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A big, old, green smorgasbord: Brooklyn The Boston Globe



By Beth D'Addono
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Discuss
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BROOKLYN - Sam's, a family-owned fixture on Court Street in the Cobble Hill neighborhood here for almost 60 years, is the

definition of old school: lackluster decor, an Italian menu that predates retro, and Mario and Louie Migliaccio running the show, a father-son team straight out of central casting.

But the pizza, with its thin, brick oven crust, fresh toppings, and perfect ratio of cheese to sauce, gives the better known Grimaldi's in Brooklyn Heights a run for its money. While we waited for our pie one Sunday, events took an interesting turn. It happened that the Rev. Clement Machado, a Vatican priest known for his globe-trotting healing ministry, was also having a late lunch, after Mass at St. Paul's around the corner. After dispensing a blessing to Mario across the bar, he came to our table and blessed us, along with our hopes, our dreams, our baked clams - he didn't miss a thing.

Even to an admitted cynic, it was a quintessential Brooklyn moment. Because while I visit Manhattan for a dose of big city glam, I come to Brooklyn for a dose of reality, a sense of place and neighborhood that is becoming more and more rare.

"Brooklyn doesn't have a hard edge to it," said Vince Emilio, 68, who grew up on Henry Street in Cobble Hill. "It's authentic. My neighborhood was 100 percent Italian and we had everything we needed on our block. Everybody knew everybody. It's not like that anymore. But it still has flavor."

Long a haven for Italian immigrant laborers for its proximity to the docks, Cobble Hill abuts Boerum Hill and Carroll Gardens, leafy neighborhoods known collectively as BoCoCa. Bordered roughly by Atlantic Avenue, the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, and Third Avenue, this area has seen the emergence of Smith and Court streets as dynamic dining and shopping destinations, and the rediscovery of Atlantic Avenue, with its plethora of antiques stores, home fashion boutiques, and family-owned Middle Eastern food stores. **There's even a new hotel at Smith and Atlantic, the 93-room boutique Nu Hotel (nuhotelbrooklyn.com), a sure sign that not all visitors feel the need to cross a bridge at the end of the day.**

Brooklyn measures 73 square miles, and with 2.5 million people, is New York's most populous borough. It would be the fourth-largest city in the country - if it were its own city. It was until 1898, when it was absorbed, in a hotly contested vote, into New York. Chartered by the Dutch as Breuckelen in 1646, Brooklyn has always been a melting pot, a place of ethnic complexity and vigor. Neighborhoods like Coney Island, Brighton Beach, Williamsburg, and Greenpoint have been home to singers Lena Horne and Barbra Streisand, directors Spike Lee and Woody Allen, poet Walt Whitman, and activist and author W.E.B. Du Bois. *Continued...*