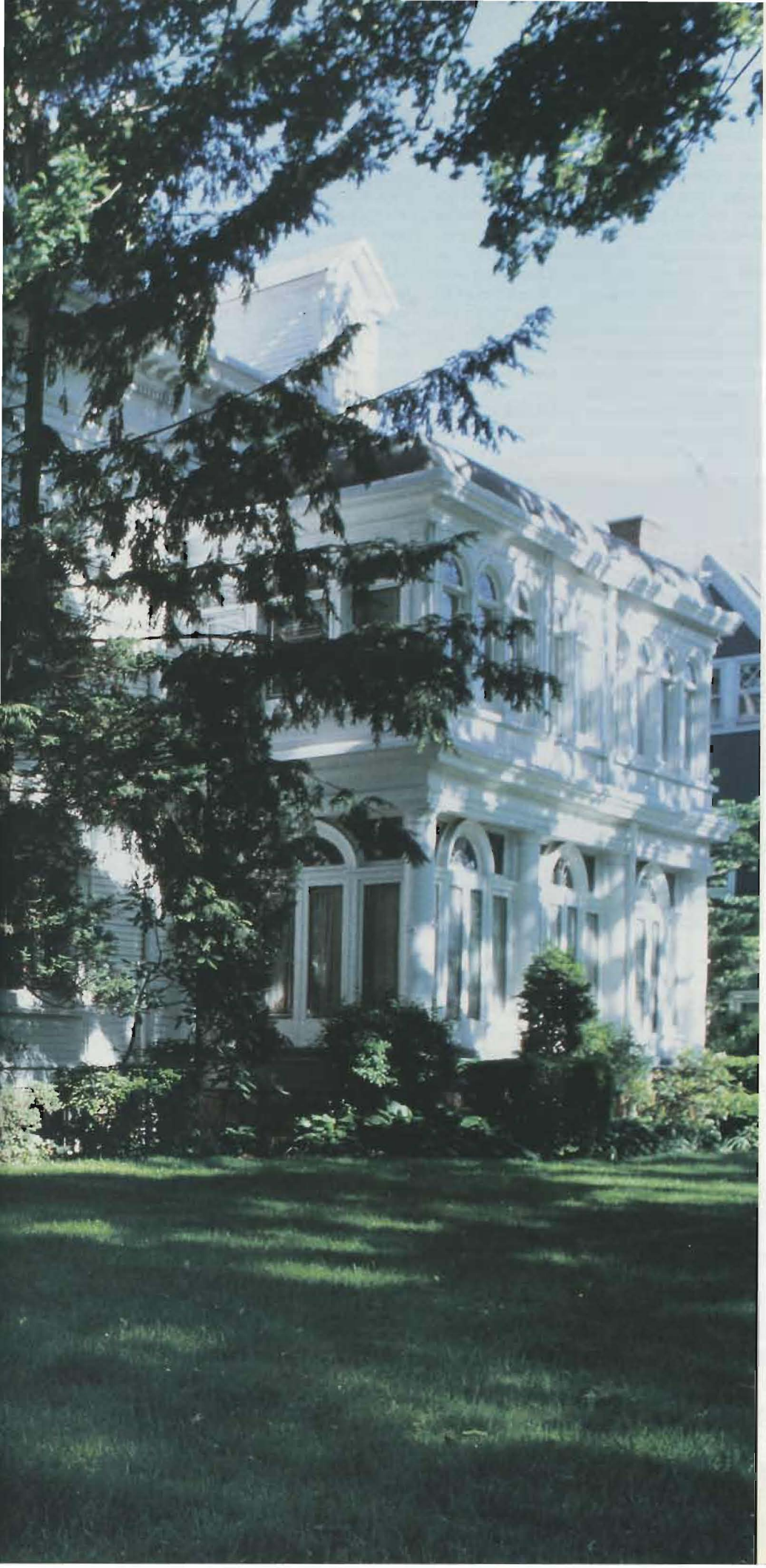


And Across the River There's

Beautiful, Bountiful Brooklyn

By Lindsy Van Gelder
Photographs by Tom Hollyman

Psychologically speaking, the Brooklyn Bridge may be the longest span in the world. To outsiders, the borough across the East River from Manhattan has traditionally been the stand-up comic's easiest laugh line, the urban pulsepoint where *Greenpernt* intersects *Toity-Toid Street*, Mr. Kotter teaches high school, and only one tree grows. The persistence of the stereotypes seems strange in light of the fact that one in seven American families can trace its roots to Brooklyn, and especially in light of its role as Hollywood's most visible incubator—the place Mae West, Jackie Gleason, Lena Horne, Barry Manilow, Barbra Streisand, Woody Allen, Mary Tyler Moore and scores of other stars came from. But perhaps the operative word is "from." The stoops of Brooklyn have been a way station to the American dream, roots that generations of movers and shakers aspired to put behind them. (Remember the John Travolta character in *Saturday Night Fever*, looking longingly across the water at Manhattan, as if it were the Promised Land?) Most snobbish of all are those numerous Manhattanites who wouldn't dream of going to Brooklyn, except perhaps on the way to the airport (a prejudice shared by legions of New York cabdrivers). Their attitude is best summed up by Donald E. Moore, president of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, as he surveys the Cherry Esplanade and its crowds of admiring tourists from all over the world. "Sometimes I think we get more visitors from the island of Honshu," sighs Moore, "than we get from the island of Manhattan."

