

We still visit the fabulous Mi Cocina; and the fancy midtown Mexicans get our pesos from time to time. We even make special trips to Gabriela's all the way up west. But for consistent, fresh, marvelous Mexican, it's Mexican Radio. Beware the small quarters, though there's a lovely bench outside on which to cool your heels. If you're really lucky, you live close enough to order delivery. Best yet, go on a weekday for lunch, when you can relax and savor the wonderful food and margaritas in peace.

BEST BAR TO MEET A MAN WHO CLAIMS TO HAVE BEEN DRIVING TEDDY KENNEDY'S CAR WHEN IT TOOK THE PLUNGE AT CHAPPAQUIDDICK

Rudy's
627 9th Ave. (44th St.)
No Phone

Glub Glub Glub. "Aha!" he cried, "a young couple in for a drinky-winky, eh?" The Mrs. froze; we nodded. "Ever seen *Days of Wine and Roses*? Aaaahh, you're too young for that one. Fucking kids."

We'd come in for an afternoon drink. Just one beer before resuming our Sunday stroll. We had been there just a few minutes before he bounded off his bar stool and began his rant. Tall, scrawny, wearing red checkered golf pants, an ugly shirt and a Yankees cap, he looked a bit like Tommy Smothers, only drunken to the point of emaciation.

"I know, I know—you just want to be left alone for your drinky-winky. But this is important." His big hands would fly about crazily and then slap together in a tight clutch, only to come loose again. "You kids are young, but you need to know the truth. Ted Kennedy, you know who that is?"

Insulted, we both noted that we did.

"When he plunged his car in Chappaquiddick? You know? He wasn't driving. I was. I was driving the car. It was a black Ford. You can look that up! I DROVE THE CAR! HE WAS IN THE BACK SEAT FOOLIN' AROUND WITH THE GIRL.

BUT I DROVE THE CAR! You see?"

We've seen him there three or four times since. Every time, somebody gets the rant.

the machine, pour in your mixture, put the stirring blades in, turn it on. Go have another glass of wine. Come back in 15 minutes, and the Krups has magically churned you up the freshest, best-tasting sorbet you'll ever eat. No restaurant, no gelateria will ever make you better.

BEST PLACE TO DRINK WITH A DOG

Brooklyn Ale House
103 Berry St. (N. 8th St.), Brooklyn
718-302-9811

Warped and Woofed. Our crazy landlord is virulently anti-dog. Not surprising, as our neighbor once had one and it barked all damn day and night while she was out hobnobbing with her colleagues in the fashion world. Bitch. So we go to the Brooklyn Ale House. We can drink \$2 pints of Checker Cab Blonde Ale there, and can satisfy our dog jones. We like to slink in there at 3 p.m., when the sun is bright and the

place is quiet, so we can hang with Clio and Balto. They belong to Sean Connelly, the co-owner. Clio is an old, old black Lab who wanders lazily about the bar, his face slack, stopping in front of anyone who will give his back a scratching. Balto usually tries to leap in your lap, which evokes cries of, "Balto down!" from the centerfold barmaid, Virginia.

By 6 p.m. the place fills with regulars like Steve the pastry chef and his artist wife, Annette; the local historian Gig Valinotti; Al the philosopher and occasional Ale House bartender. And dogs—they enter in droves. Weimaraners, collies, Michael and Naomi's Labs—they just keep coming. And this salty little pug who quivers but charges other pooches. It's a rare night when there are fewer than half a dozen dogs in there at any given moment. Some days we butt into the friendly conversation about the bar. Other days we sit

in a corner and drink alone. It's a few dogs and feeling the better for it.

BEST SANDWICH SHOP

Manhattan Hero
299 7th Ave. (27th St.)
741-3560

Yo Quiero Manhattan Hero. When we first moved the *NYP* offices to 333, there wasn't a lot about this Lower Madison Square Garden area that instantly recommended itself to us in the way of services. We'd gone soft from all those years in Soho, which, say what you will, was jam-packed with places to eat, to drink, to shop. Luckily, we didn't have to look too far to find Manhattan Hero—our heroes, several lunchtimes a week. This fine Cuban-American establishment is far and away our favorite lunch counter in the hood. At the back end



They're sometimes for Hillary at Burke & Burke.

decent neighborhood in the city—and above all the Upper West Side—continues, sending nesting boomers fleeing for the hills. But the Upper West Side's misfortune is a gourmand's boon, because along with the Banana Republics and the Starbucks has arrived a raft of terrific new restaurants, replacing the tired "family-style" eateries on which UWS residents subsisted for so long.

In place of the kid-friendly Main Street, then, you'll now find the ultra-sophisticated (but in a fun way) Calle Ocho; serving up flavorful New Latin cuisine along with some of the best mojitos and caipirinhas in town; and the ultra-fun (but in a sophisticated way) Ruby Foo's, with its above-average pan-Asian menu (but stay far, far away from the dim sum).

