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UP CLOSE

Brooklyn Breeds a New Hotelier

By BOB MORRIS

ANDREW TARLOW doesn't like to think of himself as a founding father of all things precious in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. It sounds too stodgy, too grand and old-school to him.

"Besides, I don't even have a beard," he said.

And yet, much of the artisanal, ethically sourced food and fashion coming out of this outer-borough vortex of self-conscious consumerism can be pinned on (or attributed to, if you're a Manhattan-centric cynic) him. His South Williamsburg restaurants and storefront shops — Diner, Marlow & Sons and Marlow & Daughters — all push the idea that food and clothing should come from sustainably minded noble folk.

And now there's the new Wythe Hotel a mile north, to further his cause.

"We have relationships with everyone from our sheep farmers to our coffee roasters," Mr. Tarlow was saying the other day as he looked in on his three traditionally-styled businesses, all next to one another. "Everything is well sourced and thought out."

You can say that again. At his



WELL-SOURCED: Andrew Tarlow, the owner of restaurants like Diner and Marlow & Sons, opens the Wythe Hotel.

Marlow & Daughters grocery, "hand-gathered" eggs, "house-churned butter" and pickled ramps line the shelves with homemade dog food. The side of cow being trimmed on an old-fashioned counter by hip young butchers is "grass fed and finished." The slaughtered pig being delivered by truck out on the street, where Hasidic Jews pass by, comes from a celebrated organic pig farmer.

"He's in Virginia, further than any of our other sources," Mr. Tarlow said.

Steps away, in front of Diner, the high-end meta-dive he opened in 1999, when people thought he was foolish to do such a thing in his neighborhood, Mr. Tarlow popped some watercress into his mouth from a crate delivered from an idealistic upstate farmer. Of course it was sustainable: organic, in season and adamantly local.

Even the clothes that Mr. Tarlow sells, designed by Kate Huling, his wife, are ethical. The wool is from the same sheep used for his dairy and meats. The beef at the butcher

counter and on menus comes from the same cows that provide the hides for rugs.

“I know it can seem like a parody,” said Mr. Tarlow, who is lean, 41, and almost confrontationally laid back in demeanor. “But I’m not supersensitive about what I do.”

Who has time for that with four young children, four restaurants, two shops, a literary magazine (Diner Journal) and a big new hotel to oversee?

In partnership with Jed Walentas, whose father, David, made Dumbo’s real estate go boom, Mr. Tarlow built and designed the 8-story, 72-room Wythe Hotel with his taste and ethos.

“Everything in here is about a healthier way to live,” he said after cycling to the hotel on a well-sourced orange bike with cork handlebar covers, sauntering through kitchens in a custom blue suit (no socks under his loafers) and greeting earnest-looking cooks and waiters. “Not just the food, but everything. It’s about making choices to sustain a better life.”

Mr. Tarlow grew up in Hewlett, an affluent Long Island suburb that he found uninspiring. His father and uncle ran a tailored shirtmaking businesses with shops in Brooklyn and on Long Island. After studying painting at the University of Arizona, he moved to New York, where he got a job in 1994 as a bartender at the Odeon and admired the way the restaurant’s owner, Lynn Wagenknecht, created a neighbor-

hood gathering place for artists. It inspired his vision for the once-desolate streets of Williamsburg.

“I don’t want to come off as too earnest,” he said as he ate fire-roasted flatbread with green-garlic ricotta and house-cured ham at a corner table at Reynard’s, his hotel’s restaurant. “But for me, a restaurant and hotel are all about expanding circles of community.”

To that end, in addition to the restaurant’s welcoming barnlike space and a convivial upstairs bar with great views, the Wythe Hotel has budget rooms with bunk beds for out-of-town musicians, friends and farmers. There’s locally made wallpaper on the walls, handmade ice cream in the minibars and artisanal Brooklyn-made soaps in the bathrooms, with room prices starting at a nonhostile (but not hostel-level) \$179.

One thing there won’t be? Room service.

“It’s a statement,” Mr. Tarlow said as he continued to eat and the late-afternoon light faded on revamped warehouses outside. “I don’t want my kitchen serving our food to people in their rooms watching TV. It’s important for me to bring people together.”

Television in the room, in fact, was the reason Mr. Tarlow pulled his children out of the hotel, where they had been having sleepovers with him during the hotel’s opening week. “They wouldn’t turn it off and come down to dinner,” he said.

The four-children scenario doesn’t faze him.

“I always wanted a large family,” he said. “But when we had the fourth child, people started to look at us like we were in a cult or something.”

Especially when they notice they don’t have any strollers because, as Mr. Tarlow explained, he and his wife like to have the children as close to them as possible.

“But for the record, we do have a Volvo station wagon,” he said.

The large restaurant was filling up with a mix of prosperous looking customers mixing alongside those who seemed to be putting some effort into looking the opposite. The beard count was high as were gingham shirts and thrift-store dresses. There were even some clogs. It was time for Mr. Tarlow to finish his slow-roasted duck entree and take on the duty of hosting, seating guests, many of whom he knows by name.

“How long will the wait be?” one asked.

“About an hour,” he said.

Who would have thought it on a Williamsburg weeknight?

Mr. Tarlow, for one. “I always had faith in this neighborhood,” he said.

Call him the founding brother.