If Brooklyn were a human being, it would no doubt suffer from the classic younger sibling nightmare of running after a train

Some of the trees that grow in Brooklyn surround the Prospect Park South home of Mrs. Anthony J. McAllister, shown here with some of her children and grandchildren. She remembers when this still green and gracious enclave was a summer haven for Manhattan millionaires.

that one can never catch. But in the past few years, something has changed. Maybe it was caused by the Manhattan apartment crisis, which now excludes not only the poor and middle class but plenty of Ivy-bred Yuppies as well, especially those who want to raise a family. (Brooklyn, after all, has some of the greatest concentrations of Victorian brownstones anywhere, and most of them come equipped with that amenity that Manhattan money usually can't buy—a garden.) Maybe the change was caused by a shift in values, a back-to-basics sensibility that appreciates Brooklyn's peculiar blend of toughness and warmth. "Brooklyn is an almost mythological place, like Dallas," explains actor F. Murray Abraham, who has lived in the Prospect Heights section for eleven years. When Abraham won the Academy Award earlier this year for his role in *Amadeus*, the local public school threw a special assembly for him—an eminently small-town, un-Manhattan gesture. "There's a feeling of belonging, of family, of community," according to Abraham. "But it's a little bit embattled too, probably best epitomized by the old Brooklyn Dodgers." Brooklyn has always taken care of its own—and weathered hard times with that half-belligerent, half-idealistic old Dodgers' rallying cry: "Wait 'Til Next Year!" Such qualities may hit a modern nerve.

In any case, Brooklyn is suddenly *happening*. With the rediscovery of its glorious housing stock, its rejuvenated world-class cultural institutions and an explosion of elegant restaurants, it seems less and less like Manhattan's backwater and more and more like its left bank. (Those who've lived there all along, of course, might sensibly thumb their noses and mutter, "I tolja so.") But it would be a mistake to think of Brooklyn purely as a charming urban satellite, à la Berkeley or Cambridge. Brooklyn has *scale*. As its boosters are fond of pointing out, it has more people than Philadelphia or Houston. In fact, if Brooklyn (pop. 2,230,936) seceded from New York tomorrow, it would be the fourth largest city in the U.S.

Another commodity that Brooklyn has to offer is human diversity. Author Norman Mailer lives in Brooklyn, as do Broadway playwright Harvey Fierstein, *Witness* star Kelly McGillis, and the former Queen of Sikkim, journalist Hope Cooke—as well as a staggering array of ethnic and socioeconomic groups spread over some seventy-five neighborhoods. For generations, Manhattan was a magnet for artists and writers who loved the idea of a cosmopolitan city with a surprise around every corner. Today Manhattan's appeal lies elsewhere. Except for Chinatown, virtually every ethnic or funky neighborhood below 96th Street has been bulldozed or gentrified by the real estate crunch, leaving almost unrelievedly white, professional, upper-class vanilla. But if Manhattan's Little Italy is barely more than a street where stockbrokers can eat pasta for lunch, Brooklyn's Bensonhurst is the real thing. Walk into a bakery on 18th Avenue and you'll see signs over the *pizza rustica* and the marzipan lambs warning you *"PER PIACERE NON TOCCARE"*—please don't touch. Step into a nearby espresso house and you might not hear a word of English—not surprising when you realize that there are more Italian-born Italians in Bensonhurst than on the isle of Capri. Brooklyn also has the largest West Indian population in the country. (Nearly a million steel-drum and curried-goat fanciers gather every Labor Day for the Caribbean Carnival, a celebration culminating in a Mardi Gras-like parade down Eastern Parkway.) There are large settlements of immigrant Poles (in Greenpoint), Russians (in Brighton Beach, also known as "Little Odessa"), and Arabs (along Atlantic Avenue).

Local newspapers are published in a half dozen languages (including Lithuanian and Latvian); local phone recordings will give you either a reading from the Torah in Hebrew or an account of the day's news in the Caribbean nation of Belize. There's even a special organization for immigrants from much closer to home: the New England Society in the City of Brooklyn, founded in 1880, when there were more people of New England descent in Brooklyn than in Boston. Meanwhile, artists driven out of Soho have taken up residence in Coney Island and in a scruffy neighborhood known as DUMBO (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass). In Williamsburg, Borough Park and Crown Heights dwell several different sects of Orthodox Jews, many of whom dress as their great-great grandparents did in Europe: long black coats, beards and side curls (*peyes*) for men, and wigs for married women. (Bedford Avenue, the main drag of Williamsburg, has been affectionately called "Rue de la Peyes.")

