

GRUB STREET



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Exploring the Convergence of New York's Culinary Past and Present in Ridgewood

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If in recent years fugitives from Bushwick have sought refuge and lower rents across the Queens border in neighboring Ridgewood, it wouldn't be the first time. A century ago, German-immigrant brewery workers made the same migration, occupying the then newly built yellow-brick rowhouses that survive, many with landmark status, to this day. Somehow, after waves of immigration and despite its adjacency to bar-glutted Bushwick, working-class Ridgewood has managed to retain its frozen-in-time Central and Southeast European charm, represented by the stage-set vintage façades of its German pork stores, its Italian bakeries, its Polish delis, its burek shops and red-sauce temples, and even its slightly forbidding quasi-private ethnic social clubs. Little by little, though, the culinary scene is changing, with newcomers like Vietnamese hot spot Bunker and a wood-fired pizza joint, Houdini Kitchen Laboratory, colonizing far-flung fringes of the neighborhood. Still, the Ridgewood foodscape shines brightest in the seemingly peaceful coexistence of old and new: the spicy-bacon sandwich at Norma's, showcasing cayenne-crusting pork belly from Morscher's butcher shop down the street; the fledgling Ridgewood Market, a craft-and-food fair held periodically at the German bar and banquet space Gottscheer Hall. And monitoring all the activity is dedicated food blog [Ridgefood](#), to which locals turn for answers to such pressing gastronomic questions as "Where's the nearest Greenmarket?" (the [Saturday Youthmarket](#) at Cypress and Myrtle) and "Which branch of Catania Bakery sells superior sfogliatelle?" (the one on Fresh Pond Road). Here, a look at some of the newest and oldest flavors in a part of town that relishes them both.

1. Catania Bakery

64-10 Fresh Pond Rd., nr. Grove St.; 718-417-5700

As befits a place named after a Sicilian city, the cannoli cream is legendary and best enjoyed in the crullerlike cartocci.



2. European Coffee Bar

66-07 Fresh Pond Rd., nr. Gates Ave. 718-418-8457

With its striking blue counter, Faema espresso machine, and brioche gelato sandwiches, this Sicilian-style social club is the **Sant Ambroeus** of Ridgewood (if Sant Ambroeus had a members-only back room).



3. Ltauha

55-50 Myrtle Ave., nr. Putnam Ave.; 347-689-3462

The name is an Aztec riff, but the food's American bistro; the menu sounds generic; and the liquor license has yet to arrive. Regardless, the cooking is serious, a reflection of the owners' experience at DuMont, Dressler, and **Stanton Social**. Juicy grilled chicken comes with fluffy gnocchi, and the burger's spot on.

4. Morscher's

58-44 Catalpa Ave., nr. Woodward Ave.; 718-821-1040

The idealized version of an old-world butcher shop, down to the clerks' clipped accents and the pervasive aroma of hickory smoke. But despite the German pedigree, the shop caters to the diverse tastes of its Polish, Croatian, Serbian, and Latino clientele.

5. Norma's

59-02 Catalpa Ave., at Forest Ave.; 347-294-0185

Since opening two years ago, this bakery-café has become a de facto community center, serving Kitten Coffee, flavored lemonades, savory biscuits, and a spicy-bacon sandwich with a cult following.

6. Joe's

66-11 Forest Ave., nr. Palmetto St.; 718-497-1300

The epitome of old-school Queens Italian, from the fake trellis leaves and "Hey, buddy" welcome to the sensational pasta con le sarde.

7. Julia's Beer and Wine Bar

818 Woodward Ave., nr. Cornelia St.; no phone yet

The owners of the exceedingly popular Norma's plan to serve local brews, upstate wines, and all manner of farm-to-table snacks when they open this fall.

9. Houdini Kitchen Laboratory

1563 Decatur St., at Wyckoff Ave.; 718-456-3770

Named for the escape artist, who is buried in one of the countless neighboring cemeteries, this Neapolitanesque pizzeria occupies a brewery turned art-studio complex.

10. Krolewskie Jadlo

66-21 Fresh Pond Rd., at Palmetto St.; 718-366-6226

Nobu vet Krzysztof Drzewiecki is out to change the image of Polish food from peasantry cabbage and potatoes to something more regal—hence the name, which translates to "king's feast," and the heaping platters of kielbasa, blood sausage, bacon, pork shoulder, and hunter's stew.

11. Cafetería La Mejor II

1533 Myrtle Ave., nr. Linden St.; no phone

This Miami-style Cuban-coffee counter is technically in Bushwick (barely) but worth the trip for a "dirty" horchata, housemade cinnamon-spiced rice-and-oat-milk with a double shot of espresso.

12. Burek's Pizza

68-57 Forest Ave., nr. Catalpa Ave.; 347-689-3086

The flaky-cruste'd pie of the Balkans stuffed with meat, cheese, or spinach.



Photo: Bobby Doherty/New York Magazine

13. Taqueria Kermes

66-36 Fresh Pond Rd., nr. Woodbine St.; 347-463-9263

Chef-owner and Ridgewood resident David Fernandez is a Mexico City native who used to helm the kitchen at Atlantic Grill, so go for the fish, shrimp, or surf-and-turf tacos (or maybe the nachos), and wash them down with a housemade agua fresca.

14. Rosa's Pizza & Pasta

62-65 Fresh Pond Rd., nr. Metropolitan Ave.; 718-497-7672

Sprawling, bustling, and as well lit as a Citi Field night game, Rosa's is known for its terrific Sicilian and Grandma pies; broad-minded slice hounds will want to try such starch-on-starch novelties as a vodka-sauced pizza topped with ravioli.

15. Bunker

46-63 Metropolitan Ave., nr. Woodward Ave.; 718-386-4282

Fresh, inventive takes on Southeast Asian street food, from chicken curry to fried-flounder bánh mì.

16. Gottscheer Hall

657 Fairview Ave., nr. Gates Ave.; 718-366-3030

You will find saucy goulash, cheesy spaetzle, and devoted soccer fans in this 90-year-old taproom and banquet hall established by ethnic-German émigrés from a region that was once part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, now Slovenia.

17. Cypress Inn Cafe

17-02 Stanhope St., at Cypress Ave.; 347-889-5676

The punk-rock-drummer owner pours a delicious cup of Counter Culture coffee and makes a mean turkey Reuben. Plus: wine and beer, and the occasional movie night.