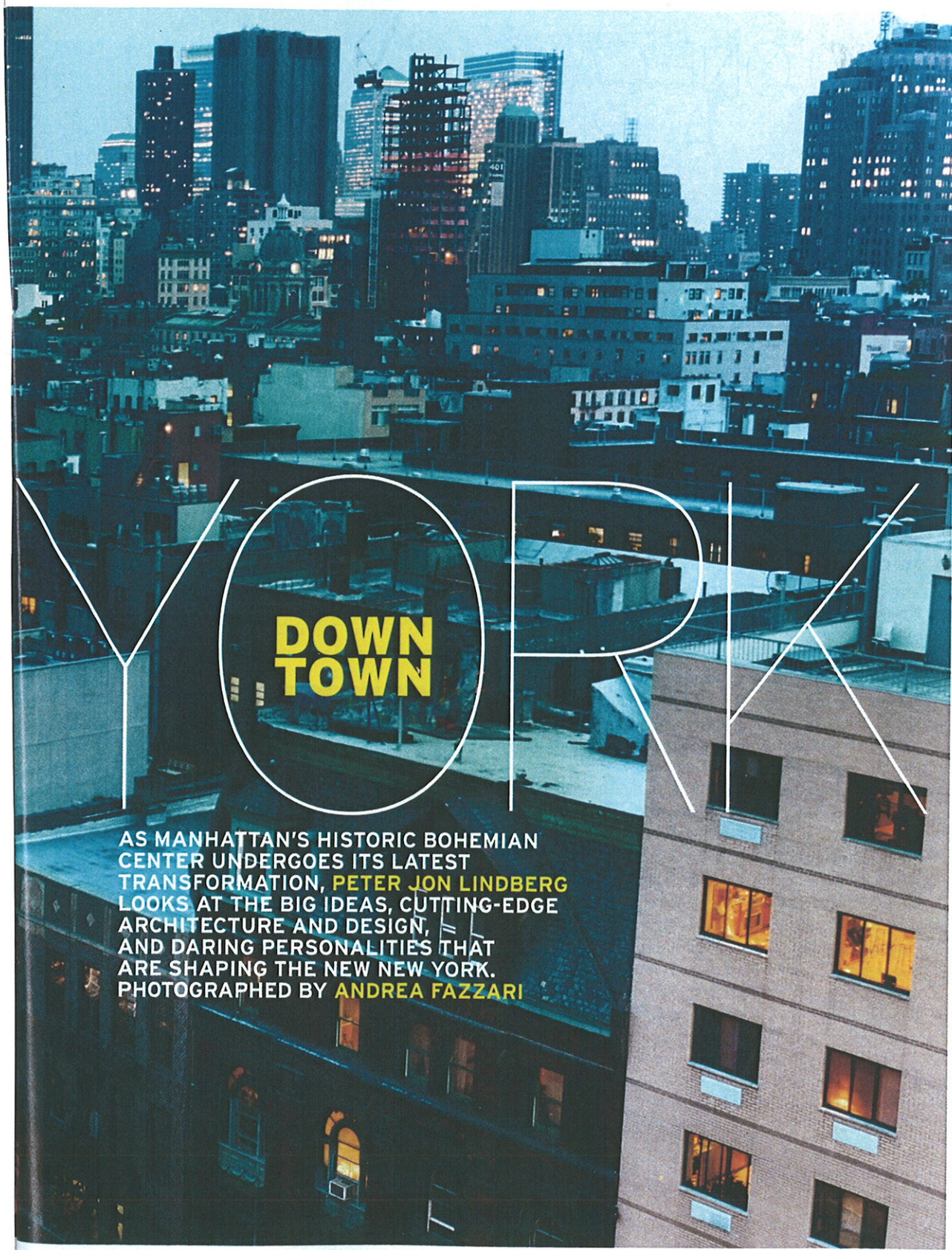


Lower Manhattan at dusk, as seen from the New Museum, on the Bowery.





