



The menu at Corner Bar consists mostly of Continental room-service classics, including shrimp cocktail, spaghetti pomodoro, and a cheeseburger, plus a seafood platter. Photographs by Quinn Batley for The New Yorker

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DIMES SQUARE, POST-SHARK-JUMP

The joke has worn off for the scene that grew around the restaurant Dimes in the twenty-tens, as the Parisian wine bar Le Dive, the sushi bar Time, and the Nine Orchard hotel's Corner Bar move in.

By Hannah Goldfield

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One recent Saturday evening at Le Dive—a new wine bar on the corner of Canal and Ludlow Streets, from the people behind Brooklyn’s Le Crocodile—I watched a foursome seat themselves at a couple of unoccupied café tables outside, as one might in the Eleventh Arrondissement. (I would bet the farm that they were European.) A host approached; I heard the words “two-hour wait.” Four pairs of eyes grew wide. The group retreated in silent resignation.

Where could they have ended up? Even at Scarr’s, the slice shop on Orchard, the line stretched down the block. If the menu at Le Dive is convincingly Parisian—crisp radishes with Bretagne butter, a steamed artichoke with Dijon aioli, cold Melon de Bourgogne—this Chinatown-adjacent pocket of the Lower East Side is unmistakably, definitively New York.

Mention Dimes Square on Twitter and the media-class peanut gallery will throw virtual tomatoes at your head. The name was coined, with a big wink, to lovingly skewer a scene of creative types which grew around a slew of businesses in the twenty-tens, including Dimes, a vaguely healthy yet stylish restaurant, and a skate shop called Labor—places whose whiff of Southern California created an exciting friction with the surrounding Manhattan grit. The name stuck as the scene ate itself and the joke wore off. A Dimes Square reality show premières this month.

A crucial ingredient in the alchemy of Dimes Square before it jumped the shark, I would argue, was that the bars and restaurants were just good enough. Le Dive is decidedly not a dive; Clandestino, the seventeen-year-old bar next door, is an archetype of one, and it wasn't long ago that you didn't have to elbow your way to a vodka-soda on a Wednesday. The arrival of Cervo's, a destination-worthy seafood restaurant serving crispy shrimp heads and mussels escabeche a few doors down from Dimes, in 2017, was, perhaps, a distant death knell. In 2020, Cervo's application for an open-streets license, to weather the pandemic (two blocks of Canal are closed to traffic for eight hours every day), paved the way for the current circus, every night a festival in the piazza.

A new sushi bar called Time, which opened in June, on Canal at Forsyth, feels forged from the ethos of the original Dimes era. The appeal is less about the food—a hundred-and-fifty-dollar omakase at the bar, à-la-carte nigiri and sashimi rounded out by sake-steamed clams and yellowtail carpaccio with yuzu in the dining room—than it is about the juxtaposition of eating the food while effectively on top of a Chinatown-bus stop, of hoisting your Telfar bag onto a white tablecloth and sipping ume highballs amid the bustle of budget travellers lugging overstuffed duffels.

There's nary a hint of tension, though, at Nine Orchard, a new hotel in a magnificent 1912 Beaux-Arts building on Orchard and Canal that once housed a bank. The hotel's cocktail lounge, Swan Room; its brasserie, Corner Bar; and its forthcoming ne-dining restaurant are overseen by the chef and restaurateur Ignacio Mattos, of Estela and Altro Paradiso. At Corner Bar, from a menu of deceptively boring-sounding Continental room-service classics (plus a foie-gras terrine and a seafood platter), I ordered dishes whose execution thrilled me. The burnished exterior of a sliced baguette, served on a doily, was so shiny it looked to be made of plaster—but it cracked open to reveal a warm, fragrant, chewy crumb. Gesturing to the accompanying pat of cultured butter, sparkling with salt, a model-handsome bartender with a curly-topped high fade said, "My nose is starting to break out from that. I brush my teeth with it."

Shrimp cocktail, blue prawns fanned tail up in crushed ice, like synchronized swimmers; spaghetti pomodoro, slick and fruity; shaggy slices of pink-fleshed skirt steak in a pool of au poivre bearing the sheen of crème-brûlée crust—each was the apotheosis of its form. The burger’s beguiling smokiness came from a sauce made with onions that had been cooked in the kitchen’s Jospier, a hybrid charcoal grill-oven hermetically sealed somewhere in the hotel’s climate-controlled depths, far from the madding crowd. ♦

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