

PROFILE &gt; Brooklyn

# Set the Table

Brooklyn's bustin' out with new restaurants serving their own unique flavor.

by **Caroline Tiger**

A wave of young, creative restaurateurs is redefining the borough's dining scene. Their hallmarks are local, organic, sustainably farmed ingredients and approachable menus served in cozy, nonpretentious settings.

Featuring New American cuisine at its finest, the menu at Saul in Boerum Hill reflects the seasons. Expect entrees like sautéed turbot with crushed Yukon gold potatoes and asparagus, or pan-roasted rib eye with a garlic-potato puree. Save room for dessert: The Baked Alaska is a signature item, served with coffee and vanilla ice cream and a dark-chocolate cookie.

Restaurateurs Lisa and Saul Bolton opened Saul in 1999. Rents were cheaper than in Manhattan, where he had cooked with star chefs David Bouley and Eric Ripert at Bouley and Le Bernardin. Now his restaurant is one of three in Brooklyn to have earned a Michelin star. (And do check out the other two: Dressler and Peter Luger.)

Another veteran of the Manhattan-restaurant scene, Doug Crowell left his gig as the general manager of Blue Water Grill to open Buttermilk Channel. Looking for something smaller and closer to home, he saw his opportunity in a bakery for sale in Carroll Gardens.

"I talked to a lot of people in the neighborhood about what they want-

The interior of Michelin-starred Dressler features intricate metalwork.



ed," Crowell says. "They wanted reasonably priced food so they could come back and eat once or twice a week."

The result is a humble eatery with local flavor. Crowell bought the church-pew seating on Craigslist and found vases at neighborhood sales. Local designer Ralph Gorham constructed the communal dining table from beams reclaimed from a Red Hook factory. Twists on comfort food, such as duck meatloaf, along with fresh mozzarella and Italian sausages from neighborhood landmarks Caputo's and Esposito's, keep diners lined up for more.

But Crowell's place is just one example of new restaurants mushrooming all over the borough. Its lively dining scene stokes a steady flow of foodie pilgrims. Officials have even devoted a week to food: Dine in Brooklyn Week, March 23–April 1.

Still, newcomers are nothing, well, new. They've been reinventing Brooklyn's culinary scene since the Dutch arrived in the 1600s and named the place for their native Breukelen. By 1855, almost half of Brooklyn's 205,000 residents were foreign-born, largely from western Europe. Today, the 2.5 million residents represent more than

160 ethnicities.

"The history of Brooklyn and food has much to do with the settling of all these immigrants in different neighborhoods," says Annie Hauck-Lawson, associate professor of health and nutrition at Brooklyn College and co-editor of *Gastropolis: Food and New York City*.

In each ethnic enclave, mom-and-pop restaurants and specialty stores opened to provide ingredients for home cooks and to serve food that reminded residents of home. Not so long ago, smoked fish, lox and bagels were plentiful in Williamsburg. And for Southern soul food, Bedford-Stuyvesant was the place to be. In Bay Ridge, you could buy a whole baby lamb in a Greek food store to rotisserie in your backyard. "But Brooklyn is always changing," Hauck-Lawson says. "There's an exchange of people that takes place, and along with it an exchange of food and flavors."

To a lifelong Brooklynite like her, getting excited about eating in Brooklyn is a no-brainer. "We always knew the borough was special," she says, "because of its diversity and because it's always shifting. It's always an adventure to explore."