Brooklyn is also known as "The Borough of Churches and Synagogues," and in Brooklyn Heights is found the world headquarters of the Jehovah's Witnesses. At the same time, there are enough gay and lesbian Brooklynites, especially in the Park Slope area, to have formed their own political club, the Lambda Independent Democrats. For that matter, New York's most traditionally conservative Republican neighborhood, Bay Ridge, is in Brooklyn. The same neighborhood is home to the annual Norwegian Constitution Day Parade in May and to a couple of notorious "families" right out of *The Godfather*. That all these people manage to get along and even to thrive is . . . well, that's Brooklyn. As former Lehman Brothers president Robert S. Rubin, who lives in a pre-Civil War house on a country-like lane in Brooklyn Heights, puts it: "We have a Moslem temple right down the street. You don't find that kind of a mix everywhere, and I feel lucky to have it here."

Richardson Pratt Jr. is president of Pratt Institute—best known for its art design, architecture and engineering departments—founded by his great-grandfather Charles Pratt.

Three centuries ago, Brooklyn consisted of six towns clustered on this westernmost tip of Long Island: one (Gravesend) settled by the English, the other five (Bushwick, Flatbush, Flatlands, New Utrecht and Breuckelen) by the Dutch. (Most of the newly fashionable "brownstone belt" is in the original town of Breuckelen, which means "broken land" in Dutch.) Over time, these and other villages and towns annexed themselves to each other for administrative reasons in varying combinations, and in 1854 Brooklyn, Bushwick and Williamsburg merged into one city, the City of Brooklyn. It was the third largest city in the United States. In the years that followed, Brooklyn resident Walt Whitman published *Leaves of Grass;* Rev. Henry Ward Beecher preached

against slavery at Plymouth Church in Brooklyn Heights (it's still standing); and Charles Pratt founded a kerosene business that was a precursor to the Standard Oil Co.

The date that in hindsight looms largest in Brooklyn history, however, is 1883, when the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge was completed. Once the sister cities of New York and Brooklyn were symbolically joined by steel cable, administrative consolidation seemed to many like manifest destiny. As Parks Commissioner James Stranahan (the "Baron Haussmann of Brooklyn" who laid out much of the borough's street system) noted in a florid speech to the New York Chamber of Commerce: "The Thames flows through the heart of London and the Seine through the heart of Paris, but in neither case do you have two cities." Union was approved by the voters in 1894 and made official four years later in fireworks-filled ceremonies celebrated not only in New York, but throughout the United States. A decade later, the extension across the river of New York's first subway, the IRT, tied the knot even tighter.

Some date all of Brooklyn's twentieth-century problems to the "Great Mistake" of becoming Manhattan's appendage. Dependence on Manhattan actually predated consolidation; in 1893, a journalist writing in *Harper's* charged that "Every other city earns its own way, while Brooklyn works for New York and is paid off like a shopgirl on Saturday night." But consolidation officially confirmed Brooklyn's status outside the epicenter. Despite Stranahan's dream, the concept of one river/one city never took root; even today, nearly a century after merger, most Brooklynites still refer to Manhattan as "the city" or even "New York," as if Brooklyn were neither.

