

BUSHWICK DAILY

Building on a Sweet Legacy: New Bar Julia's, is Set to Open This Friday This Friday in Ridgewood

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All photos by Kelly Marie Mancuso for Bushwick Daily

The diverse and expanding culinary landscape of Ridgewood is about to welcome a new eatery from an old favorite. Crystal River Williams and Denise Plowman, the creative duo behind the much loved neighborhood cafe **Norma's**, are preparing to open **Julia's**, a beer and wine bar located at 818 Woodward Avenue in Ridgewood.

I recently had the chance to sit down with Williams and Plowman and discuss their new offerings and exciting plans on the eve of their much anticipated sophomore venture. “We’re hoping at Julia’s that everyone feels welcomed, and that we can get a really nice, diverse crowd,” Williams explained, “It can be a community place, or another place to meet your neighbors.”

Norma’s Cafe was recently featured on episode of “Unique Sweets” on The Cooking Channel. Their Neapolitan Cupcakes and “Frankencrispies,” a chocolate chip cookie, rice treat and raspberry brownie hybrid, stole the show.

I was given an exclusive private tour of Julia’s, set to open on Friday, January 23rd. The space itself sits on what was a beauty salon and neighboring social club. Williams and Plowman united the two storefronts into one cozy yet sophisticated space. Williams credits her co-owner with creating the unique ambiance of Julia’s: “Denise always had an eye for design.” Arched doorways separate the bar portion of Julia’s from the larger dining area. Wine glass chandeliers with Edison bulbs hang delicately over the bar, while port wine colored walls and black and white checkered floor evoke a feeling of the vintage glamour of Brassai’s Paris of the 1930s.

The dining area is bright and rustic in comparison. Chandeliers with vintage crystal strands handpicked by Plowman illuminate the original gold embossed ceiling. Fresh herb sprigs bound with twine sit in jam jars on top of dark wooden plank tables. A reclaimed church bench acts as a cozy window seat for intimate dates or larger parties. “This side is more for spoiling yourself or someone you love,” said Williams.

Once open, Julia’s will feature a diverse collection of locally sourced beer and wine, as well as a select menu of small plate offerings that will rotate weekly and seasonally. “Basically, this is a place for us to geek out and play with foods in ways that can’t really

do over at Norma's," Williams explained, "We've established Norma's voice and what Norma's is, so it's going to be fun to do something entirely different over here, but with the same mentality behind it."



A Sweet History

Norma's first opened at 59-02 Catalpa Avenue in June 2012 with a focus on small, handheld versions of comfort foods. "At the time we opened Norma's, there weren't a lot of coffee shops and cafes here," said Williams, "Everybody loves good coffee and baked goods, so we thought we'd be a good fit here. The baked goods at Norma's are portable comfort foods."

Williams moved to Ridgewood from a tiny basement apartment on Manhattan's Lower East Side nearly seven years ago. As a mother of two, Williams sought larger living space in a family-oriented neighborhood. "Ridgewood is a real special place and seemed like a good fit for us as a family," she explained, "and as business owners, we wanted to be where we lived."

Williams and Plowman met while working with the bakery department at Whole Foods. Plowman was a buyer for the store while Williams worked as a cake decorator. Both women were California natives with culinary degrees and a shared passion for food and baking. Williams was in the beginning stages of creating Norma's when she asked Plowman for advice on coffee equipment. The two hit it off immediately, and Williams asked Plowman to be her business the next day. "It just felt like a good fit," said Williams, "It was really natural."

Norma's was named in honor of Williams' grandmother, who passed away in 2011, eight months prior to the cafe's opening. Continuing the tradition, Julia's was named for Plowman's mother. "Denise and I are ladies with pretty strong personalities," Williams explained, "so it's nice to honor the other strong women in our lives that have influenced us, given us love and made us the people that we are."

The duo originally considered applying for a beer and wine license at Norma's in the hopes of hosting weekend brunches or late night events. They quickly realized that they had run out of space and began the search for a second location. The owner of the building that houses Julia's approached the pair about expanding into his space. "It was kind of kismet," said Williams.



A Recipe for Success

One of the unique aspects of Julia's that sets it apart from other restaurants is the emphasis on small batch, locally sourced ingredients. Williams and Plowman worked together to create a fresh, seasonal menu comprised of quality artisanal items from carefully selected vendors. "We're small business owners and are really passionate about it, so we try to do our purchasing in a way that reflects that," Williams explained, "We're buying from other small business owners because we feel that's a way our money can actually help another business."

The cheese plate, a menu mainstay, will feature cheeses from Sprout Creek Farm, a non-profit dairy farm located in the Hudson Valley. The charcuterie plate will be made up of savory offerings from Ridgewood-based Morscher's Pork Store. 11385 Honey from Glendale's own Wilk Apiary, founded by local beekeeper Tom Wilk, will be included in many of the dishes. Williams also hopes to pair up with local community supported agriculture (CSA) groups to create a menu around each. Julia's will also feature three unique house beers brewed through the pilot program at Finback Brewery in Glendale. William Reder, the duo's new business partner, will head up the brewing process. Reder was a regular customer at Norma's when he approached the owners about becoming a part of Julia's. "It was a perfect fit," said Williams of Reder, "He's super passionate, hardworking but also laid back and creative."

The bar's three exclusive house beers include: Mexican Chocolate Stout flavored with bourbon, cocoa and sriracha chilies; blueberry spiked Rye IPA and a Nut Brown Ale. Julia's will also feature beer from several other local breweries such as Maspeth's Bridge and Tunnel and Transmitter Brewery in Long Island City. Instead of using kegs or a draft system, casks or barrels of beer will be tapped on a weekly basis. All wine sold at Julia's will be from New York-based, family owned, sustainable, organic vineyards. In addition to savory food and wine pairings, Julia's will also serve as a creative space for local artists. The venue will host art classes for children and their parents, as well as wine tastings and drink and draw workshops. Julia's will also feature monthly art exhibits with changing themes. The first exhibit planned is titled "Women By Women" and will feature portraits by female artists. All proceeds from the sale of artwork will go directly to the artist. "This is our chance to share our walls with other creative people," Williams explained.

"I want Julia's to be kind of like Norma's," Plowman added, "where everybody's welcomed, everybody has a good time with good laughs, drinks and family. I have a very good feeling it will get there."

Julia's at 818 Woodward Ave, Ridgewood. Soft opening is happening on Friday, January 23, 2015. [RSVP on Facebook here](#). For more information on Julia's, follow them on [Facebook](#) or visit [Norma's](#).