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All Roads Lead to Wythe Avenue

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ON a balmy Saturday evening in early July, an eclectic mix of partygoers gathered at the terrace bar atop the Wythe Hotel, a gleaming new resort in Williamsburg that anchors a summertime Eden for a fresh batch of night-crawling New Yorkers.

Alongside the predictable ripped Acne denim and thrift-store T-shirts, the guys donned an unkempt preppy uniform of crumpled button-ups from Steven Alan and frayed cutoffs from J.

Crew. The hipper gals wore Alexander Wang tops and Isabel Marant dresses, while some women showed up in Coach bags and kitten heels, fashion choices more commonly associated with Midtown than Bedford Avenue.

A symphony of foreign tongues could be overheard, too: tourists from Portugal, Japan, France, Spain and, yes, Manhattan, all seeking the idealized Williamsburg *je ne sais quoi*. One gentleman, rocking back and forth on

his skateboard, disparaged Le Bain, the lounge atop the Standard hotel in the meatpacking district: "I'm never going back there again!"

The dazzling hotel and night life complex, a staple of the Manhattan circuit, has finally washed up on Brooklyn's hype-friendly shores, bringing with it the kind of crowds eager to finally explore the Next Big Thing. And what are they finding across the river? Communal tables,

artisanal beer, saltwater pools and a cast of characters right out of the HBO series “Girls.”

Since opening in May at a restored factory building, the Wythe has helped spiff up a once-desolate corner of Williamsburg — North 11th Street and Wythe Avenue — into an artisanal-food-and-drink playpen.

Bored of the hotel’s commanding view of Manhattan? Pop over to the Kinfolk Studios, an experimental emporium that houses a design studio, gallery, cafe, bar and a popular Scandinavian restaurant.

Craving live music with a side of smoked trout salad? Cross the street to Brooklyn Bowl, where Questlove spins music on Thursdays, Blue Ribbon serves cozy nibbles, and bowling is an ironic (or would that be unironic?) pastime for 20-somethings.

And that’s just the start. Turn the corner and find the Brooklyn Brewery, a fabled local beer manufacturer that, aside from offering tours, now opens its industrial red doors as a beer garden on the weekends. Or stumble a couple of blocks and find Berry Park, a two-level sports bar that plays house music and soccer games, a newly sanitized waterfront and another yet boutique hotel — this one with a South-Beach-in-Brooklyn poolside ambience.

The city’s after-dark cognoscenti have taken note. “It’s still a relatively expensive cab ride or long train ride to get to that specific part of Williamsburg from the city or even other parts of Brooklyn,” said Matt Kliegman, who runs the Jane Hotel Ballroom and is an owner of the popular hangouts The Smile on Bond Street and The Westway nightclub in the far West Village. “In order for people to show up, these new developments had to create a fresh energy and feeling of community over there. I think they’ve accomplished that.”

TO see Brooklyn’s sparkly night-life zone unfold, start at the Wythe Hotel around sundown, when a line to its terrace bar formed at about 6 p.m. the other Saturday.

In a departure from the usual Williamsburg free-for-all, the hotel had posted burly security guards in the old-timey, reclaimed brick-and-tile lobby. There was even a velvet rope. Well, sort of; it appeared to be manila, like the kind you find in an antique nautical store. And the guards didn’t turn anyone away. “The line is a capacity issue,” said Sara Moffatt, who was on hosting duties.

Upstairs, a D.J. who resembled Jesus Christ played dub reggae, and when the sun crept below the jaw-dropping Manhattan skyline, it seemed to activate everyone’s internal Instagram clock. A sea of iPhones shot up to capture



Reynard, the restaurant at the Wythe Hotel.

the blazing pink hues (#nofilter), as if the singer Grimes had just made a surprise appearance at a Skrillex concert.

The sunset offered the harried bartenders a momentary reprieve. Since Wythe refuses to do bottle service, determined drinkers (including a group of Swedes who kept barking orders for rosé wine) were forced to bring their own ice buckets to the outdoor tables. This is what passes for V.I.P. in the land of D.I.Y.

By 9 p.m., the action had moved downstairs to the Reynard, the hotel’s handsome restaurant with Art Deco-style lamps and a splintered wood-beamed ceiling. The restaurant was booked, so Brooklyn scenesters, like members of the indie band TV on the Radio, may have to eat frisée salad with house bacon and poached egg at a communal table with a group of Japanese tourists dining on arctic char and spring vegetables.

Meanwhile, another line had formed for the terrace bar, this time stretching 15-deep onto the sidewalk. But no worries, patrons were told again. This would be an egalitarian process. “I mean, we try to weed out the drunks, but I have no problem letting in ‘Jersey Shore’ types,” Ms. Moffatt said.

There’s little chance of that happening. Of course, there were still the usual hipster staples (yes, covered in tattoos and with beard), along with the uppity professionals and the young families with one child in a stroller and another in the oven. But now they share air with an influx of European and Asian tourists in search of the “trés Brooklyn” experience (a phrase so twee that it is now routinely mocked), along with a swell of Manhattanites drawn to the neighborhood’s newfound cachet.

