



RED HOOK AWAKENS

WHAT MAY BE BROOKLYN'S MOST MYSTERIOUS AND AUTHENTIC NEIGHBORHOOD, RED HOOK CELEBRATES THE ARTISTIC, THE FORGOTTEN, THE ROMANTIC. NOW THAT YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS SPECIAL PLACE, TAKE GREAT CARE NOT TO SPOIL IT. PLEASE.

BY MALLORY KASDAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FAHNON BENNETT EXCLUSIVELY FOR **ELLIMAN**

FASHIONABLY LIGHT "I was driving down the street and saw Karl Lagerfeld scouting for a shoot and asked him, 'What are you doing here?' And he said, 'The light, the light is so beautiful.' He's right—it is beautiful," says Red Hook resident, Vivian Outlaw Adler; (OPPOSITE) Luxury automaker, Tesla, is now open in Red Hook.

ELLIMAN



It's a drizzly Wednesday night in Red Hook, Brooklyn. I'm dining at The Good Fork, a cozy spot that feels like the inside of a swanky but well-loved boat—with a sleek low wooden ceiling and subtle nautical touches throughout. I get a childlike thrill from the heavy pulley on the restroom door that makes it slide open and closed, and from watching the action in the tiny kitchen visible beyond the bar. The food is Korean inflected, the contractor and chef are husband and wife co-owners and my pork ramen and blood orange Margarita are delightful. A couple next to us wear hats—he, a modified bowler; she, a snazzy red beret. They order a slice of Key Lime Pie delivered in from Steve's, another Red Hook business just down the block off the pier, and clink "cheers" with their forks before digging in. The place is filled but not cramped, fun but not rowdy, elegant but still cool. In short, it's a perfect neighborhood joint.

But Red Hook isn't your average Brooklyn neighborhood. On any given day in this quirky waterfront village, you can visit the whiskey distillery, Widow Jane, watch the sun set over

the Statue of Liberty, get a banjo lesson at Jalopy, enjoy chicken liver pâté and day drink at beloved gastro pub Fort Defiance, attend a lecture on winter survival skills from an artist camping out in his backyard at Pioneer Works, quaff a perfectly crafted cocktail with custom ice-cubes at drinks emporium, Seabourn, or listen to world renowned players jam at legendary dive bar, Sunny's Bar.

Residents and business owners describe Red Hook as a small town where people know one another and prioritize helping their neighbors, whether it's shopping in each other's stores, frequenting neighbors' restaurants and bars or helping a teenager to secure an internship or a resident or business owner get back on his feet after a storm. There's a real sense of

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community here. Before major businesses such as Fairway and IKEA showed up, in 2006 and 2008 respectively, and brought attention to Red Hook as another Brooklyn neighborhood on the rise, artists and residents quietly lived and worked here, and there is an inherent respect for those who've been here all along. Residents new and old attend community board meetings—they care about what's coming down the pike—and many of the neighborhood's nonprofits actively keep an eye on those living in the Red Hook Houses, the second largest housing project in NYC.

But there is also major development in the works, and this moment feels like a crossroads in the history of this gritty, groovy and decidedly storied place. The robust arts scene, helmed by Pioneer Works, a non-profit arts and culture center, is bringing an organized focus and cross-pollination to the many working artists here. On the business side, several new luxury residential buildings are underway, sold out soon after they're announced despite record-breaking asking prices per square foot. Plans to adapt the massive piers along the water into media, arts and cultural campuses, as well as additional ferry service from here to Manhattan and other parts of Brooklyn will undoubtedly change the face of a neighborhood that, despite the slow roll of gentrification over the past 20 plus years, has mostly enjoyed staying out of the spotlight.

Painter Vivian Outlaw Adler arrived in Red Hook eight years ago. "We initially felt like we were moving to a certain kind of seaside town or somewhere quiet in the country. It felt like we were on vacation," she says. "But at the same time, the artist community we found

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LITTLE BIG TOWN Residents and business owners describe Red Hook as a small town where people know one another and prioritize helping their neighbors, like the Brooklyn one would imagine existed decades ago.

was a crazy scene and so much fun—there were barbecues every night, people were even roasting whole pigs out on the street! It felt almost utopian—there was a lot of bartering between people, that kind of thing."

Now Adler, who lives with her husband and their two kids, has a studio down the road and shows her paintings in her friends' restaurant, Home/Made, and the event space, Atelier Roquette. Adler feels the neighborhood's growth has dovetailed with their lifestyle—mostly. "We have our own version of Sesame Street here," she says. "One day I was driving down the street and I saw Karl Lagerfeld from Chanel standing there, in his glasses and leather gloves, scouting for a shoot. I rolled down my window and was like, 'What are you doing here?' And he said, in his accent, 'The light... the light is so beautiful.' It was crazy, but he's right. It is beautiful. And then I took my daughter to Fairway to get stuff for dinner."

When I meet Red Hook resident and real estate agent Patty LaRocco at

Hometown BBQ on a freezing Thursday afternoon, it's empty aside from a camera crew shooting a TV segment there, a very common occurrence in Brooklyn these days. The enormous space, a walk-up barbecue joint complete with craft beers, locally made wine and live music, is filled with natural light and smells fantastic—a combination of smoke, meat and garlic. The owner, Billy Durney, pit master and Brooklyn guy, talks to the camera about brining chicken, charming the crew before heading off to wash the muck off his hands. When Durney first opened Hometown in 2013, he smoked 400 pounds of meat and gave it all away to his neighbors—it was "come and get it" until it was gone. Hometown indeed.