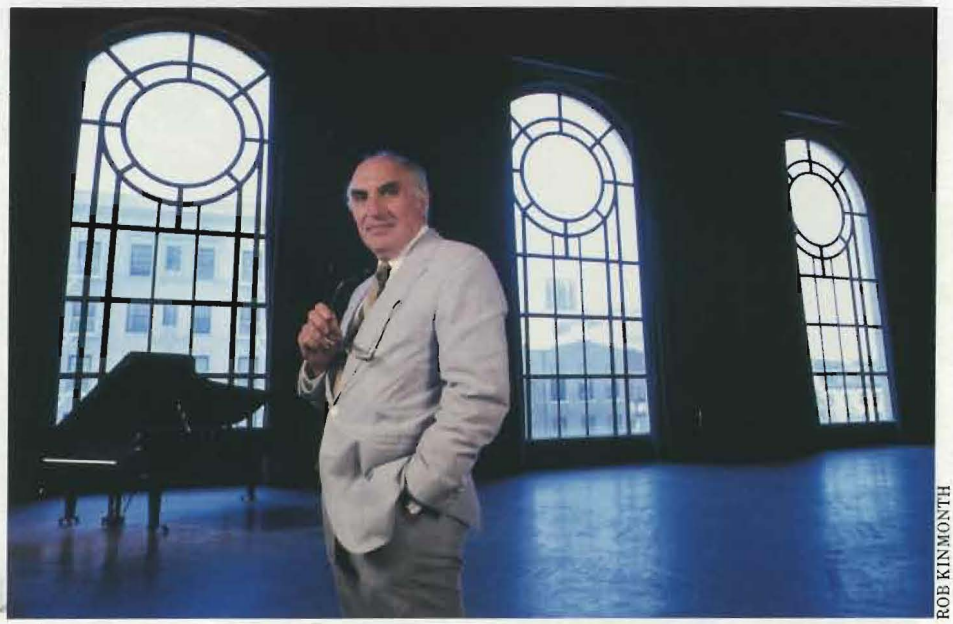
Brooklyn was at least prosperous in the years following consolidation. It boasted a humming Navy Yard, a new Botanic Garden, and a new baseball stadium at Ebbets Field for the Dodgers. The borough was also fashionable, the place the Woolworth, Pfizer, Underwood, Havemeyer, Abraham and Pratt families lived in baronial splendor. Architect and urban critic Norval White sees the Pratts as a microcosm of social trends made possible by consolidation. At the marriage of each of his sons, Charles Pratt presented the newlyweds with a new home. Three older boys built in Clinton Hill near their father's Romanesque mansion. "By the time the last son, Harold, married [in 1901], the fashion had changed, and he built *his* nuptial home in Manhattan, at Park Avenue and 68th Street." Consolidation also nipped construction of the McKim, Mead & White–designed Brooklyn Museum, originally conceived as a Louvre-like palace four times its current size. But it wasn't until the post–World War II era that Brooklyn—with neither the resources of an independent city nor the identity of a suburb—fell into serious decline. Downtown stores went out of business and racial tensions intensified as hundreds of thousands of white families followed the new expressways to the tract houses of Long Island and New Jersey. The *Eagle* folded. Coney Island's famous amusement park, Luna Park, closed down. The biggest blow came in 1957 with the departure of the Dodgers—the team that had risen from "Dem Bums" to a world championship and had produced Jackie Robinson, the first black to play major-league ball.

"Brooklyn had a number of problems and setbacks in the 1950s," according to Dr. Margaret Latimer, director of the educational project of Brooklyn Rediscovery, "but symbolically, the Dodgers' decision to move to Los Angeles was the most demoralizing. The Dodgers *were* the Brooklyn character, in all its toughness and perseverance." (Even their name was a razing salute to the fact that Manhattanites once scoffingly called all Brooklynites "Trolley Dodgers"—a reference to the maze of streetcar tracks converging in downtown Brooklyn.)

During the postwar years, "whole square miles of Brooklyn brownstones were turned into rooming houses," says architect Elliot Willensky, the borough's official historian and vice-chairman of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. "The whole tenor of the times was that everything was expendable; the idea was to go with the new and leave the old. These old brownstones were redone in the crudest way possible by contractors who couldn't care less. Landlords would just stick a sink in the corner of a room and rent it out." Ironically, Willenksy adds, "it was exactly this demeaning process that seems now to have been the Brooklyn brownstones' salvation. It made those homes viable for another twenty-five years or so, until a new generation could come along to reclaim them." While other cities (and Manhattan) turned their brownstone blocks into parking lots in the name of urban renewal, Brooklyn's homes weren't even considered worth building over.

Today those historic buildings have been recycled. The old Union League Club in Crown Heights is a health center. The former Ex-Lax factory on Atlantic Avenue has been converted into chic co-op apartments. The Prospect Park administrative offices are ensconced in an Italianate villa built by the railroading Litchfield family. More than a half dozen old Dutch farmhouses also remain in Brooklyn, and at least one of them is still in use as a private home. One of the most ambitious projects currently underway is the restoration of the remnants of Weeksville, one of the oldest settlements of free blacks in the country. Four wood-frame cottages, built around 1840, have been rescued from decades of disrepair (one of them was being used to house an illegal still) and are currently being converted into what Joan Maynard, director of the Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History, refers to as "a kind of miniature Colonial Williamsburg," but one that speaks to the rich cultural history of blacks in Brooklyn. An archaeological dig on the site has unearthed old coins, pottery, and photographs of those who fled to Brooklyn via the Underground Railroad.

