

Specialty Food Magazine  
November/December 2010  
Circulation: 30,100 readers each month

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2010

# SPECIALTY FOOD

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MAGAZINE®

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## LIMELIGHT marketplace

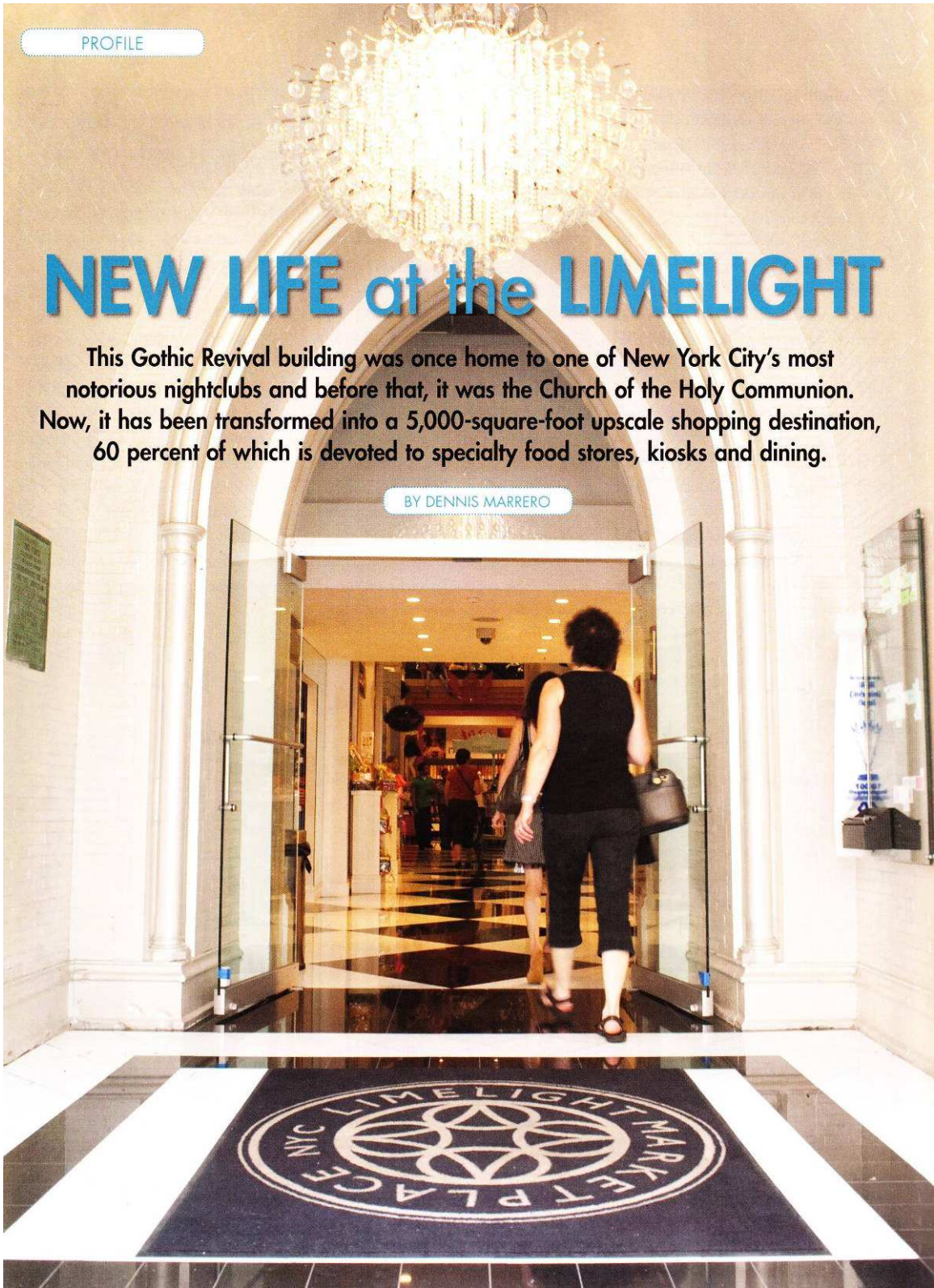
New York's infamous nightclub  
reopens as a high-end food  
market with vendors offering  
cheese, charcuterie, baked goods,  
chocolates and other specialties,  
p. 38

PROFILE

## NEW LIFE at the LIMELIGHT

This Gothic Revival building was once home to one of New York City's most notorious nightclubs and before that, it was the Church of the Holy Communion. Now, it has been transformed into a 5,000-square-foot upscale shopping destination, 60 percent of which is devoted to specialty food stores, kiosks and dining.

BY DENNIS MARRERO



On May 7, 2010, the Limelight Marketplace, a three-floor specialty department store and outdoor courtyard, opened its doors for business. Its church doors, that is. The new Marketplace is located in the Church of the Holy Communion, a deconsecrated Episcopal church that once housed the infamous Limelight nightclub, which occupied the space from 1983 to 1996, making headlines for its celebrity guests and police raids.

