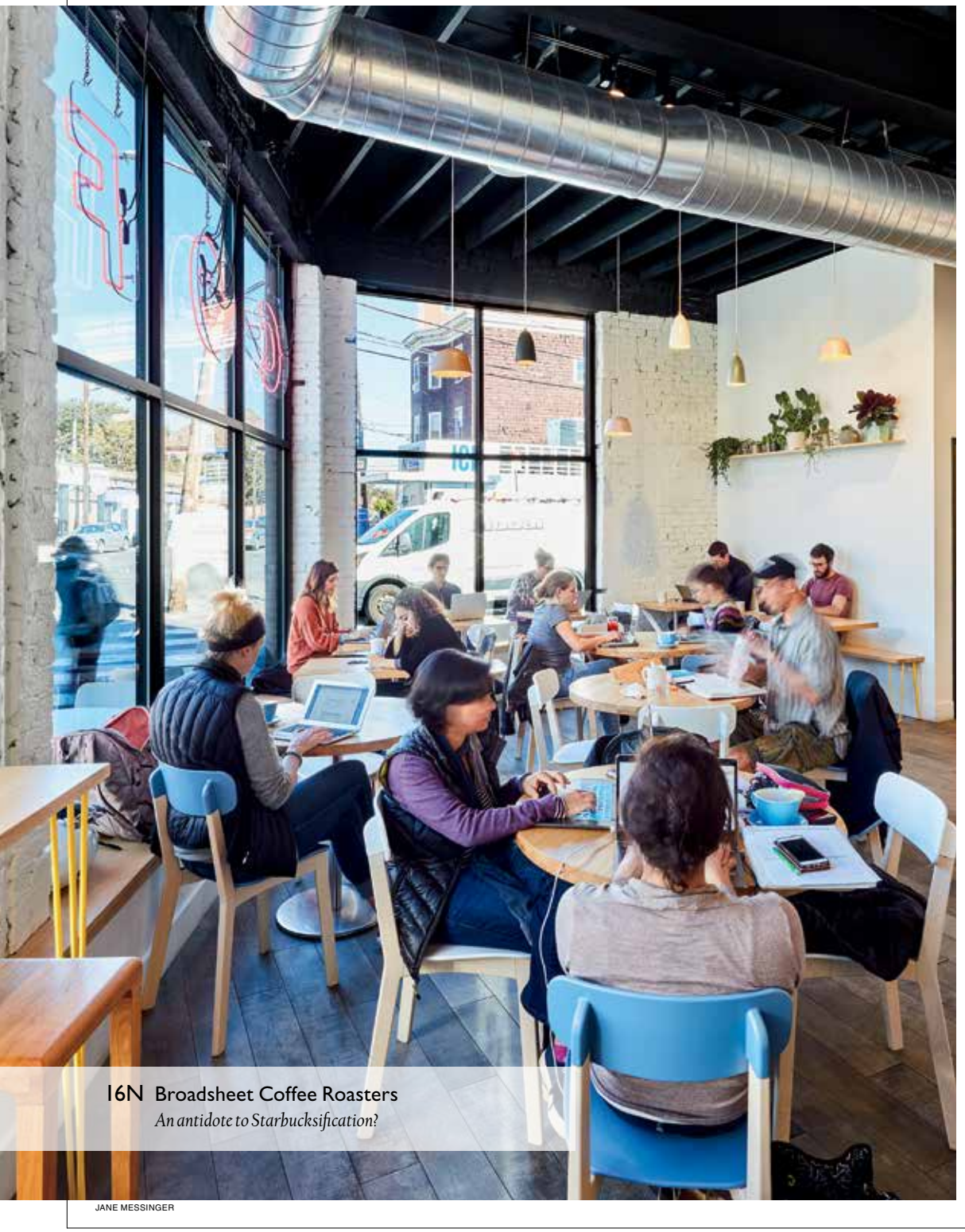
Harvard²

Cambridge, Boston, and beyond



16N Broadsheet Coffee Roasters
An antidote to Starbucksification?

JANE MESSINGER

FROM LEFT: HARVARD DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC; MUSEUM OF RUSSIAN ICONS; HARVARD FILM ARCHIVE

Extracurriculars

Events on and off campus during March and April

SEASONAL

Arts First Festival
www.ofa.fas.harvard.edu
The annual arts celebration in and around Harvard Square offers live performances of dance, music, comedy, circus acts, and theater, along with art exhibits and hands-on activities for all ages. The 2018 Harvard Arts Medalist is novelist **Colson Whitehead** '91 (profiled in the September-October 2016 issue), author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Underground Railroad.* (April 26-29)

From left: Flutist Claire Chase performs at Holden Chapel; sacred Ukrainian embroidered textiles at the Museum of Russian Icons; and *WarGames,* with a young Matthew Broderick, part of the "Caught in the Net" series at the Harvard Film Archive

THEATER

Harvard-Radcliffe Gilbert and Sullivan Players
www.boxoffice.harvard.edu
The Yeomen of the Guard; or, The Merryman and His Maid. A young woman and her father scheme to save her love interest by pretending he's her brother—but things go awry. Agassiz Theater. (March 23-April 1)