DOWN TOWN

AS MANHATTAN'S HISTORIC BOHEMIAN CENTER UNDERGOES ITS LATEST TRANSFORMATION, **PETER JON LINDBERG** LOOKS AT THE BIG IDEAS, CUTTING-EDGE ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN, AND DARING PERSONALITIES THAT ARE SHAPING THE NEW NEW YORK. PHOTOGRAPHED BY **ANDREA FAZZARI**

NO ONE CAN AGREE PRECISELY WHEN IT STARTED, LET ALONE WHERE IT STARTS.

SOUTH OF HOUSTON STREET? 14TH? 23RD?

Does it include the farther-flung galleries of Chelsea? The Financial District? Do the leafier blocks of the West Village still count, or are check-cashing joints and graffiti a prerequisite? Some say Downtown New York is less a place than an idea, more about sensibility than geography. (For the purposes of our discussion, let's call it the swath between 14th and Chambers Streets, from the Hudson to the East River.)

The one thing New Yorkers can agree on is that Downtown just *feels* different. You sense it the minute you cross that disputed border. Few cityscapes have such recognizable iconography—the cast-iron façades of SoHo, the Belgian block-paved lanes of TriBeCa, the water towers punctuating rooflines like squat wooden rocket ships, the hoardings plastered with dance-mix ads, the congee joints and Puerto Rican bodegas, the bodega that last Tuesday became a bistro.

Funky. Gritty. Hip. Eccentric. Indie. Irreverent. Cool. The prefix *Downtown* has come to connote all sorts of things, not all of them endemic to Lower Manhattan. Downtown's attitude and aesthetic have been codified, commodified, and sold in a million pieces, such that any clued-in kid visiting from the mainland can dress the part and pass as a local. And while it's still the de facto hub, Downtown no longer corners the counter-cultural market in New York. Artists, designers, and musicians—and the galleries, shops, and clubs that support them—are increasingly drawn to the cheaper reaches of way-Uptown and the outer boroughs. It's a sign of the times that most of New York's top rock acts (MGMT; TV on the Radio; the National; the Yeah Yeah Yeahs; Santigold; the Hold Steady) are based in Brooklyn.

You might conclude that the bohemian culture Downtown nurtured as its own has up and moved elsewhere. No question, this isn't the Lower Manhattan of your uncle's hard-core band. Money, both corporate and private, plays more of a role here than ever: the median price of a two-bedroom condo is \$1.37 million, compared with \$315,000 in 1993. Not even 9/11 could knock Downtown off its gentrifying trajectory. Today, the area has far fewer art galleries, far fewer poetry clubs, and six American Apparel stores. It is markedly easier to buy eye shadow than a New York Dolls record.

Yet underneath the spit-shine gloss—in the cracks between La Perla and L'Occitane—that churning, inventive, pioneering spirit improbably surges on. You can see it in the young provocateurs of fashion, art, and design who followed their muse to Lower Manhattan, in spite of the costs. You can hear it at experimental music venues like (Le) Poisson Rouge and the Stone (run by avant-garde hero and longtime Downtowner John Zorn). You can knock it back in the innovative new breed of cocktail bars—including PDT, Pegu Club, Mayahuel, and Death & Co.—that are transforming New York nightlife. Downtown has become the anchor of the city's restaurant scene, as well as the preferred location for new hotels. And after decades in the doldrums, New York is finally back to creating bold new architecture, much of it below 14th Street: Witness the fabulous New Museum, opened in 2007 on the Bowery, and, nearby, the soon-to-rise headquarters for the Sperone Westwater gallery, designed by Norman Foster. Even those interloping luxury brands and national chains are copping a Downtown edge:



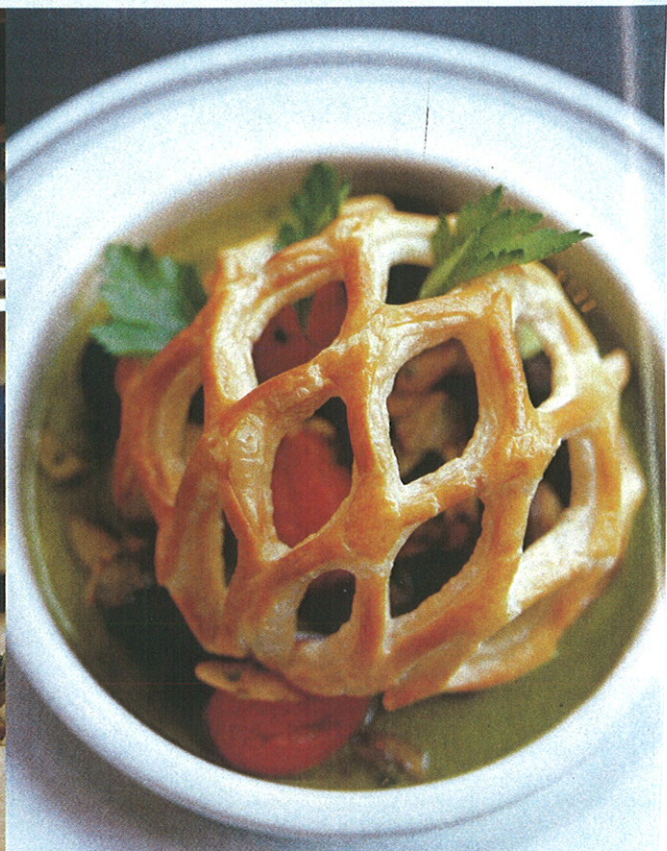
Designers Carol Lim and Humberto Leon at their Opening Ceremony store on the once-remote Howard Street, near Chinatown.

TRAVEL + LEISURE

October 2009



Fresh New York Clockwise from above left: Artist and 34-year Downtown resident Laurie Simmons inside the New Museum, on the Bowery; Daniel Boulud's new DBGB Kitchen & Bar restaurant; escargots at DBGB; chef April Bloomfield in the test kitchen of her pioneering West Village gastropub, the Spotted Pig.



"DOWNTOWN CONNOTES A RAFFISH, UNBATHED, COUNTERCULTURAL SENSIBILITY—WHAT REPUBLICANS WOULD CALL 'EDGY.' IN NEW YORK IT'S ALL OF THAT, PLUS IT'S GEOGRAPHICALLY ACCURATE." — GRAYDON CARTER

The New Museum, on the Bowery,
with Swiss artist Ugo
Rondinone's *Hell, Yes!* installation.



consider Derek Lam's striking new SoHo store, by Japanese firm SANAA (who also designed the New Museum), or J.Crew's actually-quite-hip men's emporium in TriBeCa, the Liquor Store (co-conceived by Andy Spade).

"If one reads anything about the history of New York, one sees that it's a whole different city every ten years," says Sean MacPherson, who, with the Bowery Hotel, has done plenty to define the current phase. I'd say his timetable is off by about, oh, 10 years. These days, Downtown changes itself every other week.

MORE THAN MOST PARTS OF NEW YORK, DOWNTOWN

readily evokes Then and Now, Before and After. History is forever bursting to the surface here, like the underlayers of subway posters for last season's blockbusters. For this reason Downtown also evokes in its denizens a keen sense of nostalgia, usually of the pessimistic sort: *Everything went downhill after Florent/CBGB/the Mudd Club closed. Alphabet City was better when it was just artists and dealers and thieves. TriBeCa was better when it didn't exist.* I moved to Manhattan at age 24—in time to catch Jeff Buckley at Sin-é but too late to glimpse Basquiat chalk-painting sidewalks. Whenever you arrived, it seems, you were either too late or too old.

A favorite lament concerns the Fall of SoHo—where, eight years ago, in a metaphor too preposterous to make up, the Downtown branch of the Guggenheim Museum was replaced by a Prada store. It's true that SoHo's most recent metamorphosis is startling even in a city defined by metamorphoses. But too often we neglect the long view—and across its history, the curious expanse between Houston and Canal Streets has seen plenty of ebbs and flows. Mostly farmland in the 18th century, it became, by 1825, one of the richest and most densely populated neighborhoods in Manhattan. John Jacob Astor was a principal landowner. But trendiness had its drawbacks. The 1860's saw an influx of high-end retail—Tiffany; Lord & Taylor—that forced out a quarter of its residents. (Does any of this sound familiar?) It was at this time that SoHo's iconic architecture took shape: the grandly ornamented commercial buildings and warehouses clad in cast iron. But in the 1890's retailers began relocating Uptown, and SoHo spiraled into decline; through the first half of the 20th century it became a wasteland known as Hell's Hundred Acres.

