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Getting reacquainted with the city's 'ins' and 'outs'

By Bonnie Friedman
Special to The Advertiser

"I'll have a lychee martini, please."

"What?" the tall, tattooed, totally-clad-in-black waiter asked, looking decidedly down his nose. "We don't make those here."

"Here" is Momofuku Ssam Bar in New York City, where I learned on a recent trip to my hometown that frivolous, mostly-vodka-based drinks — such as lychee martinis — are decidedly "out." As in, do not order one in any trendy restaurant or bar. You will embarrass the friend with whom you are drinking and you will reveal that you are decidedly unhip and unaware that "dark" cocktails — classic and contemporary, made with bourbon, rye, Scotch, rum — are "in."

Dark cocktail lounges in which to enjoy these cocktails are also "in." The Flatiron Lounge (very dark) and The Empire Room (dark) in Manhattan and Fort Defiance (not SO dark) in Brooklyn are three of the best.

For those food enthusiasts who may not know, Momofuku Ssam Bar is one of David Chang's joints. I don't care for him — at least on paper 'cause I've never met him — but a friend convinced me I'd love his food. I did. Chang is the king of pork — pig meat in every form is still very "in" — and of noodles. The four signature items we had highlighted pork and/or noodles (duh); the star of the show was an amazing seasonal dish — Fuji apple kimchee with jowl bacon, maple labne and arugula. (It's fascinating to me that our everyday convenience store food such as ramen and kimchee and pork buns sit atop culinary pedestals there ... at least for the moment.)

Food trucks are still "in." I had hoped to stumble upon them regularly but I saw only one — the Van Leeuwen Artisan Ice Cream Truck. If you are more determined than I, Google "NY food trucks," pick the one you like, and follow it on Twitter. It's a new world, my friends.

I'm sorry to be the bearer of this news, but cupcakes are absolutely "out." The good news is French macarons are "in." Colorful, crunchy exteriors, chewy meringue-y interiors with creamy goodness sandwiched in between. They're everywhere. Some of the best are at Madeleine Patisserie in Chelsea.

There is, of course, more to New York than food and drink. There is art and plenty of it. If you are a Picasso fan, this is your year. MoMA's "Picasso: Themes and Variations" is up through Sept. 6. And "Picasso in The Metropolitan Museum of Art" remains on display through Aug. 1.

I saw them both. Both excellent; the Met's is extraordinary because it includes the museum's entire 300-piece collection — paintings, drawings, sculpture, ceramics, prints — never before seen in its entirety.

Museum restaurants are also very "in." (Yes, it does always come back to food!) The trend started with The Modern at MoMA, which opened several years ago. New in the Guggenheim is the Wright, after Frank Lloyd Wright, who designed the landmark building.

And the Museum of Arts & Design on Columbus Circle has Robert. A sleek, contemporary room with food to match, it's on the ninth floor, with great views. The Whitney Museum of American Art will get its new Danny Meyer-owned-and-operated caf later this year. For now, the space is filled with a "pop-up," another great urban trend.

Tiny stores, some as small as 100 square feet, can be anywhere — in a hotel or museum lobby, or a small city green space that sells food, clothing, accessories. They can be there days, a few weeks, sometimes more. And then they're gone. In the Whitney there's a pop-up cafe called Sandwiched. You can rest your feet, and eyes, and the food is good and, not surprisingly, overpriced. But hey, you don't have to leave the building. And speaking of leaving the building ...

This is, obviously, the last time my byline will appear in this section. After many years as an occasional contributor, that saddens me. It has been a joy to share my travels with the Advertiser's readers, not to mention working with Wanda Adams, Chris Oliver and Treena Shapiro, fine editors all. I hope we all meet up again somewhere out there ... soon.



Colorful French macarons have displaced cupcakes as a trendy treat in the Big Apple.

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This is Picasso's year in New York, with lavish exhibits at MoMA and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.