Other Brooklynites meanwhile devote their energies to renovating or restoring their own brownstones. (Whether to renovate or restore is the sort of question that can start a fight at a Brooklyn cocktail party.) The national magazine *The Old House Journal* has its offices in Park Slope, which, according to editor Patricia Poore, has more



ROB KINMONTH

The oldest performing arts institution in the country, the Brooklyn Academy of Music has become the scene of many experiments under the leadership of Harvey Lichtenstein.

gargoyles, gaslights and other Victoriana than any other single neighborhood in the country, including Cape May and the individual neighborhoods of San Francisco. The Brooklyn brownstoning boom has also created a new class of carpenters, stained-glass makers, antiques sellers and salvagers, and other artisans. "A lot of them are old hippies," says Poore. "We call them 'the Ph.D. cabinetmakers.' "

Groups like the Brooklyn Heights Association, the Brownstoners of Bedford-Stuyvesant, the Fort Greene Landmarks Preservation Committee, and The Montauk Club (whose ornate Park Slope headquarters is a copy of the Ca d'Oro in Venice, with added-on Montauk Indian motifs) regularly sponsor walking tours, house tours and lectures. The Long Island Historical Society (currently in the process of changing its name to The *Brooklyn* Historical Society) likes to think of much of its work as research into "the genealogy of the whole community, not just individual families, although of course we do that too," according to executive director David Kahn. Upcoming multimedia exhibits organized by the Society, for example, focus on such topics as black women of Brooklyn, the Dodgers, and the Indians who lived in Brooklyn in the seventeenth century. On the whole, Brooklynites these days seem almost obsessed with a sense of their history—even if their origins were in Portland or Port-au-Prince.

The very first neighborhood to be "rediscovered" was Brooklyn Heights, an enclave of historic row houses and mansions on the bluff of land directly south of the Brooklyn Bridge. Today it's the undisputed social center of Brooklyn, although those who live there like to deny it. "I wouldn't want to be quoted by name," says one resident whose family has been in the *Social Register* for generations, "but the reason people move here is so they don't *have* to be social. We're not into the who-has-more-money competition you'll find in some other places." One local catering firm is notorious for making its deliveries in a Mercedes, but on the whole, informality reigns. The Heights is the kind of place where you see millionaire investment bankers jogging in baggy old Bermuda shorts on Saturday afternoon. It's also one of the few spots where you can barbecue in your backyard and look at the Manhattan skyline at the same time. "It's got all the advantages of a big city and of a small community, too," says Theodore Roosevelt IV, who moved there in 1972. "If your child is out playing, you know the neighbors will keep an eye on him, but you're still only ten minutes away from Wall Street."

Brooklyn Heights is emphatically child-

With a piece from the Brooklyn Museum's fine Egyptian collection are President of the Board of Governors Robert Rubin, board member Mrs. Tracy C. Voorhees and Director Robert Buck. The museum is also noted for its Hudson River School paintings and decorative arts department.

oriented, and dinner party conversations frequently center on private schools. The "traditional" choice is Packer Collegiate Institute, a venerable old school with Tiffany windows in its chapel. Headmaster Peter Esty, formerly of Deerfield Academy, is the first to concede that Packer "has standards of decorum." St. Ann's, started in the 1960s in a church basement, but now an independent school, is the "progressive" choice, with no grades and no dress code; its headmaster, Stanley Bosworth, an *enfant terrible*, likes to describe himself as "an agnostic libertine" who has "been blackballed by at least half the Yuppies in this community." Both schools draw heavily on Brooklyn's diversity. (For example, Packer students, between them, speak more than twenty languages at home.) Despite their superficial differences, the two schools seem to get their students into the same excellent Eastern colleges. Parents who don't like either educational approach, meanwhile, can send their children to Brooklyn Friends School, rooted in the Quaker tradition, or to Poly Prep Country Day in Bay Ridge, known not only for its academic program, but also for its superb athletic facilities.

The Brooklyn Heights lifestyle also includes playing squash or tennis as a member of The Heights Casino, founded in 1904 as "a country club in the city." (The club's junior squash program has been especially successful; in 1983, the top players at Princeton, Yale, Harvard, Penn, Wesleyan, St. Paul's, Milton, Andover and Exeter were all Casino products, and Brooklyn is listed with Britain and Pakistan as a "major international squash power.") Brooklyn Heights men might also be members of the Rembrandt Club of Brooklyn, a century-old organization of architects, artists, art collectors and patrons of the arts. "We get together once a month, dress in black tie, drink champagne and listen to a presentation from a local artist, like club members David Levine or Neil Estern," according to Rembrandt's Brooklyn-born president, insurance broker Seth Faison, who is also an officer on the board of the Brooklyn Museum. Brooklyn Heights ladies might belong to the equally venerable Mrs. Fields Literary Club. Residents are over-represented on the boards of the borough's cultural organizations, and volunteerism is also alive and well in the Heights, albeit with a twist. Says Junior League of Brooklyn president Julie Nelson: "Most of our members seem to be active in other organizations as well as the League, but virtually all of them work or go to school too. In fact, most of our assignments are in the evening or on weekends. We're very *urban*." David Kahn, executive director of the Brooklyn Heights - based Long Island Historical Society, adds: "The people who live in this community could live anywhere, but they've chosen this community, and they really support it."