"The Fluxus artist George Maciunas really pioneered SoHo as a place to live and work," explains Lisa Phillips, director of SoHo's New Museum. Starting on Wooster Street in 1967, Maciunas set up co-ops in disused cast-iron buildings. So began the rise of New York's most famous artists' colony. "It was about more than just affordable space," Phillips says. "It was about seeing beauty in unconventional environments—living in those interzones, in places that people wouldn't normally think of as appropriate or safe."

It's easy to forget how desolate the city used to feel south of Houston Street. In 1970, TriBeCa had only 243 residents. Today, it has 26,151. Downtown still came off as a wild, vaguely menacing frontier as late as 1985, when Martin Scorsese shot his cult

classic *After Hours* here. The film starred Griffin Dunne as an Uptown Mr. Jones lost down the rabbit hole of pre-hedge fund SoHo and TriBeCa. In the course of one long night he's accosted by burglars and mohawked punks, flummoxed by a kinky sculptress, chased by an angry mob, and ultimately sent back to Midtown encased in plaster of paris.

"At the time it was all just called Downtown," Dunne recalls. "Terms like NoHo, TriBeCa, and Nolita hadn't taken form yet. And it was truly a no-man's-land. There was no traffic to block—we would shoot all night long and no one would bother us."

You certainly couldn't find a place to spend the night back then, unless you count three-dollar SRO's. High-end hotels were scarce Downtown until the mid-90's, when a handful of boutique properties made inroads. Now they're on every other block. The past 18 months have ushered in Robert De Niro's Greenwich Hotel, in TriBeCa; Sean MacPherson's cheap-chic Jane Hotel, in the West Village; André Balazs's the Standard, New York; the Cooper Square Hotel, designed by Carlos Zapata Studio; and the just-opened Crosby Street Hotel, in SoHo, the first stateside property from London's ever-stylish Firmdale group.

Downtown's hotel boom has helped to lure a relatively new demographic over the past decade: tourists. Indeed, some weekends there appear to be more visitors on Spring Street than in Times Square. No surprise, either, for SoHo and its satellite neighborhoods have become retail destinations to rival Madison Avenue, with both global and homegrown brands, outsize designer flagships and back-alley boutiques cheek-by-jowl.

Today even Uptown girls stray as far south as (gasp!) Howard Street, on the grungy fringes of Chinatown, to peruse



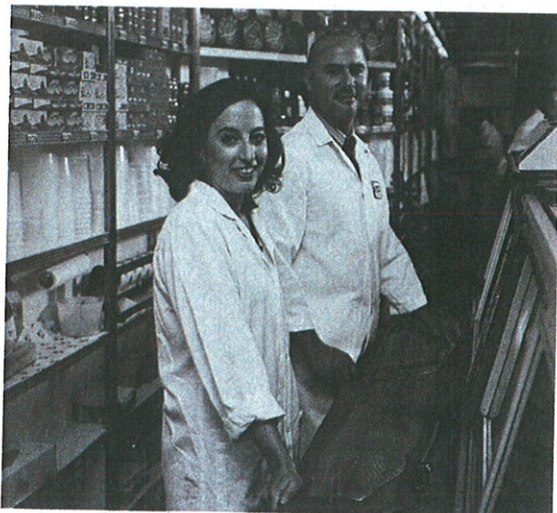
The new rock-and-roll-inspired John Varvatos store on the Bowery, occupying the former space of the iconic CBGB club.

the racks at Opening Ceremony. Carol Lim and Humberto Leon—U.C. Berkeley grads who'd worked for Bally and Burberry—cofounded the boutique in 2002, selling their own line of clothing alongside a mix of labels from Europe, Asia, and South America. A branch in Los Angeles followed. In August the duo opened an eight-story department store in Tokyo. But their hearts remain in Lower Manhattan, specifically the “alternate universe” of Howard Street.

