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Harlem happenings: Summer 2017 restaurants - by Faith Hope Consolo

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Where it's happening in Harlem is in the kitchen, with more new restaurants opening this season across all the neighborhood's enclaves, and to the acclaim of the gourmands of New York City.

Fresh off the third installment of The Harlem EatUp! Festival, which hosted more chefs (63), more artists and performers (36), more restaurant exhibitors and community organizations (45), and more eager foodies than ever, the numbers attest to the dynamism that is Harlem's dining scene today.

The Main Stage, in Morningside Park, was the site of cooking demonstrations by Harlem's culinary superheroes. Chef Marcus Samuelsson, of the nationally renowned Red Rooster and the new Streetbird Rotisserie; Darryl Burnette, chef of Belle Harlem, the neighborhood's first chef table; and Karl Franz Williams from haute Caribbean Solomon & Kuff, wowed the crowds, while thousands sampled from the booths set up as The Harlem Stroll in the park.

More upmarket, the Dine In Harlem series where private dinner parties with tasting menus created by each restaurant's chef, partnered with a guest chef, plus wine pairings and entertainment. Some of the best parties were thrown by executive chef Joseph "JJ" Johnson at Minton's, merged with adjacent The Cecil since January; the classic Ginny's Supper Club; LoLo's Seafood Shack, Harlem's home of creative Caribbean street eats; and Indian fusion spot Chaiwali Harlem.

All this fine food is boosting Harlem's foot traffic and tourist visits, from both around the world, and just around the city. This summer will be heating up with another installment of Harlem Week and the broader Harlem Festival & Celebration, with 100+ events – concerts, film festivals, fashion shows, career fairs, youth programming – in July and August, attracting 3 million people to the neighborhood.

In South Harlem, everyone is talking about Clay, now open at 553 Manhattan Ave. Chef Gustavo Lopez has brought elegance to the 70-seat restaurant, which was totally redone with a modern interior to match his flair for transforming local ingredients into more Harlem haute cuisine. All the details, even down to the hand-thrown plates and bowls – created by New York City artisan Wynne Noble – work together to make Clay the neighborhood's buzzing new dinner spot.

Bo's Bagels, freshly opened at 235 West 116th St., has New York City's carb-enthusiasts humming, which is an impressive feat as New Yorkers take their bagels seriously.

Boutique wine bar and olfactory wonderland Nez Bar will be opening soon at 411 Manhattan Ave., and Dorothy's Petcare, at 421 Manhattan Ave., will soon become the first brick-and-mortar home of New York's most well-known dog walking and grooming company. Home decor designer Kathy Kuo, who sells online and at Neiman Marcus, will soon open her first stand-alone "design bar" and showroom at 1961 Adam Clayton Powell Blvd. The Taipei-born designer is also now a Harlem resident.

On Lenox Ave., Morningside Coffee & Biscuits, now open at 547 Lenox Ave., has Harlem all agog over its buttery, flaky, delectable biscuits, perfect for breakfast sandwiches and, for what some people are already calling, the best fried chicken biscuit sandwich. Ever.

L.A. Sweets NY, newly opened at 192 Lenox Ave., is quickly gaining a reputation for another New Yorker favorite, the red velvet cupcake. Owners Loretta and Ricardo are getting raves for their selection, including Key Lime cupcake with graham cracker crust, their peanut butter cupcake and vegan Apple cupcake. With a long list of cupcake creations and friendly service, diners are already calling it "game over" in competition against the doyenne of the New York cupcake, Magnolia Bakery in SoHo, made famous in 1990s TV series "Sex and the City."

Sugar Hill Creamery, at 184 Lenox Ave., will be Harlem's only family-owned, neighborhood ice cream shop once it opens, to feature handmade ice cream (including dairy-free options), ice cream sandwiches and sundaes, plus coffee and pastries.

In Morningside Heights, everyone getting ready for Harlem's first Shake Shack, coming soon to 2957 Broadway.

On 125th St., Whole Foods will be open in July at 100 West 125th Str., with its inauguration expected to resonate even more than all of the excitement that came with their announcement. Also coming soon, PC Richards, at 309 West 125th St., and Footlocker, at 272-280 West 125th St.

In Hamilton Heights, Mumbai Masala, is now open at 1768 Amsterdam Ave., where residents are proclaiming this "the best" Indian food they've had in ages, and if that's not a testament to

what's happening in Harlem, where New Yorkers are now going to find the best Indian food, then what is?

Harlem has always been known for its entertainment options, but the level is only getting higher, with the fun spots becoming gourmet spots, the taste palettes bringing on more of the immigrant flavors, and service is improving with nods to fine dining restaurants in Midtown, while making room for everyone, alongside the home-style recipes and supper clubs the neighborhood is loved for by so many people.

Happy dining!

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