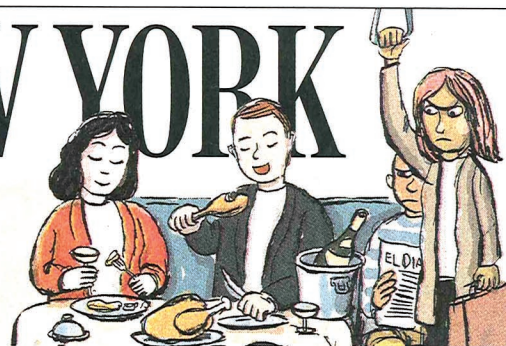


GREATER NEW YORK

Unwelcome Subway Fare

Food Consumption Galls Straphangers **IN THE BOROUGHS A20**



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PROPERTY

BLOCK PARTY | By Laura Kusisto

Eateries Cross the Bridge to Williamsburg

In a New York real-estate fantasy come true, young foodies driven from the East Village by rising apartment rents are seeing some of their old restaurant favorites appear in their new neighborhood, Williamsburg.

Lower East Side and East Village favorites, including Vanessa's Dumpling House, Mama's Food Shop, Momofuku and Caracas Arepa Bar, have all opened new locations in Will-

iamsburg recently. For foodies it's like living the dream: taking their favorite restaurants and transplanting them to a cheaper neighborhood.

"Walking down Bedford is really similar to walking down the Lower East Side any given night," said Brian Whitton, a 27-year-old who runs a marketing agency. "It is actually a better time than the Lower East Side because the river keeps out the Meatpacking crowd,"

he said.

Mr. Whitton lived on the Lower East Side for a couple of years before moving recently to Greenpoint, where he often journeys to nearby Williamsburg for cuisine.

He concedes the move has required culinary sacrifices, but the loss of some of his favorite restaurants was partially offset when one of his Lower East Side mainstays, the Meatball Shop, opened a location on Bedford Avenue in July.

In fact he says he likes the new spot better. On the Lower East Side, "it is a madhouse and you can never get a table. This one is 2½ times the size and I've got a table a couple of times," Mr. Whitton said.

Michael Chernow, a Meatball Shop co-owner, said the decision to expand into Williamsburg was simple. "We live out there [and] we love the neighborhood," he said.

The trend was highlighted this week when Max, an East Village favorite for hearty pasta and other Italian dishes, rented space at Driggs Avenue and South Second Street.

Luigi Iasilli, an owner, wrote in an email that he plans to close the East Village location as the neighborhood is getting "slow."

"I finally found what I believe I was looking for," he said of his Williamsburg site. "For me, [it is] going back to the roots, small space, \$3,000 rent, a small yard, a mixed ethnic neighborhood with only a bodega across the street."

Peter Levitan, a broker with Lee & Associates NYC, said retail rents are significantly lower, ranging from \$30 to \$80 a square foot, compared with \$100 to \$150 a square foot.

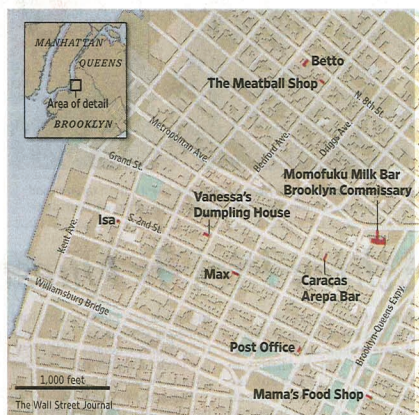
For other longtime Manhattan restaurateurs, the cheaper rents allow them to experiment with new concepts with less risk involved. Owners who made their mark in the East Village have opened places in Williamsburg, such as Betto and Isa.

Alla Lapushchik, who helped open village night-life favorite Death & Co., struck out on her own with Post Office on Havemeyer Street, which serves 100 kinds of whiskey.

"The rent is a little more forgiving," said Ms. Lapushchik. "When you're not super stressed because your rent is \$10,000 a month, you can focus on the parts that you like."



Williamsburg's Post Office, above, with a sample of its wallpaper, below, was opened by a veteran of an East Village night spot. Bottom, the Meatball Shop has opened a Williamsburg eatery.



As Williamsburg's warehouses have made way for luxury condos, some locals have decried the neighborhood's transformation into a more mainstream, family-friendly place.

An influx of Manhattan restaurants could be taken as more evidence of the loss of Williamsburg's unique flavor. But Mr. Whitton, the recent Lower East Side transplant, welcomes the addition of familiar spots.

"If I knew a place I recognized, I would probably go there because I knew it and I trusted it and I've been there before," he said.

