phone and there's instant response as to availability. They call you back on the day to confirm. I read that a few uptown restaurants now have tea

sommeliers where the tea menu holds equal importance to the wine list and teas are served in stemless Riedel glassware to best experience the colour, aroma and flavour. There's a niche market for everything here, the city is big enough to sustain it. Creative vision seems to be more readily rewarded economically and it comes down to sheer volume of numbers.

For a spot of home cooking, I head to the Farmers Market at Union Square, the largest fresh produce market in New York. It's open four days a week (Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays) and perfectly located, not too far from any of the downtown areas. It's where small producers sell vegetables, fruit, herbs, cheese, olive oil, meat, nuts and preserves – and it's entirely seasonal. I determine my menu by what's available. The city boasts more than 40 open-air green markets in various districts on different days to meet the growing demand for fresh, organic produce that is grown or produced within close proximity. It's like tasting the conscience of the city and it's reaffirming to see its widespread appeal and support.

On second thoughts, merely taking a bite seems too polite and restrained: I prefer to devour New York.

My New York directory

Favourite eats

Hearth

403 East 12th St, East Village
T: 646 602 1300; restauranthearth.com
Italian Mediterranean flavours, interesting menu and wine list, one of my new favourites.

Peasant

194 Elizabeth St, NoLita
T: 212 965 9511; peasantnyc.com
Terrific wholesome food from the wood-fired oven – pizzas are fab.

Prune

54 East 1st St, East Village
T: 212 677 6221; prunerestaurant.com
Clean, fresh, honest flavours – great food. Portions are what we expect, thankfully not American stuffed-plate size. Try the salt cod with chilled eggplant pickle or the James Beard onion sandwich with chicken livers – both delectable.

Momofuku Noodle Bar

171 1st Ave, East Village
email reservations only; momofuku.com
Steamed pork buns to die for and the Fried Chicken 2-Ways (Old Bay and Korean) is hard to beat. One of the hottest tickets in town; be prepared to queue.

La Esquina

106 Kenmare St, LES
T: 646 613 7100; esquinanyc.com
Authentic Mexican taqueria – go for the fish tacos and the tostados.

DBGB Kitchen and Bar

299 Bowery, East Village
T: 212 9333 5300;
danielnyc.com; dbgb.html
Daniel Boulud's latest hit, French brasserie-style. Sausages, charcuterie, roast poultry. The bar area serves a decent drink (and espresso and beer). It's like dining in an upscale pantry.

Minetta Tavern

113 Macdougall St, Greenwich Village
T: 212 475 3850; minettatavernny.com
Same owner as Balthazar and Pastis (Keith McNally). French bistro menu – go for the roast chicken or the pigs' trotters.

Standard Grill

848 Washington St, MePa (under the Standard Hotel at the High Line)
T: 212 645 4100; thestandardgrill.com
A bistro menu of charcuterie, meat, fish and poultry. A table on the outside terrace is pretty cool, while inside is buzzy and great for that New York pastime of people-watching.



MARGE HARRIS

01 Christine Manfield stocks up at Balthazar

Cookshop

156 10th Ave (at 20th St), Chelsea
T: 212 924 4400; cookshopny.com
Local sustainable produce from independent farmers and providers; simple delicious bistro-style food.

Pearl Oyster Bar

18 Comelia St, West Village
T: 212 691 8211 (no reservations

taken); pearloysterbar.com
Oysters and seafood; small and intimate.

Balthazar

80 Spring Street, SoHo
T: 212 965 1414; balthazarny.com
Essential to book for dinner, try your luck at lunch. Or go around 10am for a late breakfast or 5pm for a drink at the bar and watch the place fill up.

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01 Russ & Daughters became Christine Manfield's local grocery in NYC

Inoteca

98 Rivington St, LES
T: 212 614 047; inotecanyc.com
Small Italian trattoria, some terrific Italian wines; small room that always packs out quickly.

Drinks

Ten Bells

247 Broome St, LES
T: 212 228 4450; thetenbells.com
Small wine bar with huge list of Spanish and French wines available by the glass. Start early, it's crammed by 6.30pm. Serves tapas as well.

Stanton Social

99 Stanton St, LES
T: 212 995 0099; thestantonsocial.com
Very cool lounge bar and restaurant; start with a cocktail and see where it takes you.

Monday Room

210 Elizabeth St, NoLita
T: 212 343 7011; themondayroom.com
Small wine bar attached to Public restaurant next door.

Madam Geneva

4 Bleecker St, East Village
T: 212 254 0350; madamgeneva-nyc.com
The best gin cocktails in town – and the largest selection of gins –in this bar attached to Double Crown restaurant.

Food Shops

Porchetta

110 East 7th St, East Village
T: 212 777 2161; porchettanyc.com
All things porky cooked on the rotisserie – sandwiches, soup and more – the roast rolled pork with fennel pollen and garlic is amazing.

Dean + Deluca

560 Broadway, SoHo
T: 212 430 8300; deandeluca.com
One of the definitive and most sophisticated food stores in NYC.

Whole Foods

95 East Houston St, LES
T: 212 420 1320; wholefoodsmarket.com
"Green" supermarket that stocks a huge range of organic products and fresh produce, cheese, breads and ready-made food to eat in or take out.

Russ + Daughters

179 East Houston St, LES
T: 212 475 4800; russanddaughters.com
Jewish delicatessen with large range of smoked salmon and gravlax, pastries and pantry essentials. My local shop during my last visit.

Katz's Delicatessen

205 East Houston St, LES
T: 212 254 2246; katzdeli.com
Legendary NY landmark; grab a hot dog or one of the biggest sandwiches you can put your mouth around – act local and order pastrami.

Murray's Cheeses

254 Bleecker St, West Village
T: 212 243 3289; murrayscheese.com
The city's best-known cheese shop – produce from all over the world.


Ciao Bella Gelato

285 Mott St, NoLita
T: 212 431 3591; ciaobellagelato.com
Great gelati to grab on your way home after dinner or just because.

Tuckshop

28 East 1st St, East Village
T: 212 979 5200; tuckshopnyc.com.
Australian owner makes various pies on site – the chicken one is my fave. Pike's Riesling by the glass, Coopers Ale, lamingtons, vanilla slices also on offer.

Magnolia Bakery

401 Bleecker St, West Village
T: 212 462 2572; magnoliabakery.com
The shop that started the cupcake craze, spawning many copycats (across NYC and the world). There's a limit to how many you can buy. 



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