

Williamsburg, New York

By Nicholas Lander

From designer-distressed Marlow & Sons to ‘captivating’ Reynard, Andrew Tarlow (left) has an essential eye for detail



Andrew Tarlow in the Wythe hotel

Walking with Andrew Tarlow on Broadway in Williamsburg between his restaurants, Marlow & Sons and The Diner, and his butcher's, Marlow & Daughters, we bumped into his young female butcher carrying a tray of warm, sweet Italian sausages, and his baker going home at the end of a nine-hour shift. Was there, I wondered, a candlestick maker involved, too?

Tarlow, 42, and his talented wife, Kate Huling, have built up a diverse and successful business over the past 15 years. This includes two other restaurants, Roman's in Fort Greene and Reynard in the newly opened Wythe Hotel; a clothing and leather business under the Breton label; and a lively food magazine, Diner Journal, cleverly capturing the romantic attachment that many young Americans now feel towards what they eat.

Today's Williamsburg resonates to the same food beat in motion in southeast London. Standing in line for takeaway food at the weekend Smorgasburg food market (now suspended until the spring), I felt as though I were back in Borough Market or around Maltby Street – only with the Hudson river ahead of me rather than the Thames.

Suitably fortified, we set off round a few blocks that took us to the Radegast Hall & Biergarten, which would not look out of place in Munich; the Mast Brothers chocolate heaven established by Rick and Michael Mast; and the latest outpost of the Blue Bottle Coffee Company, which originated in Oakville, California.

On Wythe Avenue, Reynard occupies the ground floor of a former cooperage to which Tarlow has brought his restau-

rant expertise to match those of developer Jed Walentas and hotelier Peter Lawrence. Like so many Williamsburg pit-stops Reynard has wonderful 19th-century brickwork, now exposed to create a relaxed atmosphere.

Walking in at 9pm, we were both captivated. The design has exposed the tall windows, wooden floors and ceilings and other original features; the kitchen incorporates an open oven and grill; the small red logo of a fox looks smart on the outfits of the waiting staff. Their practice of decanting every wine they serve adds a further touch of elegance.

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Mast chocolate sorbet

In such a setting, a salad of red kale, apple, breadcrumbs and capers; goose breast with sauerkraut; a ginger pudding; and a sorbet made from the local Mast chocolate were all excellent. The kitchen also passed the acid test of offering what I craved at that time of night, an omelette stuffed with cheese and spinach. With a bottle of cool Beaujolais our bill was \$140 for two.

The following day I sat opposite the equally cool Tarlow at the designer-distressed Marlow & Sons. Relaxed and laid-back he may seem, but this is a restaurateur with an essential eye for detail.

It emerged first when he gently admonished our waitress for failing to explain one of that day's main courses. Then, as he noticed my attention wandering to a flashing light box behind the bar, he explained: "That flashes on when there is food ready in the basement kitchen so the waiters know to run downstairs and collect it."

Tarlow learnt the facts of restaurant life working his way up from the bottom as a busboy in Manhattan 20 years ago. Today he makes a practice of "working the door" at every new restaurant for at least the first couple of months.

In that era Williamsburg was not safe. Yet once Mayor Giuliani had cleaned up the Lower East Side, Tarlow realised the suburb remained quiet and desolate, but was no longer dangerous. He used the money he was earning to transform a rundown corner site into The Diner, a property then available for a mere \$90,000 freehold.

And while Tarlow joins the ranks of restaurateurs who have ameliorated so many city centres, it is his emerging role in fashion that marks him out. As his restaurants expanded, Tarlow decided to explore the "farm to table" connection more fully, leading to the establishment of his butcher's shop. As it began to handle carcasses of lamb and beef, there came the challenge of what to do with the skins and wool. A range of clothes, leather bags, sweaters and gloves is the result, leaving Tarlow to ponder that perhaps the next step may be "to look for our own cotton fields". That's a long way from bussing dirty dishes.



Mast chocolate sorbet