It's bitterly cold, the wind whipping off the waterfront, so LaRocco and I jump into my car and she directs me off road to a huge, red painted warehouse at 202 Coffey Street, which has housed production shoots for the new HBO show *Vinyl*. The space will eventually be the site of a giant arts and media operation.

Next, we cruise over to Pioneer Works, a beautifully restored, massive manufacturing warehouse that now serves as a gallery, educational center and event space for the arts. Founded in 2012 by artist Dustin Yellin, the center offers a rich range of projects that span visual arts, film, music, science and education.

Next door is Yellin's studio, where assistants scrape glass planes that form the foundation of his oversized glass and layered

paper sculptures. His crew is prepping for an opening that night in the gallery space. It's breathtaking—like a painstakingly refurbished barn, with beautiful wood, brick and exposed beams throughout. There are meetings taking place in the upstairs offices and everyone is buzzing around the glow of laptops in

clusters. The show opening tonight, called FLOOD, is the work of a sculptor named Charles Harlan, and includes a waterfall-type sculpture made of chain-link fence dripping from the three-story cathedral ceiling. I can't wait to come back for one of the monthly Sunday open studios, especially

in the summer when the beautiful attached sculpture garden is open.

Back in the car, LaRocco points out the Robotic Church, a musical performance space flanked by two single-family homes



on a cobblestone side street off of Van Brundt, Red Hook's main drag. Inside, the place is rigged by robots that perform music composed by the artist Chico MacMurtrie. It strikes me how art is everywhere in this neighborhood, and how, behind the doors of this unlikely building, an entire creative world exists. It's weird, wonderful and—to my mind—what continues to keep places like Red Hook so unique.

On another sunny winter weekday, I'm back in Red Hook meeting a friend at Fort Defiance, a pub on Van Brundt Street. As I walk in, a man is falling off his barstool, literally. He's not drunk—he just slipped—and people all over the restaurant rush to help him up. There are several man buns in my sightline and guys with ironic sweaters and chunky silver jewelry talking about funding. It feels like a *New Yorker* cartoon without the caption. I order a delicious bowl of lentil soup and some fantastic deviled eggs. My friend arrives—she's having a tough morning and she requests a hot toddy, which seems absolutely appropriate. After lunch, we head across the street to check out a few of the boutiques that line Van Brundt.

The Record Store is all San-Francisco-circa-1977 vibe—green plants, mid-century modern chairs and the proprietor, Bene Coopersmith, spinning records in the windowed storefront space across from a public school playground. An eclectic vinyl collection spanning '80s fitness, soul, funk, reggae and many other categories I can't really categorize invites not just browsing, but pulling up a chair and staying a while, as does a turntable just for guests to sample the wares. The second time I go in, he's teaching guitar to a tween but allows me to shop quietly. I find a copy of *The Grateful Dead's American Beauty* and consider it, though I don't have a turntable. Then, I consider a turntable.

Foxy and Winston is a gift store filled with items I would love to receive. Jane Buck, the proprietor who lives down the

street, has been in this space, which is cozy and artfully layered with drool-worthy items for kids and adults, for nearly seven years. Her beagle sits happily in a box beneath her desk, Joni Mitchell is on Spotify and the store houses beautiful objects—turquoise mermaid bookends, decoupage trays and paperweights, cozy and bright cashmere socks, handmade stuffed animals and handmade (by Jane) stationery and textiles. I fall in love with some wooden voice recorders and discover they're crafted in Red Hook by a company called Brand New Noise. I had to meet the person who

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designed something so clever and cool. Turns out, he's just down the street. Of course he is.

Brand New Noise is Richard Upchurch. A former touring musician, visual artist and audio recordist, Upchurch initially made the first of these cool, battery powered audio boxes, along the lines of an old school tape recorder but cuter, for his nephew. His nephew's teachers loved it, so he made a bunch more for them. “I've met very few people who looked at these boxes and weren't like, ‘These are awesome! I just have to explain what they are,’” he says, sitting in his tidy woodworking studio amongst his

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cartoon-like creations and Mason jars full of beads, knobs, nails and screws.

Today, Upchurch, who's collaborated with musicians like The Black Keys, sells his recorders in the Museum of Modern Art store and in record, music and gift shops across the country. But he makes all of his creations from scratch here (last year he built 10,000 boxes) with the help of paid high school interns from the neighborhood. The internships are set up through several organizations, including Good Shepherd Services and Exalt Youth Red Hook. Mentoring kids from the community and teaching them small business skills is a crucial part of Upchurch's work ethic. He's creating an environment where the kids feel part of the team and take pride in the work—it's genuinely inspiring.

Upchurch appreciates Red Hook's communal vibe and the general interest of its residents. “The first day I was here, setting up my studio, people just walked by outside and asked me, ‘Who are you and what are you doing here?’” he says. “And that's what the neighborhood is like.”

After taking my leave, I walk across the street to Fairway, which is the thing I'm most used to doing in Red Hook. Yes, it's grocery shopping, but even this is pretty special. On a summer weekend, I bring my family and we eat lunch outside, taking in the harbor and the boats streaming by, the kids throwing rocks into the Erie Basin. There's something I've always loved about driving to Fairway, parking in a lot like a civilized person and shopping in a large space where the signage is clever and the people care deeply about cheese. There's attitude, a point of view, soul...and a bunch of characters there, just like in the neighborhood it calls home. **■**