Those with more refined tastes can walk up to Alouette for cultivated French fare (the restaurant is helmed by an able Vongerichten disciple), or over to Avenue Bistro for decent Parisian bistro cuisine.

BEST BAR TO WATCH MEN DRINK THEMSELVES TO DEATH

The Holiday Cocktail Lounge
75 St. Marks Pl.
(betw. 1st & 2nd Aves.)
777-9637

What's Dipsomania? On Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights the place is jammed with people drawn to the cheap Heinekens (\$3), the very, very tall mixed drinks and kooky characters ranging from hipsters to chic Europeans and the occasional drag queen. Any other night of the week, though, the Holiday is the grimmest bar on Earth, empty except for the handful of alcoholics who seem to be there every day that they aren't strapped down in the detox ward at Bellevue. Seeing a woman among

them is rare; the men range in age from 38 to 65 or so. All smoke heavily and drink whiskey, vodka or gin straight. For the most part, little is said. Each man has his mission. Ronnie drinks until his face swells to the size of a watermelon and then nods off. Don risks getting fired from his city job for getting blasted every afternoon on shift. One guy who never speaks does a half dozen or more glasses of whiskey and then ambles off, to see a junkie hooker, we're told. Without fail one or two guys take their belts in a hurry and then lay their heads on the bar to sleep for a time, cigarettes poking from their fingers and burning down to the filter.

We go there because the drinks are cheap and it's usually quiet enough to read. Except at 7 p.m., when *Jeopardy!* begins and patrons yell garbled answers at the tv over the bar, and growl at anyone who'll listen, "See? I knew that one, I fuckin' knew that one."

EXPERIENCE DOWNTOWN UPTOWN!!!

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out in beautiful **Mendocino County, CA**, the mellow and cool green thought of which seduces your friends at Soup to Nuts every time we gaze westward from our office window at the garment district industrial rubble or else catch a noseful of the stench that drifts

from the miserable, fanless bathroom that the fellows who own **333 7th Ave.** have provided us. Roy's chef, whose name is—and this is a cool one—**Troy Guard**, will prepare what we're told will be a "Euro-Asian" menu to match up with the wines. There will be four courses, each featuring high-concept stuff like "Island Steamed Moi" or "Szechuan Venison With Asian Hash and Plum Nectar." The evening costs \$95, tax and tip not included. Call 266-6262 for reservations.

This Thursday they're going nuts for **multiple sclerosis victims** in **Chelsea**, and while we're all for supporting the palsied and the infirm, this might be an event to avoid. "It's a foodie's dream come true!" the press release informs us, and we're already unholstering the proverbial Tec-9.

"Imagine if all the doors to all the stores inside **Chelsea Market** were wide open with chefs beckoning visitors to come in and taste to their hearts' content," the press release continues. Shades of the **Brothers Grimm**: leering toque-headed creeps beckoning people into their lairs.

"Imagine if wine, beer and soda from the **Brooklyn Brewery** and other purveyors were flowing freely and if restaurants like **Le Madri**, **Murray's Cheese Shop** and **Good and Plenty To Go** set out offering for the taking," the press release continues. "Imagine if three different bands performed for hours and if **David Rosengarten** from the **Food Network** stopped by for a cooking demonstration and tasting. Now add 1000 of New York's hippest professionals to create more fun, and it's a fantasy turned reality at **An Evening at Chelsea Market**, hosted by the **New York City Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.**"

Anyway, the event's scheduled for this Thursday, May 6, from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. The evening will also include a silent auction, architecture talks by Chelsea Market's designer and cooking instructions: The three bands mentioned

above, by the way, are called **Mecca Bodega**, the **Roy Campbell Trio** and the **9th Street Stompers**. For more information, or to purchase tickets at this, the last possible moment, call **Elizabeth Daly** at 463-7787, ext. 3016. Or visit the New York chapter's website at www.msny.org.

Dropped by **Alva** lately? Didn't think so. It's very 1995, isn't it? The chrome, the black enamel, the underlit metropolitan gloom—a whole restaurant designed to evoke a black-and-white gelatin print in a full-color world. But there it is, a Flatiron throwback entering a mellow adolescence, and if you've got a little time to kill (as we did last week before the best dang wedding we've ever attended), and the long bar at **Gramercy Tavern** is, at the end of a Saturday afternoon, packed bald spot to **Ferragamo** pump with daytrippers, **Alva** provides respite. A married couple from **Philly** shoot the shit with the bartender, **Tom**. A regular tells his most recent date story to

the waitstaff (it was a disaster). We get the dope, again from **Tom**, on how good **Andy Pettitte** is throwing this season (what with the war and all, we're a little behind the times with the **Yankees'** start). Featuring a wine list heavily tilted toward California and France, and a roster of bar snacks available until late-late, **Alva** encourages you to belly up to an absence of frenzied hip. Our pick: a glass of **Coppola Rosso** (yes, *that* Coppola; he owns a winery, and his blended signature red isn't half bad) and the duck confit spring roll with a pomegranate glaze, the roll's crunch countering nicely the fatty duck hash. On the stereo: mid-90s **Gypsy Kings**, and that's just fine with us.