“This is a tiny pocket of Old New York,” Lim tells me. “Even when we opened in 2002, it was deserted after 7 p.m.” Yet they found plenty of kindred spirits. “Up the block is E. Vogel, the 120-year-old custom shoe place; Ted Muehling, who’s made jewelry around here since the 90’s; and newer stores like De Vera and BDDW—it’s this incredible little street.”

THE CULINARY LANDSCAPE, TOO, HAS EXPLODED. IN

contrast to a decade ago, most of New York’s restaurants-of-the-moment—those that aren’t in Brooklyn—are below 14th Street: the Spotted Pig, Locanda Verde, the Waverly Inn & Garden, Elettaria, and the genre-defying, destination-defining restaurants of Keith McNally (including Balthazar, in SoHo; Pastis, in the Meatpacking District; Schiller’s Liquor Bar, on the Lower East Side; and the new Minetta Tavern, in Greenwich Village). And then there are the Lower East Side’s WD-50, where relentlessly innovative Wylie Dufresne conjures his metaphysical cuisine, and David Chang’s border-jumping Momofuku empire in the East Village. It’s hard to imagine these latter restaurants—defiantly casual, offbeat, often quite affordable—existing anywhere but Downtown. And its appeal—for both diners and restaurateurs—remains undiminished (if not enhanced) by the area’s gentrification. As Graydon Carter, co-owner of the Waverly Inn, says, “In any other city, *downtown* connotes a raffish, unbathed, counter-cultural sensibility—what Republicans would call ‘edgy.’ In New York it’s all of that, plus it’s geographically accurate.”



Niki Russ Federman and cousin John Russ Tupper in their family’s landmark 90-year-old Lower East Side food store, Russ & Daughters.

IT’S EASY TO FORGET HOW DESOLATE THE CITY USED TO FEEL SOUTH OF HOUSTON STREET.

Even Uptown chefs are migrating south. Daniel Boulud, whose namesake French restaurant sets the standard for Upper East Side fine dining, has arrived on the Bowery, of all places, with a resolutely informal, resoundingly loud boite called DBGB Kitchen & Bar. (Yes, the name is a pun on CBGB, whose former quarters are just up the block; the legendary rock club closed in 2006.) Hearing the Replacements blasting while sampling Boulud’s note-perfect charcuterie is quite the novelty. But if there’s a disconnect between his name and the neighborhood, Boulud doesn’t see it. “I’ve been a New Yorker for twenty-five years, and just happened to drop my suitcase Uptown,” he says. “I’ve been coming down here just as long—partying, visiting friends. So opening a restaurant here seemed natural.”

But Boulud might not have chosen this quirky strip were it not for the futuristic edifice looming down the street. The New Museum recalls a seven-story stack of gift boxes (an allusion to SoHo’s retail transformation?). The setting is incongruous: two blocks north of a shop with a sign proffering CASH REGISTERS, SLICERS, SCALES, BANDSAWS and two doors up from the Bowery Mission homeless shelter. Yet the museum embraces its context with an exuberant HELL, YES! (so reads the rainbow-colored sign on the façade, an installation by Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone). The purview is global, yet the curators are dedicated to exhibiting artists who still live and work in Downtown, such as the up-and-coming Corsican-born multimedia artist Agathe Snow and established artists like Laurie Simmons.

“We were keen to bring a great work of architecture to the city, and to this street specifically,” Phillips says. “The hope is that the Bowery will become a sort of laboratory for experimentation in architecture and design.” It’s certainly become a bona-fide tourist destination. And the museum has spurred an unexpected revival of the Bowery: besides DBGB and the Bowery Hotel, recent openings include Double Crown, a restaurant-lounge from design collective AvroKO; the clothing emporium Blue & Cream; Bowery Electric, a bar and rock club co-owned by musician Jesse Malin; a soon-to-debut pizzeria from McNally; and, in the former CBGB space, a splashy John Varvatos store.