Another Brooklyn cul-de-sac is the Prospect Park South section of Flatbush, developed at the turn of the century by Dean Alvord as *"rus in urbe"*—country in the city. If Brooklyn Heights is New York's Beacon Hill, "PPS" (as it's called on the stone plaques at its borders) is a miniature Newport—a community of enormous old houses with columns, gables, conservatories and rambling porches, set under the shade of maple trees on streets with tranquilly Anglophilic names like Rugby, Albemarle and Buckingham. (The "pink palace" prominently featured in the film *Sophie's Choice* is in Prospect Park South, although it has now been repainted its original conservative gray.) Marjorie McAllister (whose late husband Anthony headed one of the city's major tugboat companies) remembers that when she moved to the neighborhood fifty years ago, it was largely a summer resort for Manhattan millionaires. Today PPS and its adjacent communities are still surprisingly rural; last year, the neighborhood even threw a country fair, complete with hayride and best-apple-pie contest.

There are many historic houses to be found in Bedford-Stuyvesant, one of the country's oldest settlements of free blacks. Joan Maynard heads a local preservation society.

The typical born-again brownstoner is a creature whose enthusiasms may sound odd to non–New Yorkers, who take such amenities as neighborliness, garages and backyard hollyhock beds for granted. "A few weeks after we moved in, we and two other new families were invited by the old-timers to a block party," recalls Wall Street executive Michael Chabot Smith, who moved from Manhattan's Fifth Avenue to the Ditmas Park section of Flatbush in 1979. "They rolled out a large 'welcome to the block' cake with all our names on it. It really made us feel that we were part of the neighborhood." Another Brooklyn luxury is elbow room. The Smiths, for instance, have a swimming pool in their backyard. Attorney Henry Christensen III and his wife Constance, also an attorney, moved several years ago to a rambling brick home on Prospect Park West, originally built for the daughter of Bon Ami cleansing powder magnate William H.H. Childs and previously occupied by former New York Governor Hugh Carey and writer Pete Hamill. The Christensens have four children and each has his or her own room. "We can be *profligate* with space in Brooklyn," Christensen notes happily. "We just don't have to think about it."

Some of the borough's new pioneers have Brooklyn roots going back for generations. Pratt Institute, founded by Charles Pratt in 1887, is currently presided over by his great-grandson, Richardson Pratt. A professional school best known for its art design, architecture and engineering departments, Pratt, like many other Brooklyn institutions, went through a period of malaise in the Fifties and Sixties, and even thought of leaving Brooklyn altogether. "We agonized over our position, but in 1970 we decided to stay," Pratt recalls, "and having decided to stay, we made a commitment to be very sure that we were perceived in the community as 'us,' not 'them.' " That decision gave rise to a number of new directions for the school, such as Pratt's summer programs for disadvantaged young people. "If they have talent," Pratt says, "it pops out here." Pratt's office is dominated by a portrait of his great-grandfather, and he likes to joke that "no matter where you are, the old boy's eyes are on you." But he also sees a continuity between the modern school's professional emphasis and Charles Pratt's original goal: to prepare Brooklynites for the then-modern world of the Industrial Revolution. The landmark school library—founded in 1896 as Brooklyn's first free public library—is

currently being computerized.

A Brooklynite with even older ties is Kathryn Remsen-Aroneau, descended on her mother's side from Dean Alvord, developer of Prospect Park South, and on her father's side from Rem van der Beck, a member of the original twenty-five Walloon families who settled Brooklyn. (The family's name was later Anglicized to Remsen and was the inspiration for Remsen Street, Remsen Avenue and Remsen Court.) Kathryn Remsen was brought up in Maine. Several years ago, on a business trip to New York, she met Brooklyn-born Richard Aroneau, a history buff whose passion was fixing up historic houses—and who was more than a little intrigued by her surname. The two were married last spring and are currently living on land once owned by Kathryn's ancestors in the Ft. Greene/Clinton Hill/Wall-

For a hundred years, diners have been tucking into lobsters, chowders and crab in the nearly unchanged dining room of Gage & Tollner, owned by Mr. and Mrs. Edward S. Dewey.

about area. "I feel like I'm constantly running up against their ghosts," she notes. "Even the synagogue where we were married turned out to have once been a Dutch Reformed Church where the Remsens probably worshiped."

