

Return to Greatness

White collar, blue collar and in between: Business is booming in Brooklyn.

by **Caroline Tiger**

By now, “comeback kid” is an identity that’s strongly associated with Brooklyn, but the claim of a comeback begs the question: When did Brooklyn go away? And why? An exact moment is difficult to pin down, but it may have begun somewhere around 1957, when the borough lost the Dodgers to L.A., and in the decades that followed, when its manufacturing and shipping industries, which had supplied the world’s goods in the first half of the century, faltered. Economics aside, Brooklyn made a huge comeback on the popular scene in 2002, when *Time Out New York* ran a cover with the headline, “Manhattan: The New Brooklyn,” and in 2004, when

Miranda, a main character in HBO’s *Sex and the City*, worked past her reluctance to embrace a move across the bridge, expanding the Manhattan-centric series’ definition of “the city.”

These pop-culture milestones may not be the ones future economists and demographers cite when they trace the ebb and flow of Brooklyn’s fortunes, but they do reveal what has always been a PR problem for the borough: its proximity to — and inevitable comparison with — big, brash, sexy Manhattan. Lately some have noticed a shift in that kind of thinking. “Brooklyn is being recognized for what it’s always been — a city in its own right,” says Carl Hum, president of

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Downtown Brooklyn’s high-rises loom behind residential buildings.

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the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce. But if you're interested in comparing the borough with the big city, Brooklyn is weathering the recent economic downturn better than its glamorous neighbor. Last September, the chamber released a study done in partnership with the Fiscal Policy Institute that found while New York City stands to lose as many as 80,000 jobs during the following year, Brooklyn's share will be 6,000. That's 1.4 percent of its private-sector jobs — as compared to 2.6 percent across all of New York City.

Hum attributes the borough's fortitude to the diversity of its business sectors. While Brooklyn has seen a contraction in its housing and financial services markets, other sectors are present and growing. Niche manufacturers like printers, wood workers, and specialty food-makers are adding new jobs. Twin Marquis Noodles, which makes dumplings and noodles at its two Bushwick factories, is expanding. So is Wonton Foods, the country's largest manufacturer of fortune cookies.

Joe Chan, director of the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership, traces downtown's resurgence to the early 1990s, when a public-private partnership built 16-acre MetroTech Center, which has evolved into a vibrant urban public space and business district. Its success prompted the rezoning of downtown Brooklyn, creating a new residential

neighborhood. Manhattan-based companies have taken advantage of lower rents and tax incentives. Weil Gotshal, New York's second largest law firm, and *El Diario LaPrensa*, the region's largest Spanish-language newspaper, are two of many that have moved in.

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— Carl Hum, Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce

The retail, hospitality, and food service sectors are growing, too. Chan cites 2,000 hotel rooms currently in the development pipeline. “Ten years ago, you couldn't say that downtown Brooklyn was part of the broader hospitality market which was basically Manhattan below Ninety-sixth Street,” he says.

As more Manhattanites move in, demand increases for the bars, restaurants, and stores that contribute to Brooklyn's rising tourism profile. From 2000 to 2006 there was a 25 percent increase in the personal income of Brooklyn residents, whose spending power is now \$75 billion a year. More than 400 shops joined the retail landscape between 2001

and 2007. The chamber's September 2008 study projects the creation of 500 jobs in food services this year.

The borough also counts in its business profile a plethora of creative, independent businesses — a sector that can be traced back to the 1980s and 1990s, when artists moved from Manhattan to Williamsburg and other neighborhoods, transforming them into the city's new artistic hubs. Tracy Watts, a milliner who designs and makes high-end hats sold nationwide at Barneys, in Canada at Holt Renfrew, and at top shops in Tokyo, signed a ten-year lease on a space in Gowanus in December. “I tripled my square footage for a small increase in rent,” says Watts, who went from paying \$1,300 per month for a 300-square-foot studio in Chelsea to \$2,000 per month for an 1,100-square-foot studio in Brooklyn. Before signing the lease, Watts called her clients to make sure they'd come see her in Brooklyn. “They didn't hesitate,” she says. “They all come here already. All the designers are here because no one can afford the Garment District anymore.”

dVider is another Manhattan expat that's thriving in Brooklyn. The company designs and makes room dividers and vinyl stickers. Two years ago, they moved from a cramped space in Nolita to a studio in the Dumbo neighborhood, where there's enough room for an office area, a sticker-making zone, and a stor-

age space. For them, the move wasn't just about space — it was about moving to an area saturated with creative people. “It gets your brain going to live here,” says staffer Kerry Hassler.