Hold on, you say—the birthplace of punk rock is now a fashion boutique? Well, as Dave Navarro of Jane’s Addiction put it recently, “Better this than a Pinkberry.” To Varvatos’s credit, rock and roll has always been part of his brand’s aesthetic; he even

(Continued on page 191; see page 192 for the Guide)

DOWNTOWN NEW YORK

(Continued from page 176)

hosts a monthly music show on Sirius XM. The Detroit native vividly recalls his first trip to New York in 1977—a pilgrimage to see the Ramones at CBGB. Now, in CB's old digs, Varvatos embraces his inner rock geek: selling vintage vinyl, displaying punk memorabilia, staging free concerts, and treating the room less like a clothing store than, well, a club. "We see it as a cultural space," he says. "No way are we trying to emulate what was here before, but we wanted to keep to the history, and to keep music alive in the Bowery. We have a stage and a P.A., so on any given day, people show up and play—the guys from Cheap Trick, Ringo Starr, the New York Dolls." And plenty of curious young rock fans who aren't remotely interested in fashion drop in to the store just to see where CBGB once was.

DOWNTOWN IS A PLACE OF ENDLESS collisions and near-misses, where disparate worlds rub up against one another with remarkable familiarity. Here's Yonah Schimmel's bakery (opened in 1910) abutting an art-house cinema; there's the Bowery Hotel sidling up to a methadone clinic. In an East Village basement, the sultry speakeasy PDT hides behind an unmarked door in a hot dog joint, while over on the West Side, a derelict elevated freight railroad is abloom with flowers, transformed into the city's newest park.

The High Line—the former railroad in question—is an apt symbol for Downtown's quirky charms, struggles, and (continual) rebirth. Yet were it not for the vision of two ordinary citizens, artist Robert Hammond and writer Joshua David, the High Line might be just a memory. Hammond moved to New York in 1993 and was captivated by the Meatpacking District and West Chelsea—semi-industrial areas "that weren't traditionally beautiful, that some consider eyesores." The High Line in particular caught his imagination: a rusted jumble of steel girders, concrete, and shadlow that wound through Manhattan's far west side. Built in the 1930's, the 1.45-mile-

long railway had been unused since 1980 and was marked for demolition. At a community board hearing on the subject in 1999, Hammond met David, and the two founded Friends of the High Line, an advocacy group dedicated to saving the structure. FHL would go on to raise \$150 million to recast the railway as a pedestrian park.

"Downtown has more of the juxtapositions I love about New York—the glamorous and the gritty, the hard and the soft, the old and the new," Hammond says. "That's why I love the High Line: Who would have imagined a steel structure with wildflowers growing on top?" The first section of the park opened last spring to rave reviews.

"IT'S SPECIFICALLY A DOWNTOWN thing. It could go anywhere, but it makes more sense here." Andy Spade—founder of Jack Spade, husband of Kate, and all-around Renaissance man—is discussing his latest venture, Partners & Spade, an ephemera shop/exhibition space/creative consultancy headquartered on Great Jones Street. On any given day P&S's stock might include riding crops, antique globes, Super Balls, and a vintage photography book titled *Brokers with Hands on Their Faces*. For a time they also sold vintage guns. Oh, and live birds.

Spade remains dedicated to Downtown, but he admits misgivings. "It doesn't have as much diversity as it did, just because of how expensive it is to live and rent space here. I think half of Downtown has moved to Brooklyn," he says.

There are those who feel Downtown has betrayed itself—or, more to the point, them—in the name of mammon, that money has broken Downtown's spirit. Resentment over gentrification is nothing new, but it's grown increasingly bitter in the past 15 years. (That Guggenheim-



Cocktail entrepreneurs Phil Ward of Mayahuel tequila bar, Audrey Sanders of Pegu Club, Brian Miller of Death & Co., and Jim Meehan of PDT, inside Sanders's Burmese-themed bar, on Houston Street.