The building, built from 1844 to 1846, is documented as the first Gothic Revival construction to appear in the U.S., and was designated a New York landmark in 1966. Mike Tzezaileidis, owner of Jezalin's, a specialty food and gift store that is among the more than 40 current vendors at the Marketplace, says, "You're not going to see anything else like it in Manhattan, whether you're coming to shop or treating it like a museum visit."

But, beyond the dramatic architecture, the spot's more recent history and reputation as a club draws attention, something retail developer and mastermind behind the Marketplace, Jack Menashe, is taking advantage of by incorporating the Limelight name in the new market. Though the structure has been completely renovated, it has not stopped people from bringing up its past. "The only thing about the market that's getting a little old," says Tzezaileidis, "is all the people telling me what they did in my store when it was the Limelight! I've only had one customer say, 'I remember when this was a church.'"

### Reinventing the Limelight

Although the publicity surrounding the Marketplace's name and location has sparked a great response, the idea to reinvent the Limelight came by accident. After relocating a lower Manhattan fashion boutique named Lounge to Miami, Menashe was left with merchandise in New York to unload. He asked a friend who managed several local properties about a temporary retail space and was offered the Limelight. (While various companies had tried to revive the Limelight club under different names, Avalon being the most recent, the space had been dormant for two years.) Menashe opened a shop to host a sample sale that ended up lasting about six months. With nothing but an 8.5- by 11-inch sign hanging

outside, the sale managed to attract an average of 5,000 customers per day. This opened Menashe's eyes to the location's potential. "The architecture, history and maze-like layout presented a formula for something great," he says.

Although his previous retail experience centered on boutiques, Menashe took this project in a new direction. "When the economy tanked I thought a lot about what consumers were willing to spend on," he explains. "There was something lighthearted and upbeat about unique foodie concepts." Keeping this in mind, Menashe and retail-environment designer James Mansour, designed a marketplace with 60 percent of the space devoted to food.

Menashe's goal was to have a mix of products that would attract a wide demographic, and his in-house team of tastemakers sought out innovative retailers, vendors

and entrepreneurs that would fit the profile. A key draw of the Marketplace's business model is that it offers opportunities for companies that would otherwise not be able to afford their own storefront in its pricey Chelsea neighborhood location. The market is set up similar to a boutique department store, so retail spaces for each vendor tend to be smaller than a storefront. This allows companies to secure space for a rent that is much lower than traditional storefronts in the area. The Marketplace also allows new leases to range from two months to five years, which gives entrepreneurial businesses a chance to test the waters. In addition, vendors are provided with a POS system, store build out and maintenance support, branded materials and marketing and public relations support.



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### STORE STATS

#### Limelight Marketplace

656 Sixth Ave.  
New York, NY 10010  
212.359.5600  
limelightmarketplace.com

DATE OPENED: May 2010  
RETAIL SPACE: 5,000 square feet  
TOTAL NUMBER OF VENDORS: 43  
NUMBER OF FOOD VENDORS: 19

(For a full list of vendors, visit [specialtyfood.com/limelight](http://specialtyfood.com/limelight))



Miss Tea



Mari's New York



Butterfly Bakeshop

### A Shopping Excursion

Limelight Marketplace has two main floors with third-floor “sky box” rooms that are accessible by separate staircases. The first floor offers access to the courtyard, which has been used as a farmers’ market and as a barbeque space called the Limelight Grill. With outdoor seating available for 40 patrons, the space is slated to become a year-round restaurant.

Much of the shopping area on the ground floor is devoted to specialty foods. The second floor is made up mostly of beauty, art, fashion and jewelry shops and has access to the stores in the third-floor sky boxes.

### Food Highlights

Currently, there are 19 food vendors in the Marketplace. On the first floor there are different sales areas and rooms that are labeled to generally denote what you can find there: Festival of Shops; Sweet Room; Specialty Food; and Gourmet Food. There is also a two-story wine bar that you access from the second floor. Here are some of the food highlights at the Marketplace:

**Festival of Shops.** This is the main Marketplace hall, which is located at the Sixth Avenue entrance. Among the designer boutiques, visitors can find antioxidant- and probiotic-packed Jala Frozen Yogurt and It’s Sugar, a candy haven from Jeff

Rubin, co-founder of Dylan’s Candy Bar and FAO Sweets.

The area also hosts a French-style cart from MarieBelle’s that offers specialty chocolates and confections. (MarieBelle’s flagship store and Cacao Bar is located in Manhattan’s Soho neighborhood.) Owner Maribel Lieberman says the best seller at the Limelight is its toffee. “We use an original English recipe and a premium European butter,” she explains. “It just a basic toffee with sugar and butter but the secret really is what butter you use.”

**Sweet Room.** This area currently has five vendors that offer shoppers an upscale selection of cakes, award-winning brownies, whoopee pies and chocolates. The shops are designed to be uniform; spaces range in size from 12 x 8 to 11 x 6 square feet, and all vendors have matching white awnings with their company logos printed on the front. The Cupcake Stop mobile food truck has created its first location without wheels in the Sweet Room. Its Red Velvet cupcakes are a crowd favorite but other options like the Elvis cupcake, a peanut butter cake baked with pieces of banana and topped with peanut butter frosting and yellow sugar, are also popular.

