

Welcoming Italian restaurant settles into the Stuy By Rosie McCobb

It's surprising what you can find out just by taking a stroll around the neighborhood.

There I was, suffering from a bout of the "indoor blues," which can afflict people who spend large quantities of time working from home, as well as those who are `stuck` at home, sitting in front of the computer, looking for work. Listening to NPR all day and hearing story after story about the rapidly deteriorating economic situation certainly wasn't doing much to lift my spirits. So, I decided to go out and take a stroll around the 'hood, hopefully interact with another live human being...you know how it is. I turned the corner on to Lewis Avenue and noticed that there was some construction and renovating going on in one of the many storefronts that have been empty for quite some time. My nose for news gave the air a little sniff: yes, that was indeed fresh paint being slathered on the exterior of a building on the corner of Halsey and Lewis Avenues, which used to house a Jamaican take-out joint. I spotted a couple of guys working on the front door to the space, and like the busy-body that I am, ambled over to inquire what might be going in.

Manning the paint can was Chicco Piadina, Italian expatriate and resident of Halsey Street. Mr. Piadina is the owner of two restaurants in Manhattan, including Piadina – a well-liked and favorably reviewed Northern Italian restaurant on West 10th Street between 5th and 6th Avenues. He is currently putting the finishing touches on what is about to become Sarighina, a comfortable and welcoming little spot that will serve Neapolitan-style, brick oven pizza and pasta to Italian-food-deprived Bed Stuy residents. Piadina who owns and lives in a house on Halsey Street, decided to open a place in the neighborhood "for our family," he said – literally and figuratively. Literally, Piadina will only have to commute the expanse of a couple of houses to his new restaurant, and is excited by the notion of opening a business so close to his wife and children. Figuratively, Mr. Piadina and his partner Edoardo Mantelli are passionate about making Saraghina a welcoming, family-friendly destination for neighbors and residents of Bed Stuy.

The new space of Saraghina is uniquely configured so that the space on the Halsey Street side will have two large tables, a line of two-tops, and some stool seating along the bar, which will seat up to 20 people. "If it gets busy," Mr. Piadina explained, motioning me to follow him through a narrow hallway, "we can seat people at a community table or café tables in this space." My jaw dropped when I spied the space he was referring to. Having walked by this storefront countless times, I never would have

imagined that behind its dilapidated exterior and scarred metal gate would be an airy, light-filled space featuring white-painted, exposed brick walls, front and back windows, and an arched ceiling topped with a huge sky light. Mr. Piadina quickly pointed to the newly installed electrical outlets and said: "We are wiring this whole space for Internet. At night, we can seat people from the restaurant here if we need to, and during the day, it will be a cafe and general store." He mentioned that they will be stocking fair-trade coffee made by Gorilla, the Park Slope staple, and that he and Mantelli will be encouraging patrons to utilize the café as a community space: "If you want to come here and order one cup of coffee and sit here all day to socialize, or read, or do work, we encourage you to do that." Whoa!

Next stop was a peek at the back garden – also an alternative option for diners if the Halsey Street space gets too crowded. The space seemed to be the width of two storefronts, and so far featured a wooden deck and some funky found objects and antiques. If that wasn't impressive enough, Piadina went on to describe the kinds of ingredients that will be used in the cooking, and what food will be for sale in the general store; not only will Saraghina and the general store be utilizing and selling organic and locally-grown vegetables, meat, and dairy products, they will be getting some of their foodstuffs – such as Serrano ham, prosciutto, and bufala mozzarella – shipped in from Spain and Italy, respectively. To further showcase New York State's natural resources, Piadina is tricking out the restaurant with a filtering system attached directly to the tap so that customers will be able to enjoy New York City's famous clean water from upstate. And Piadina's forward-thinking ideas don't stop there: "We want to have a kids area here – maybe in the back garden – so that parents can enjoy their meal, but know that their kids are safe." He explained that because he has a family and is often stymied by the notion of trying to dine out and enjoy adult company while bringing along the kids, he feels strongly about creating a place that will cater to families in a new way; that will also include setting his restaurant prices to mesh with tastes and pocketbooks in the neighborhood. "The margarita pizza will be about \$12," stated Piadina. And the pasta dishes? "I'm not sure yet, but likely around that price range."

The decor of both the restaurant and café seem to mesh well with the idea of being friendly and welcoming, yet modern and unique. Piadina and Mantelli, along with Piadina's wife, a production designer, have created a rustic feeling in the restaurant and café by incorporating the aesthetic of the back garden. The space feels cozy and yet airy, due to the painted white brick walls, simple wood banquettes, and antique stools and chairs. They have also utilized antique doors as room dividers, and covered the exterior of the building with old wood planks that were

once part of a brownstone. The restaurant does not have a firm opening date as of yet, but Piadina predicts it will be somewhere in the vicinity of "2 weeks to a month, we'll see how it goes." Piadina also mentioned that Saraghina is slated to become one of a handful of new businesses opening on Lewis Avenue, including the Buttercup Market, which will be a specialty market co-run and owned by Ardenia Brown of Solomon's Porch fame, and there is also a wine bar in the works for the space next door to Buttercup's space, as well as some sort of kid's center run by the owner's of Bread Stuy, which will be opening in the storefront once slated to become Stizzy.

All this neighborhood news was making my head spin, so I thanked Piadina for the tour and headed over to Bread Stuy to see if I could get more info about the kids' center. I wasn't able to find out anything, so if any of you have the scoop, let the rest of us know.