Prada switch didn't help.) "For the first time in Manhattan's history, it has no bohemian frontier," declared Adam Gopnik in *The New Yorker* in 2007. "Another bookstore closes, another theater becomes a condo, another soulful place becomes a sealed residence." MacPherson seconds Gopnik's alarm: "I often wonder, *Do we really need so many banks?*"

But if the effects of millennial prosperity were undeniable, the effects of recession are now plainly visible. Storefront vacancy rates in New York are at their highest since the early 1990's, and a full one in 10 retail spaces in SoHo are presently unoccupied. "With prices loosening up a little," MacPherson says, "there might be more room for more adventurous projects."

So will the softening of the real estate market spark a revival? Will poets and sculptors recolonize Lower Manhattan? Phillips is optimistic. "Downtown still represents the vanguard of the counterculture. There's still a lot of renegade thinking that takes place here—and the downtown is going to bring even more changes."

"Art and music do seem to be more inspired when people are struggling," Jesse Malin observes. "Downtown always needs that next kick in the ass." >>

KEY MOMENTS IN THE RISE & FALL (& RISE) OF DOWNTOWN NEW YORK

1651:

Peter Stuyvesant buys the Manhattan farm (or *bouwerij*) that gives the present-day Bowery its name.

1870:

The city's first openly gay bar, the Slide, opens on Bleecker Street.

1960's:

Robert "My Way Is the Highway" Moses plots to ram a six-lane expressway through SoHo. *Wanker!*

1967:

Joseph Papp's Public Theater, on Lafayette Street, opens with the world premiere of *Hair*.

1850's:

Bohemians—actual Bohemians, along with other Eastern Europeans fleeing the 1848 revolutions—settle the Lower East Side.



1902:

A Polish immigrant family pays \$4 a month for a 300-square-foot apartment on Delancey Street. A century later, a graphic designer shells out \$2,500 a month for the same space.

**CBGB
OMFUG**

1974:

The band Television plays the first notable rock show at CBGB, paving the way for Patti Smith, Richard Hell, the Ramones, Blondie, and Talking Heads.

DOWNTOWN NEW YORK

IF NOVELTY IS ONE OF THE ONLY constants in New York, there are also places whose constancy is the novelty. Places that have held on so long they might as well be preserved in vinegar. Places like Russ & Daughters, the Jewish “appetizing” shop that’s occupied the same Houston Street storefront since 1920. It’s the sort of spot where you might join a nonagenarian widow, a tattooed drummer, and Harvey Keitel in line for bagels and whitefish.

“All these hipsters who’ve settled in the neighborhood are now discovering us,” says Niki Russ Federman, the 31-year-old great-granddaughter of founder Joel Russ. “You’ll see them chatting with the grandmothers, sharing tips—‘Oh, you have to try the wasabi-roe and cream-cheese sandwich!’”

Federman remembers a wholly different neighborhood from her youth, when the Lower East Side was still dominated by working-class families. Its transformation into a trendsetters’ bastion is now complete, though traces of the Old World remain: in the cacophonous weekend marketplace on Orchard Street; in the discount underwear shops run by Orthodox Jews; in the brilliantly conceived Lower East Side Tenement Museum, which documents the era when this immigrants’ ghetto was the densest conurbation on earth.

Federman studied for an MBA at Yale and worked in international development and health care and as a yoga teacher until a few years ago, when she began to consider joining the family business. She got an unexpected boost from a Downtown icon. “I was at a friend’s party, and Lou Reed happened to be there,” she recalls. “I’d brought some hors d’oeuvres from Russ & Daughters, and Lou was hovering around the table, devouring the smoked salmon. Someone finally told him who I was. He marched right over and shook my hand and said ‘Niki, I just wanted to say—you’re New York royalty.’ Lou Reed! I almost dropped on the floor.”

And when Lou Reed speaks, Downtowners listen. Not long afterward she started work at the shop. +

GUIDE: THE NEW DOWNTOWN NYC

STAY

Bowery Hotel 335 Bowery; 212/505-9100; theboweryhotel.com; doubles from \$425.

Cooper Square Hotel 25 Cooper Square; 888/251-7979; thecoopersquarehotel.com; doubles from \$425.