The influx of the new brownstoners has given Brooklyn's cultural institutions a boost—although here, as in everything else, the borough still feels overshadowed by Manhattan. "If The Brooklyn Museum were anywhere else in the country, it would be recognized for what it is—an international museum, one of the best in the world," insists director Robert T. Buck, who came to Brooklyn from the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo in 1983. The Brooklyn is widely acknowledged to have one of the finest Egyptian collections anywhere, most of it purchased through the Charles Edwin Wilbour fund. Charles Edwin Wilbour had made a fortune in the printing business in the late nineteenth century, then developed a passion for Egyptology and sailed the Nile for fourteen years on his own luxury liner, collecting as he went. His collection found its way to the Brooklyn—as did a good chunk of the family fortune, left to the museum by Charles' son Victor, who died in 1931. The Brooklyn also has, among other treasures, an impressive collection of Hudson River School masters, the Frieda Schiff Warburg sculpture garden containing old New Yorkiana (from cobblestones to columns from the old Pennsylvania Station) and a track record for providing New Yorkers with lively, non-establishment exhibits, such as Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*. The museum also strives to serve its own natural constituency; one example is an upcoming exhibition showcasing the work of sculptors who live and work in Brooklyn, such as Judy Pfaff. Brooklynites return the favor: a recent campaign saw a 45 percent upsurge in membership.

The Brooklyn Academy of Music has had spectacular success in recent years under the stewardship of president and ceo Harvey Lichtenstein. Instead of competing directly with Manhattan cultural giants like Lincoln Center, Lichtenstein carved out a unique niche for BAM as a center for experimentation, especially in its "Next Wave" festival. By spotlighting such artists as choreographers Alvin Ailey, Merce Cunningham, Lucinda Childs, Twyla Tharp, Trisha Brown and Laura Dean, performance artist Laurie Anderson, theater director Robert Wilson and composer Philip Glass, Lichtenstein has quadrupled the BAM audience since 1967. BAM also has been active in instituting programming of special interest to Brooklyn's large black community, be it performances of DanceAfrica, or of old-time tap-dance masters. "When I came here I was advised by the powers that be in Manhattan that this was a dead end," Lichtenstein recalls. In fact, "being in Brooklyn probably gives you more freedom to be daring or experimental." BAM's next challenge, according to Lichtenstein, will be finding ways to integrate into its avant-garde formula more traditional cultural fare, such as the appearance next March of the Central Ballet of China.

Brooklyn also boasts what most horticulturists view as one of the finest botanical gardens in the country. The Brooklyn Botanic Garden includes such pleasures as a fragrance garden for the blind and a garden composed solely of plants and herbs mentioned in the works of Shakespeare. But its most famous feature is probably its Japanese garden, totally authentic from its redwood Shinto shrine (constructed with wooden pins instead of nails) to the echo caverns under its five cascades, which intensify the pleasing sound of falling water. Although attendance fell by half or more the year Ebbets Field closed and continued to drop throughout the Sixties and Seventies, the last five years have seen a climb back up, and the garden has embarked on an ambitious construction project: a new $21 million conservatory.

Not far away is still another marvelous Brooklyn resource: 526-acre Prospect Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, the team responsible for Manhattan's Central Park. "But the concept of the two parks is different," according to Administrator Tupper Thomas. "Central Park is very much a part of the Manhattan grid system, and part of its charm is that from the park you can see the tall buildings of the city. The idea of Prospect Park was to get you into the country, back to nature." Although Prospect does have its softball fields and band shells—and a newly restored Picnic House, Boat House and Tennis House—visitors are usually struck by the park's unexpected wildness. In the late Sixties Marianne Moore had a poem published in the *New Yorker* about a century-old weeping Scotch elm that was in danger of dying. "The Camperdown Elm" became for many a symbol of Brooklyn: "still leafing;/still there. *Mortal* though. We must save it. It is/ our crowning curio." The elm is "still leafing" today.

If one needs yet another reason to visit Brooklyn, there is its tradition of good food. (The "shore dinner" was supposedly born one night when Diamond Jim Brady asked a Sheepshead Bay waiter for a sample of everything in the day's catch.) According to *Daily News* food critic Suzanne Hamlin, who lives in Brooklyn Heights, "Nowhere is the wonder and excitement of Brooklyn more apparent than in the variety of food you can buy here, especially the ethnic food." Hamlin is especially fond of Atlantic Avenue, a Middle Eastern bazaar of spices (including frankincense and myrrh), spinach and lamb

pies, almonds, olives and the sticky sweet known as halvah. Other Brooklynites swear by such indigenous street food as the Coney Island frankfurter and the egg cream—that perversely named soda concoction made with neither eggs nor cream.