As tinted S.U.V.’s idled along the curb, picking up fedora-topped diners for their trip back to Manhattan, the hordes

gathering at this intersection bled into one unruly mass. One guest of the hotel, a wealthy-looking older gentleman in a wheelchair escorted by a younger man in a low-slung baseball cap, was allowed to cut the line of rooftop pleasure seekers, many with passports in hands. This unusual scene attracted the attentions of revelers chain-smoking outside of the Brooklyn Bowl, where one woman, with short spiky hair and a lip ring, bellowed out a signal of support: “Woo-hoo!”

By the next morning, the scene was considerably calmer, even anemic. At 9 a.m., the only sign of life was at Reynard, where the tables were filled by couples in their 40s and older. They were out-of-town parents — giveaways with their cargo shorts, Barneys garment bags and earnest Teva sandals — and they, too, have found their slice of Williamsburg, a nice-enough hotel to spend the night while they visit their children living nearby.

Their fish-out-of-water tableau seemed to transform the restaurant’s tasteful vintage interiors into a “Twilight Zone” IHOP, one that served slow-cooked scrambled eggs and home-churned butter. “These people have got to be the parents of the locals,” a handsome waiter with a woodsy mustache said. “We’re really looking at a post-post-post-gentrification neighborhood, aren’t we?” A cooler brunch scene, he added, kicks in around 11:30 a.m.

But the real action, at least on this Sunday, when the temperature topped 97 degrees, was two blocks away at the King & Grove Williamsburg, a new 64-room hotel overlooking McCarren Park that is being re-branded as an “urban retreat.” There is a small penthouse bar, imported pastries from Balthazar in the lobby and, most important, an outdoor saltwater pool.

With the midday sun overhead, the poolside setting evoked a twisted version of Miami, where the revelers are paler, covered in more ink and have no abs. To get past the scraggly haired door guy in floral Vilebrequin board shorts, one must be either a hotel guest or a resident of the adjacent six-story condominiums, thoughtfully named the Residences at the Williamsburg. Everyone else has to book a reservation on OpenTable and pay \$45. (It is free Monday to Friday.)

Inside, about 40 guests tanned on wooden benches and lazily flipped through magazines on their iPads. A small army of Converse-wearing waiters served rum-soaked slushies and pork sliders with caramelized onions and salsa verde as throwback tunes like Aretha Franklin’s “Rock Steady” played softly from the outdoor speakers.

Seated on two of the coveted lounge chairs were Michael



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and Mary Swanhaus, television producers in their 30s who live in one of adjacent condos. “Every day feels like a vacation, but with artistic touches,” Mr. Swanhaus said as his 9-month-old daughter, Daisy, splashed in the pool with a family friend. They make full use of his area’s newfangled luxuries, nibbling on crab cakes and truffle fries at Rosarito’s Fish Stack, popping by the Wythe or playing tennis at the renovated courts nearby. “I call this area the ‘magic block,’ ” he added.

“It reminds me of the old SoHo before it got out of control,” said Mr. Swanhaus, who lived there before changing boroughs. “But with insane, un-Manhattan amenities.”

They were joined by a number of day-trippers from Manhattan, including Allie Schulz, 24, an actress and yoga teacher who lives in NoHo. She had taken the L train to scope out what a friend dubbed a “hipster secret pool.”

“It feels more like Vegas maybe, or a country club,” said Ms. Schulz, a sun-kissed blonde in a black bikini. This doesn’t mean she wouldn’t consider staying at the hotel when her boyfriend from Argentina visits next month. “I have no problem feeling like a prince and a princess for a couple of days,” she added. “Besides, it’s cheaper than buying tickets to Miami.”

On the other side of the pool, a scrawny photographer named Mike Mabes was chatting with anybody who would listen (Manhattan staycationers, condo residents, out-of-town guests) about a Ritalin binge he had indulged in at an amateur movie screening the previous night. He was a character so archetypically Williamsburg, he felt almost pre-“Girls” retro. “I’m a regular here,” he said.

Finding the Way to Williamsburg

A few basics for the first-time visitor to the sybaritic playground of Williamsburg.

GETTING THERE A cab from Manhattan is about \$20 to \$25, depending on your departure spot. The closest subway stations to the Wythe Avenue hub are the Nassau Avenue stop on the G train and the Bedford Avenue stop on the L train. If you are traveling during the day or the early evening, another option is the East River Ferry, departing from East 34th Street roughly every 45 minutes. The last departure on summer weekends is at 8:47 p.m., arriving at the North Sixth Street terminal (about a six-minute walk from the Wythe Hotel) at 9:14 p.m. The one-way fare is \$4.

GETTING BACK As the crowds have found their way to this slice of Williamsburg, so have yellow cabs on the lookout for fares back to Manhattan at the end of the night. But many people use the car service from Northside Luxury, on Bedford between Sixth and Seventh, (718) 387-2222.

STAYING THERE If you want to park yourself in the neighborhood for a weekend, two handy options are the Wythe Hotel at 80 Wythe Avenue, (718) 460-8000, and the King & Grove Williamsburg hotel at 160 North 12th Street, (718) 218-7500. Rates for a room for a weekend in August start at \$265 for the Wythe and \$287 a night at King & Grove, based on a recent search of both hotels' Web sites.
