

April 6, 2008

WEEKEND IN NEW YORK | MADISON AVENUE

Few Parades on This Avenue, but Plenty on Display

By [SETH KUGEL](#)

THE toniest stretch of Madison Avenue may be the only place in the city where you can wear an outfit perfectly suited for your destination yet still feel underdressed just walking down the sidewalk.

Though it starts out innocently enough near a row of fast food restaurants on 23rd Street, by the 50s on up Madison Avenue is loaded with stores like Gucci and Prada and Hermès and other even fancier names that the average passer-by is not sophisticated enough to have heard of.

That makes an afternoon strolling Madison a great plan for a certain indigenous Manhattan tribe of shopper-gatherers, while less aspirational tourists join the local riffraff wandering down the still fancy, but more democratic, Fifth Avenue — with its St. Patrick’s Cathedral and Museum Mile and where you can always pop into Central Park.

But even if your tastes aren’t particularly high-end, don’t completely count Madison out or you’ll miss some of the quirky and sometimes even affordable stops that make a brisk two-mile walk — say, from St. Patrick’s (the back of it) at 50th Street to [Woody Allen](#) land in Carnegie Hill in the 90s — worth your Saturday afternoon.

Be sure to look above street level. For instance, on the fourth floor of the northwest corner of Madison and 54th Street is a plain sign that says “Vintage Poster Gallery.” It’s the new digs of the Ross Art Group, which opened up a Manhattan gallery in November after years of serving Manhattan clients from Westport, Conn. Browsers can check out the vintage advertising posters, many of them big stone lithographs by well-known artists like Leonetto Cappiello and Roger Broders. Not to say you’ll walk out with a Cappiello advertising the French remedy Le Thermogène (for cough, rheumatism and “points de côté”), but some posters start in the low hundreds.

It’s worth poking your head into the public atrium in what is still known as the I.B.M. Building at 57th Street. The bright, high space is kind of like the Starbucks you’ve always wanted: a place where you can sit and relax and chat without ordering coffee. There’s also art on display.

Just off Madison on 60th Street (to the east) are two equally alluring but totally different attractions. First, there’s the French Institute-Alliance Française, which has occasional films and other events, but also has a gallery open to the public. (An exhibition of work by Peter Knapp, the fashion photographer, is coming in May.) And just past it, Gene’s Coffee Shop, for what is probably the cheapest sit-down meal off this stretch of Madison; almost everything is under \$10.

But you can also indulge in a little luxury. Not handbags, perhaps, but expensive chocolate (at least a truffle or two) is within almost everyone's splurge budget. There are plenty of shops along this part of Madison, including Leonidas, at 51st Street; Teuscher, on 61st Street just east of Madison; and Debaue & Gallais, on 69th Street just west of Madison. MarieBelle, the SoHo spot that also serves sophisticated hot chocolate, crepes and salads, recently opened a second-floor shop on Madison between 65th and 66th Streets that's more intimate than its SoHo location. You have to be buzzed in, which adds an air of exclusivity (Madison Avenue-ese for hassle) to your visit. They have just started a Friday evening small-plates menu, with piano [music](#) provided by the new chef, Marianne Ladant, from 6 to 11 p.m.

You'll find many, many galleries along Madison, as well, like the Arader Galleries (two of them, in fact, at 72nd Street and 78th Street), which specialize in, among other things, Audubon aquatints and lithographs and 16th-century maps (the ones that make [Cuba](#) as big as [Texas](#) and render [North America](#) an unidentifiable blob).

And though you may not want to enter the high-end jewelry spots, you should poke your head into Traum Safe near 74th Street to see where those who do shop Madison store their valuables. For \$90,000 you can get a safe with custom-made drawers, including ones that can wind your watches for you.

Crawford Doyle Booksellers near 81st Street is doubly quirky — there are the racks out on the sidewalk selling not \$1 paperbacks but old Sotheby's and Christie's catalogs, full of high-quality art reproductions, for about \$5 or \$10. Quirk No. 2 is the business hiding in the basement: Burlington Antique Toys, essentially a smoke-filled room stocked with all kinds of antique toy soldiers and the painting studio of the owner, Steve Balkin. It has to be one of the strangest stores in Manhattan.

You're honor bound to stop by the William Greenberg bakery near 82nd Street, which is the expensive clothing boutique of Jewish bakeries. Its black-and-white cookies may have been named Best of New York by New York Magazine, but plenty of places are almost as good. The schnecken — pecan and raisin buns that are sticky to the point that you need multiple toothpicks — are what really stand out and, alas, the magazine doesn't have a category for that.

As you get past 86th into Carnegie Hill, things turn more neighborhoody. One very un-Madison-like sign sits outside of Schatzie's, a neighborhood staple. It reads: "DIRTY BRISKET SANDWICH, \$7.50." Your sandwich, which is brisket with a sweet Southern-style sauce on rye bread, is not the most colorful thing inside; that honor goes to the rotund owner, Tony Schatzie, who has a lot to say about whatever you bring up, be it politics or corned beef, with vocabulary that would get him kicked out of many other Madison Avenue locales.

FROM AUDUBON TO SCHNECKEN

[Ross Art Group, 532 Madison Avenue, fourth floor — enter on 54th Street; \(212\) 223-1525;](#)

www.rossartgroup.com.

French Institute-Alliance Française, 22 East 60th Street; (212) 355-6100; www.fiaf.org.

Gene's Coffee Shop, 26 East 60th Street; (212) 355-3794.

Arader Galleries, 29 East 72nd Street and 1016 Madison Avenue; (212) 628-3668 and (212) 628-7625; www.aradergalleries.com.

Traum Safe, 946 Madison Avenue; (212) 452-2565; www.traumsafe.com.

Crawford Doyle Booksellers, 1082 Madison Avenue; (212) 288-6300; bookstore@verizon.net.

Burlington Antique Toys, 1082 Madison Avenue — basement; (212) 861-9708. www.burlingtontoys.com.

William Greenberg Jr. Desserts, 1100 Madison Avenue; (212) 861-1340; www.wmgreenbergdesserts.com.

Schatzie's Prime Meats, 1200 Madison Avenue; (212) 410-1555.

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