Crosby Street Hotel 79 Crosby St.; 212/226-6400; crosbystreethotel.com; doubles from \$525.

Greenwich Hotel 377 Greenwich St.; 877/888-1255; thegreenwichhotel.com; doubles from \$475.

Jane Hotel 113 Jane St.; 212/924-6700; thejanenyc.com; doubles from \$114.

The Standard, New York 848 Washington St.; 212/645-4646; standardhotels.com; doubles from \$295.

EAT

Balthazar 80 Spring St.; 212/941-0364; dinner for two \$100.

DBGB Kitchen & Bar 299 Bowery; 212/933-5300; dinner for two \$80.

Double Crown 316 Bowery; 212/254-0350; dinner for two \$120.

Elettaria 33 W. Eighth St.; 212/677-3833; dinner for two \$110.

Locanda Verde Greenwich Hotel; 377 Greenwich St.; 212/925-3797; dinner for two \$110.

Minetta Tavern 113 MacDougal St.; 212/475-3850; dinner for two \$98.

Momofuku Ssam Bar 207 Second Ave.; 212/254-3500; dinner for two \$80.

Pastis 9 Ninth Ave.; 212/929-4844; dinner for two \$140.

Russ & Daughters 179 E.

Houston St.; 212/475-4880; lunch for two \$22.

Schiller's Liquor Bar 131 Rivington St.; 212/260-4555; dinner for two \$70.

Spotted Pig 314 W. 11th St.; 212/620-0393; dinner for two \$120.

Standard Grill The Standard, New York; 848 Washington St.; 212/645-4100; dinner for two \$80.

Waverly Inn & Garden 16 Bank St.; 212/243-7900; dinner for two \$100.

WD-50 50 Clinton St.; 212/477-2900; dinner for two \$124.

SHOP

Blue & Cream 1 E. First St.; 212/533-3088.

Derek Lam 12 Crosby St.; 212/966-1616.

J.Crew's Liquor Store 235 W. Broadway; 212/226-5476.

John Varvatos 315 Bowery; 212/358-0315.

Opening Ceremony 35 Howard St.; 212/219-2688.

Partners & Spade 40 Great Jones St.; 646/861-2827.

AFTER DARK

Bowery Electric 327 Bowery; 212/228-0228.

Death & Co. 433 E. Sixth St.; 212/388-0882.

(Le) Poisson Rouge 158 Bleecker St.; 212/228-4854; lepoissonrouge.com.

Mayhuel 304 E. Sixth St.; 212/253-5888.

Milk & Honey 134 Eldridge St.; milkandhoneyreservations@gmail.com.

PDT 113 St. Marks Place; 212/614-0386.

Pegu Club 77 W. Houston St.; 212/473-7348.

The Stone Corner of Ave. C and Second St.; no phone; thestonenyc.com.

SEE & DO

High Line Entrances on Gansevoort St., 14th St., 16th St., 18th St., and 20th St.; 212/500-6035; thehighline.org.

Lower East Side Tenement Museum 91 Orchard St.; 212/431-0233; tenement.org.

New Museum 235 Bowery; 212/219-1222; newmuseum.org.

For a full guide to Downtown New York, visit travelandleisure.com.



1982:

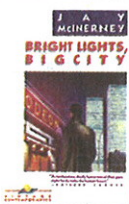
NYC's Loft Law finally allows residential use of former commercial/industrial properties, giving Downtown artists a much-needed legal footing.

1997:

Balthazar opens, hardly anyone notices. “Table for two at eight this Friday? No problem!”

2001:

Guggenheim Museum SoHo closes; becomes a Prada store. Designed by Rem Koolhaas. But still.



1984:

Bright Lights, Big City glamorizes coke-fueled Downtown nightlife, sets stage for eventual invasion of TriBeCa by young bankers who only saw the movie.



2007:

Opening of the **New Museum**, the first-ever art museum to be constructed from the ground up in Lower Manhattan.

2009:

The **High Line** debuts to wild acclaim, with would-be visitors queuing up for wristbands. (Some mistakenly believe it's a club.)