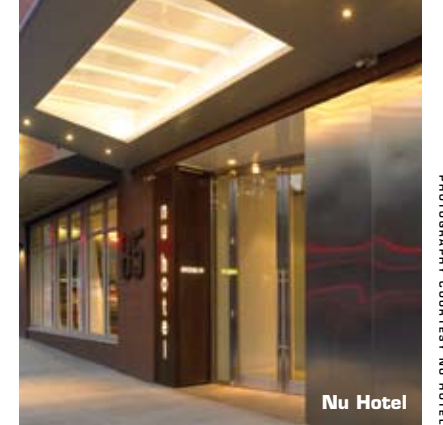
dVider joined more than 50 other design studios last spring to participate in BKLYN Designs, a six-year-old show that showcases the best of the borough. It's attracting more and more design pilgrims — around 6,500 last year. To apply, designers must prove they design and manufacture in the borough. “People have been trying to sneak in, using their grandparents' addresses,” says the show's organizer, Karen Auster. For this year's show, from May 8–10, judges sifted through more than 100 applicants to choose a total of 40 designers

Perhaps what's most unique about Brooklyn is that its older, family-owned businesses stand a chance among all these energetic entrepreneurs. Chamber president Carl Hum says Brooklyn retains a sense of community that's more akin to a village. “People have a sense of pride about being from Brooklyn,” Hum says. “That extends to a sense of pride in our homegrown businesses. They'll choose to patronize those over others.” That partly explains the success of third-generation businesses like Junior's, called “quintessentially, traditional Brooklyn” by borough president Marty Markowitz. The iconic diner has stood at Flatbush and DeKalb avenues since the 1920s. Its founder Harry Rosen originally owned five luncheonettes — four in Manhattan and one in Brooklyn. In October 1929, newly broke, he sold four of the five restaurants, keeping the one in Brooklyn.

“It seems counterintuitive,” says Alan Rosen, Harry's grandson, “but in hindsight he was right . . . he had vision.” The business has grown every year since 1958, and it's hard to surmise its fate had Harry Rosen stuck with a Manhattan location. “I don't think we'd still be around,” Alan says. “Businesses in Manhattan disappear faster.”

Where to Stay

Spend the night in style at these Brooklyn hotels.



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Hotel Le Bleu Administering a shot of glamour to Fourth Avenue, Le Bleu features a glass-and-chrome lobby and ergonomic beds and in-room iPod docking stations. The hotel appeals to business travelers with on-site secretarial and courier services. Enjoy the skyline with your cocktail at restaurant/lounge Vue. 370 Fourth Ave., hotelebleu.com

New York Marriott at the Brooklyn Bridge The Marriott offers a full suite of business services, including a notary public and a translator. The hotel is a short walk from the pedestrian entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge, as well as downtown's many shops and restau-

rants. Theater fans will find an outpost of TKTS, the discount Broadway ticket booth, across the street starting in July. 333 Adams St., marriott.com

Nu Hotel Nu mixes traditional boutique hotel amenities like free Wi-Fi and Aveda toiletries with quirkier ones: Guest suites feature hammocks (don't worry, you still get a bed), and corner rooms come with bunk beds. With modern-loft décor that's cool but not intimidating, Nu is close to Smith Street's shops and restaurants; or you can settle into the lobby's reading corner, stocked with Brooklyn authors. 85 Smith St., nuhotelbrooklyn.com — Sarah D. Bunting

Inspired Community

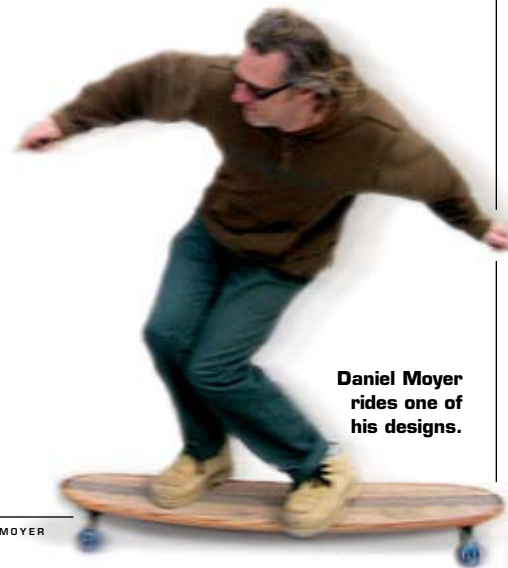
WHAT CAN BROOKLYN make for you? For starters, a chair, a bed, a table, and a sideboard — and throw in a skateboard for good measure.

Daniel Moyer makes both: Elegant, Asian-inspired hand-joined furniture and funky skateboards from the wood left over. Moyer moved his eponymous design business to Brooklyn from Manhattan seven years ago, and hasn't looked back. “I came for the low rents, but once I got here I discovered a vibrant community.”

Like Moyer, many of Brooklyn's design talents have been attracted by affordable rents in facilities that served manufacturers in an earlier era. Buildings in neighborhoods like Greenpoint, Williamsburg, Sunset Park, and Red Hook have been renovated with today's designers in mind.

In return, these creative types often draw design inspiration from the borough's world-class fine arts college, the Pratt Institute, and the world-renowned collections of the Brooklyn Museum.

— Virginia Citrano



Daniel Moyer rides one of his designs.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY DANIEL MOYER

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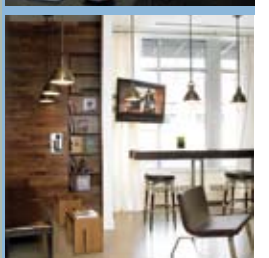
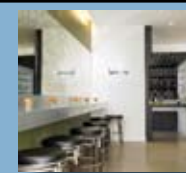
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