Other Sweet Room occupants include Mari’s New York one-bite brownies, where the Caramel Sea Salt Brownie is the best seller. The Little Candy Cake Company, created by former celebrity stylist Cindy

Paragallo, produces handmade miniature wedding cakes created entirely of chocolate. Wannahavacookie offers whoopee pies, two moist cookies that sandwich the company’s signature butter creams. The vendor expects to serve six to seven flavor varieties daily.

**Specialty Food.** While specialty foods are sold throughout the Marketplace, in the room labeled Specialty Food shoppers can find stylish cookware, quality oils and specialty teas. Baci Gelato, along with its full espresso bar and fresh juices, serves up decadent gelatos, while Butterfly Bakeshop features signature and custom cakes.

Alejandra Remijio, manager of Whisk, a Brooklyn-based retailer specializing in designer cookware, says that, due to its small space, the Limelight location will feature seasonal themes rather than represent the full Whisk collection. Cross merchandising with other nearby vendors such as Carter & Caveros’ extra virgin olive oils or Miss Tea’s organic specialty teas also helps sales, says Remijio.

**Gourmet Market.** Right outside of the specialty food vendor area is Jezalin’s gourmet market, the retailer’s first brick-and-mortar store. Jezalin.com opened as an online-only gift order business specializing in design-your-own specialty gift crates five years ago, but owner Tzeailidis was looking for retail/warehouse space in the Hamptons when the

Limelight got in touch with him.

Today Jezalin's encompasses one of the biggest retail areas for any one vendor in the building. Though the space was originally intended to be separated into six sections for different merchants, Tzezilidis decided to rent the entire room. The 1,200-square-foot market has a traditional set up with fromage and charcuterie departments offering up to 70 different cheeses and select meats like Spain's Jamón Ibérico; an onsite coffee roaster; an antique nut roaster; a deli serving up traditional and specialty sandwiches such as the Chevre Delight, featuring Bucheron goat cheese, grilled Italian eggplant and zucchini pressed in a toasted panini; and a specialty domestic and international grocery section that offers selections such as Slitti Nocciolata, a creamy hazelnut spread. Jezalin's has a ten-year contract with Limelight. "[We're] in it for the long haul," says Tzezilidis. "If things go well, which I anticipate they will, I'll ask for the contract to be even longer. We're thrilled to be in the neighborhood [and] based on the repeat business that we're getting, it seems that the neighborhood is also thrilled that we're here."

Jezalin's specialty paninis are taking off with the lunch crowd. "We are quickly becoming recognized for our sandwiches," he continues. Best sellers include the Mr. Mortadella, featuring mortadella, imported provolone and pickled hot red peppers, and

the Soppresata Tartufo, which combines Fra Mani soppressata salami, pecorino with truffles and hot cherry pepper on a crispy baguette panini.

Jezalin's incorporates the custom gift crates it sells online into its retail location. Customers can choose products from the store's shelves to create custom gifts; the crates include an envelope with a wax seal that contains a greeting, plus product information for the items included in the gift. Using an old-world-style wood crate instead of a basket gives more flexibility with the types of items you can include, explains Tzezilidis. For instance, the store features a display of gift set ideas that join Polish pottery with specialty products such as an elegant tea pot with artisan tea blends.

The rustic style of the crates also fits in perfectly with Jezalin's design, which is distinct from the uniform look of the other vendors. "Even though this store is only three months old, it looks like it's the oldest gourmet market in Manhattan," says Tzezilidis. He acquired reclaimed wood from an old department store in Tennessee to cover the refrigerators and all sides of the deli and checkout counters. Wrought iron decorative fencing installed by Limelight adds to the store's authentic feel.

**Wine Bar.** In keeping with the only tradition that has held true throughout the landmark building's history, wine will be served.

Occupying one of the sky boxes is The Cana Wine Bar, named after the biblical wedding feast in the town of Cana where Jesus turned water into wine. With an entrance located on the second floor, the wine bar's two-level space amounts to 700 square feet and will have seating on both levels. Bruce Caufield, owner of the space, has signed a ten-year-lease.

Although the bar was still in the process of opening at presstime, Caufield says it will serve 20 varieties that will change seasonally. The bar menu will include Italian-inspired small plates, cured meats and cheeses, as well as paninis, bruschetta, soups and salads. Along with wine, Caufield says customers can expect to see wine cocktails with biblical themes that pay tribute to the historic church setting.

### The Future

Upcoming plans include two restaurants on the first floor—one being famous Brooklyn pizzeria, Grimaldi's, which was slated to open at presstime. Many of the current vendors believe that New Yorkers will come to know the space as a premier shopping center. Lieberman of MarieBelle's notes, "People are finally starting to think of the Limelight as a place to shop, but it will take a little time for people to forget what it was and realize what it is now." |SFM|

*Dennis Marrero is associate editor of Specialty Food Magazine.*



Jezalin's

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