

THE BROOKLYN FRIDGE

JOSH OZERSKY

New York's most famous food blogger lives in Brooklyn, eats elsewhere.

INTERVIEWED BY RICK ORTLIP



Photographs: Akiko Nishamura, brooklynphoto.com

Josh Ozersky, “edible animal savant” and editor of *New York Magazine’s* beloved food blog Grub Street (nymag.com/daily/food), claims he bought his Ditmas Park apartment because of its proximity to that Brooklyn landmark, DiFara Pizza. “I wanted to be close to Dom,” says Ozersky, whose latest book, *The Hamburger: A History*, hit stores in April. “Dom is a saint. A saint! To watch him perform his unhurried ritual is a privilege that ennobles my address.” Ozersky tends to talk in such grandiloquent language, uttering aphorisms (“the fat is the meat, and the meat is the vegetable”) as if speaking to an invisible Boswell. And, in fact, Ozersky’s surprisingly elegant apartment, filled with books, paintings and oriental rugs and furnishings in the high-Victorian style, is practically a shrine to Samuel Johnson, whom Ozersky claims as his hero. His vocation is clear from the meaty memorabilia to be found on nearly every wall, and his refrigerator has more animal carcasses than the local pound. This is definitely a fitting home for the man who calls himself “New

York’s most conspicuous carnivore.”

Did you really move to Brooklyn to be near DiFara Pizza?

Not exactly. It’s also near my friends Eddie Schoefeld, the Chinese food maven, and Henry Tenney, the king of karaoke and an aspiring gourmand. But the thought of being within walking distance to the High Priest of Pizza was what clinched the deal.

What else do you eat around here?

Despite this neighborhood’s just fame as an ethnic eats Mecca, I don’t really eat here that often. There’s a Paki takeout place on Coney Island Avenue that serves a delicious chicken sausage that’s indistinguishable from Bob Evans, in the best sense. It sits behind a sneeze guard and they keep it at about 10 degrees above room temperature. It’s fantastic. I also like Schnitzi, the local kosher cutlet house, which is piously decorated with pictures of various miracle rabbis.

You eat out in Manhattan a lot for your job. Do you think Brooklyn measures up? A lot of critics, like Alan Richman, have gone so far as to say they like Brooklyn better. Which do you think is the better borough?

I hate to say this in *Edible Brooklyn*, but it’s not even close. There is probably more good food in the East Village and Lower East Side than in all of Brooklyn. Manhattan, particularly Upper Manhattan, has just as many ethnic hellholes as Brooklyn. Queens is the great mother borough of globetrotting street gluttony, and Brooklynites just have to face it. We have DiFara and the River Café, still the best restaurant in Brooklyn for my money, but most of Brooklyn’s restaurant standards are a sham. Peter Luger is no longer the city’s top steakhouse. Park Slope is a desolate wilderness. The area on the other side of the park has, what? A NYC ICY that hasn’t opened and the Farm on Adderley. And now Pomme de Terre. There’s a Pomme de Terre on every block of the Upper East Side. The one great thing was the food at Red Hook ball fields, and its future is in doubt.

Why are you so hostile to Brooklyn?

I’m not hostile. I just eat out a lot, and I can’t hack the hype. I was the *Newsday* Queens critic for two years, and I saw what first-rate Asian and Latino food was like. I eat in the city’s best restaurants, the Gramercy Taverns and L’Impero’s, and, believe me, no lovably twee mom-and-pop bistro in Prospect Heights comes within a mile of them. It’s hyperion to a satyr!

Okay, so is there anywhere in Brooklyn worth eating?

The best things for me are the Russian appetizing stores. I’m especially devoted to Taste of Russia, in Brighton Beach. They pro-

duce some of the best takeout prepared food I've ever had—and in such copious quantities, for so little money! I had an amazing piece of flattened dark-meat chicken, some crown roast of pork, a salmon croquette and four different kinds of stuffed turnovers there the other day for something like \$12. Plus dill-and-garlic bacon from the meat counter. What a paradise. And of course Dom. That man, more than any hippie pig farmer, personifies the Slow Food movement. His bust should be mounted atop Brooklyn Borough Hall.

Knives

I only bring these knives out on ceremonial occasions. They're so good I only use them in public. What a stupid waste. Why did I buy them? I have to start using them more. I use my Chinese cleaver for everything, from mincing garlic to hacking chickens. I love it so.



Salts

Most of my cooking involves a lot of salt. I have table salt, fleur de sel to finish meats with, rosemary salt for dry rubbing, hibiscus salt for specialty pastas, a bull-head salt cellar filled with kosher salt for cooking, and volcanic rock salt for the table.

Pepper

I use the pepper mill for salt, but I like the bodega coarse pepper more anyway. I need a lot for barbecue rubs and roasts. It never goes bad or goes weak. I'd need wrists like King Kong Bundy to twist all the pepper I need.



Art

My father was a very gifted painter who was fascinated with chefs and restaurants. I wanted this apartment largely so I would have a place to display his work.

My friend Ali Ahmad gave me this beautiful picture of Buckwheat carving a turkey. I know that my meat art registers on some people as self-parody, but the truth is that I really am Mr. Cutlets, and he is me.

On His Desk

That's my late father's box cutter, from his studio, a bottle of sauce from the place where I first started eating barbecue as a child, and the Master Grill ridizio signal. I turn it from red to green when I start writing.

In His Freezer

I have a duck and a boneless Brandt short rib, both from my friend Pat La Frieda. I bought them for a barbecue that I





ended up not having, and I'm saving both meats against a rainy day. The Brandt boneless short rib I may make burgers from.

Burgers

I did a blind taste test of seven of the top burgers in the city for Always Hungry, a new food site. I took the remains of the Veselka burger and the Five Guys burger. The Burger Shoppe one I had for breakfast.

Skillet

This skillet has been with me for my whole adult life. I wrote a tribute to it for a recent book called *Taking Things Seriously*. The press I use for steaks, chops and chickens.



Pork Roast

I'm trying to convince Bobby Flay's people to have me on his new grill show. I'm going to cook this Hampshire rack of pork for a test video this afternoon at Robbie Richter's mother's house, in Rego Park.

Calf-Foot Water Bottle

I bought this at a truck stop in Texas. I use it as a totem or at least a decoration. I don't think I ever drank wine out of it. Maybe some consommé.

Dehydrated Hash Browns

True hash browns are shredded, the better to dry out and absorb butter on the griddle. The Betty Crocker dehydrated hash browns are one of my favorite childhood snacks. They're bad, but in a good way.

Schmaltz

There's no substitute for chickenfat. Or for kidney suet, tallow, butter or any of the other fats that are the fundamentals of carnal gastronomy. 🍷