One of Brooklyn's most famous restaurants is also one of the oldest: Gage & Tollner (372 Fulton Street), founded in 1879 and still serving traditional seafood dishes like clam-belly broils in its gaslit, wood-paneled dining room. (Waiters here wear insignia to show how long they've worked at the restaurant—a star for every five-year period and a bar for one year.) Another classic is Peter Luger's (178 Broadway, just off the Williamsburg Bridge). This is the place to go for huge slabs of tender porterhouse steak accompanied by crunchy hash-brown potatoes, salads of beefsteak tomatoes and sweet raw onions, and mugs of draft beer, all served up on butcher-block tables in a setting that looks like an old German beer hall. People have been having a genteelly rowdy time here since 1887. But Brooklyn is also the site of some of New York's most interesting *new* restaurants. Two of the best are Restaurant Lisanne (448 Atlantic Avenue, near the Brooklyn Academy of Music), a temple of such *nouvelle cuisine* innovations as goose with mango sauce and fettucini served with salmon and red caviar; and Ferrybank (1 Front Street), where specials include elegantly prepared Southern dishes, from fried catfish with hush puppies to Florida gumbo with rice. Ferrybank is in fact in an old bank near historic Fulton Ferry, where Robert Fulton's steamboat once connected Brooklyn and Manhattan. The restaurant was designed by the architect son of owner James Strawder, who earned three stars and two bars as a waiter at Gage & Tollner before striking out on his own.

Several other Brooklyn restaurants also combine culinary excellence with imaginative décor. The River Cafe (1 Water Street) has what no Manhattan restaurant has: a view of the Manhattan skyline. Situated on a barge in the East River at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge, it serves *haute cuisine* with an aggressively American touch, including steak with Kentucky bourbon sauce. At Tripoli (156 Atlantic Avenue), you can watch the belly dancers downstairs or sit upstairs in a hand-carved teak sailing ship. Order the *maza*, a sampling of some twenty Lebanese dishes. Nightfalls (7612 Third Avenue in Bay Ridge) serves American classics in a sleek post-modern setting that won the American Institute of Architects' 1983 award for distinguished architecture: there's even a 15-foot-high by 36-foot-wide

Recognized as one of the country's finest, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden comes to glorious bloom each spring. In the authentic Japanese Garden with its Shinto shrine (and, here, a neighborhood wedding), are President Donald E. Moore and Vice-President Elizabeth Scholtz.

copper waterfall in the garden. Other top choices include Raintrees (142 Prospect Park West in Park Slope), situated in an old ice cream parlor; and The Veranda (268 Clinton Street in Cobble Hill), an urban country inn.

In the midst of this renaissance, there are problems. One in four Brooklynites is poor and getting poorer. Paradoxically, many Brooklynites worry that the borough is getting too rich. The Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corp. has helped thousands of minority residents to renovate their houses, but brownstones in Bed-Stuy are now going for as much as $400,000—way out of reach for most. "We want to learn from Manhattan's mistakes," says Borough President Howard Golden. "This has always been a family city, a church- and synagogue-going city, a haven for immigrants, a city whose service backbone has always been the mom-and-pop corner store. Suddenly we find ourselves with riches we never realized, but we don't want to lose what we already have." Golden's office has encouraged new industry, such as the proposed MetroTech telecommunications complex in downtown Brooklyn and a new downtown hotel to fill the void left by the St. George, which was converted into co-ops and a health club several years ago. "But we'll fight any efforts to drive out the poor or the aged," Golden says. "After all, they're the people who stuck with Brooklyn when Brooklyn had hard times."

Brooklynites also claim that, despite their renaissance, they get insufficient recognition. "We joke that the only way to get your name in the *New York Times* if you're from Brooklyn," says cultural consultant Margaret Latimer, "is to be involved in a mass murder." But scratch a Brooklynite and you'll invariably find a psyche torn between the desire to tell the whole world that the borough is on the way back to glory, and fear that the whole world will promptly decide to move there. "I think what we really want is for people in San Francisco and Boston to know about Brooklyn," cheerfully concedes Park Slope resident Patricia Poore. "But maybe we don't want people from the Upper East Side of Manhattan to know."

Right now, they probably *don't* know. But wait 'til next year.

Brooklyn's Finest

Photographs by Tom Hollyman

Brooklyn's best is a mix of the bounce and bravura of its zesty neighborhoods and the tranquil treasures of its fine museums and parks. Old settlers and new explorers are finding the city's savor right outside their brownstone doors.

1. *On a Columbia Heights stoop are three Brooklyn boosters: Elliot Willensky, vice-chairman of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, Margaret Latimer, director of Brooklyn Rediscovery, and architectural historian Norval White.*

2. *Not a few of Hollywood's stars were ignited in Brooklyn. Mae West, Lena Horne, Mary Tyler Moore, all hail from here, as does F. Murray Abraham of* Amadeus, *here with wife Kate on the Esplanade.*

3. *Heart of the borough is Prospect Park, its rural splendors designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, and now administrated by Tupper Thomas.*

4. *Kathryn Remsen, a descendant of two early Brooklyn families, married Richard Aroneau, and returned to the neighborhood to restore some of its pre-Civil War houses.*

5. *Stanley Bosworth is the progressive headmaster of St. Ann's School.*

6. *Robert J. Anderson is president of Brooklyn department store Abraham & Straus.*

7. *Sculptor Neil Estern and his wife, art director/producer Anne Estern.*

8. *Borough President Howard Golden presides over a population bigger than Philadelphia's.*

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