

My Hell's Kitchen

Ballet instructor **Peter Brandenhoff** offers his insight into the area

Denmark-born Peter Brandenhoff's talents have taken him around the world, performing with the Boston Ballet, Hamburg Ballet and San Francisco Ballet. An in-demand ballet instructor, he is currently teaching at the Ailey Extension.

What has your experience of Hell's Kitchen been over the years?

I am a fairly recent transplant to the city from San Francisco but have come to the city on a regular basis since the '80s. Hell's Kitchen was not a place I spent any time in until I moved here and in the few years I have been here it has become my favorite neighborhood.

Where do you eat in Hell's Kitchen?

The question could almost be, 'where do you not eat in Hell's Kitchen?' The place is swamped with good places to eat. I do not particularly enjoy places packed with people who 'discovered' it via social media, and from experience and principle I do not find any sort of 10-minute meal worth a 45-minute wait. Atmosphere is important too: friendly, jovial and without pretensions or major showmanship. Chez Napoleon makes phenomenal French food and it seems like you are away from New York for the duration of the meal. Braai has a good modern South African menu, though I wish they could get their hands on more game, like Springbok and such. On the Asian side it is a cornucopia – Mooncake on 54th Street has great Vietnamese soups and sandwiches for lunch and Co Ba on 53rd Street is another little oasis of tranquility while dining.

What bars or cafes would you recommend in the neighborhood?

Kahve gets my highest recommendation for cafes hands down. It hits all the points that make a place worth going to for me: great, friendly staff and owners,



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cozy atmosphere and great coffee. I have been drinking coffee since I was a kid and I do not prescribe to the coffee hoopla the hipster culture is imposing on us. Coffee is not something you should wait for for more than a few minutes. I usually get the same thing but recently inadvertently took possession of another customer's almond milk au lait, which was delicious! Their Turkish coffee is the best I have had this side of the Atlantic.

Since retiring from dancing full time I have severely cut down on the bars I make it to, but 'Disiac on 54th, and

McCoy's on Ninth are great places. Valhalla is great for beer and for their unpretentiousness when it comes to serving it.

La Bergamote is a great place for European-style afternoon cakes and tea, especially on warmer days when you can sit outside.

What's your favorite place locally?

The Ailey building. It is the best building for dance in the city. The studios are amazing, spacious, light and well kept with great views from all of them. And the energy when you walk in is something special – you feel it is a place with a heritage and history but also a place that is constantly moving forward.

What one thing do you think could improve Hell's Kitchen?

Keeping the chains, franchises and other advancements of gentrification at bay. The more we homogenize the less interesting we become; a glass of wine is far more expressive than a glass of milk.

How do you think the neighborhood compares to other areas of Manhattan?

Nostalgia plays a part here, as many aspects of the neighborhood remind me of my old stomping ground The Tenderloin in San Francisco. Where many other neighborhoods have changed completely in the past years Hell's Kitchen has not been completely overrun by hipsters, chain stores and freshly designed fancy eating joints. It may of course yet come, but I hope not.

Who do you admire in the neighborhood?

My students at Ailey. They are hardworking, dedicated young people in a tremendously demanding field. The number of jobs available to them is limited as is the country's general support of the arts. The fortitude and determination that they have is something extraordinary.

BIOGRAPHY

Peter Brandenhoff was born in Denmark and graduated from the Royal Danish Ballet. After dancing with several high-profile schools, in 2004 he discovered his passion for teaching after helping create an outreach trip to teach in South African townships. His teaching engagements include Royal Danish Ballet and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Peter's Hell's Kitchen:

BAKERY
La Bergamote
W52nd, 10th/11th

BARS
'Disiac Lounge
W54th, 9th/10th
McCoy's
9th, W51st/W52nd
Valhalla
9th, W53rd/W54th

COFFEE SHOPS
Kahve
9th, 51st/52nd

RESTAURANTS
Braai
W51st, 8th/9th
Chez Napoleon
9th, W51st/52nd
Co Ba BC
W53rd, 9th/10th
Mooncake Poeder
W54th, 8th/9th