Mother's Day's *imminent*, and here's a way to put some life back in the woman's bones (she *has* been around the block a few times by now, hasn't she?). **Burdick Chocolate** has assembled **Mother's Day** bundles that will arrive on time if you call in an order by Wednesday; **Burdick** will also hand deliver packages in New York City on Friday.

From all appearances, **Burdick's** is a real mom and pop operation. **Larry Burdick**, who was trained in **Switzerland**, handcrafts his chocolates in **New Hampshire**. **Burdick's** wife **Paula** designs the packaging: There are lots of wooden boxes, French ribbons and gold-wax seals. For Mother's Day—in addition to chocolate by the pound—the outfit's offering a pyramid (\$60) of stacked woven boxes jammed with champagne truffles, chocolate mice, miniature bonbons, chocolate-dipped dried fruit and French tuiles—chocolate brushed crisp wafers. There's also a picnic basket bearing

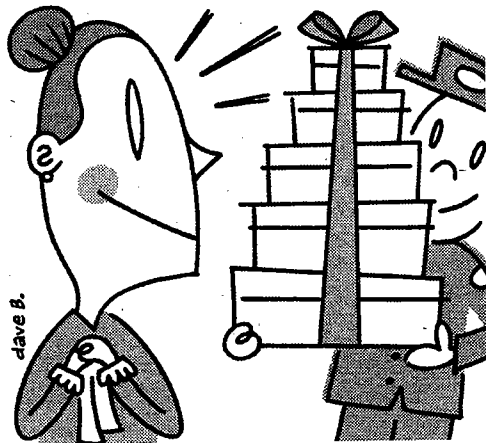
"Soup to Nuts"

assorted chocolates, three chocolate bars, a wicker box of truffles, a tin of dried fruit and a couple mice; the package is wrapped in English ivy and costs \$58. Or go for the clay Grecian urn (\$28), which holds a 16-piece assortment box and a couple of chocolate mice. **Burdick's** phone number is 800-229-2419, or fax your request to 603-756-4326.

More last-minute Mother's Day stuff: **Belgo Nieuw-York**, that newish Belgian-inspired frites joint that casts its weird blue glow over the Lafayette St. sidewalk near the repellent **Joe's Pub**, is serving a special brunch: made-to-order Belgian waffles with a bunch of different toppings, plus a selection of omelets. Everything you order comes with pastries and other stuff, too, including champagne or great Hoegaarden beer. The bargain-basement fixed price is \$12. Call 253-2828... **Belgo** will also, on May 10, host the first of a two-part tribute to the history of beer, presented by the New York chapter of the **American Institute of Wine and Food**. **Brooklyn Brewery** brewmaster **Garrett Oliver** will host the event, at which guests will obviously sample a bunch of beers. The dinner costs \$75. For tickets and information call the AIWF at 447-0456... Fine chef and reformed criminal **David Ruggerio** is famously back behind New York stoves, now at the reductively named **Steak Au Poivre** on the Upper East Side. His Mother's Day menu's being served between 1 p.m. and 9 p.m. on the big day, and costs \$39.95 (kids under 12 eat half-price). There's all sorts of good stuff being served: Reassuring words like "quail," "softshell crabs," "gnocchi," "steak," "cheesecake" and "creme brulee" leap up at us from the menu. Call 758-3518... The excellent, low-profile Upper East Side French restaurant **Bouterin** is an ideal place to take your mother, unless she's all loud and vulgar. Between noon and 8 p.m., **Bouterin's** serving a prix fixe for \$45. We're not going to waste space naming dishes, but take our word for it: The menu's restrained-ly Gallic and wonderful. Call 758-0323... And finally—leaving your mother out of it for a change—did we ever drink cognac last week. It was last Wednesday, and there we were at a **Spirits Journal**-sponsored tasting at the **Mark Hotel** on Madison Ave., comparing a \$900-a-bottle **La Pouyade** against an even costlier **Remy Martin Louis XIII**. The winner? **Louis XIII** is a lighter, smoother brandy, while **La Pouyade** is heavier, deeper, more complex. If you want to judge these two magnificent cognacs for yourself, and you've got the financial weight to back up your extravagances, call wine distributor **Andrew F. Bell** at 727-1957 to place orders or else to find out where the stuff is served.

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E-mail tips and comments to souptonuts@nypress.com or fax to 244-9864.



DAVE BAMUNDO



"A little SOHO on the Upper East Side...fabulous!"
- Chris Shuff TCG

"Nothing hits \$20.00 you'll find The Commons a hit."