American Repertory Theater
www.americanrepertorytheater.org
Enjoy dance-hall, roots, and reggae-rocking

Caribbean rhythms with ***Lady Lee & The New Awakening Band*** and guest artists Mashy Word Compressor and Boston rap star Scape Scrilla. Oberon. (March 30)

MUSIC

Harvard Department of Music
www.music.fas.harvard.edu
Flutist **Claire Chase,** professor of the practice of music, performs seven world-premiere compositions, joined by guest vocalists. Holden Chapel. (March 29)

WCRB Classical Cartoon Festival
www.wgbh.org
Animated stories on a giant screen accompanied by live music. Boston Symphony Hall. (March 24)

STAFF PICK: Skeletons, Skylines, and Weeds

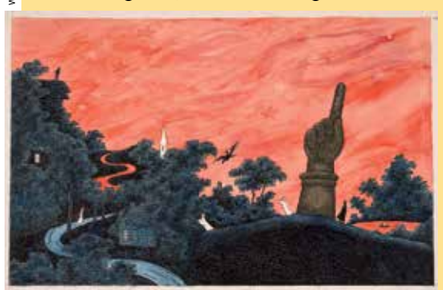
"Gorey's Worlds," at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, explores what inspired Edward Gorey '50, mostly through works he bequeathed to the Hartford museum. They range from nineteenth-century folk art to photographs and drawings by Eugène Atget and Edvard Munch and an oil painting, *Dandelions in a Blue Tin* (1982), by the brilliant and reclusive landscape artist Albert York. Gorey was "ahead of his time" in appreciating York's work, and acquired eight of them in the 1980s, says Erin Monroe, Wadsworth's associate curator of American painting and sculpture. She believes Gorey was drawn to something "subtly subversive" in York's "ordinary" subjects, and to the humor in the carefully arranged weeds.

EDWARD GOREY: ANNOUNCEMENT FOR THE POETS' THEATRE PERFORMANCE IN FOGG MUSEUM COURT, MAY, 1952/ OFFSET LITHOGRAPHY ON PAPER, 5 1/2 X 14 IN./©THE EDWARD GOREY CHARITABLE TRUST

Images of skeletons, alleyways, animals, skylines, dancing figures, and gravestones also appear in the show, as they do, one way or another, in Gorey's own legendarily macabre and dry-witted works. Dozens of borrowed objects—his own art, fur coats, and handsome jewelry, along with 1970s portraits by culture photographer Harry Benson—flesh out a singular creative spirit.

Gorey died in 2000, leaving no explanations of his attachment to the bequeathed items. But Monroe's research suggests connections: parallels between *Church and Graveyard* (c. 1850), a folk-art sketch by an unknown artist, and Gorey's *Haunted America* (below), a 1990 watercolored pen-and-ink design for a book on supernatural short stories; or between many Gorey-esque objects and those in Atget's *Naturaliste, rue de l'École de Médecine* (1926-27; printed by Berenice Abbott). On view, too, is a print of a 1952 illustration Gorey made for the Poets' Theatre, a Cambridge group that included Frank O'Hara '50 (Gorey's College roommate), and of which Gorey was the resident artist. "It was about as counterculture as you could get in the early 1950s," says Monroe.

The flyer reflects the link "between text and image, and a unique typography and theatricality, that are the foundation" of his artistic career, she notes. Acrobats, gloved women in gowns, and mustached gentlemen are depicted as "languid bodies, graceful, and unusually boneless," resembling his later drawings. His own "presentation—fur coats, high-top sneakers—which seems sort of pre-hipster now, was strange on campus then, and even when he moved to New York City," she adds. "At six-foot-four, he didn't necessarily blend in. I think he was OK with everything that was strange and unexpected." ~N.P.B.



WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART, AMERICAN PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS PURCHASE FUND, 2015.4.1.

Harvard Glee Club
www.boxoffice.harvard.edu
The **Harvard Glee Club** and Ashmont Boy Choir sing the *Davison Mass,* by Memorial Church resident composer Carson Cooman. (April 6)

Holden Choruses
www.boxoffice.harvard.edu
The **Holden Choruses** and **Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra** perform Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony. Sanders Theatre. (April 20)

LECTURES

The Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology
www.peabody.harvard.edu
Smithsonian Institution curator of globalization Joshua A. Bell delves into the international network behind the production, repair, and disposal of mobile devices in **Unseen Connections: A Natural History of Cell Phones.** (April 18)

The Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study
www.radcliffe.harvard.edu
The Alzheimer Enigma: The Causes of the Dementia Epidemic features Albert Hofman, Kay Family professor of public health and clinical epidemiology at the Harvard Chan School of Public Health. (April 23)

EXHIBITIONS & EVENTS

Museum of Russian Icons
www.museumofrussianicons.org
Rushnyky: Sacred Ukrainian Textiles offers beautifully embroidered cloths used in life-cycle ceremonies and sacred rituals.

Fuller Craft Museum
www.fullercraft.org
Mindful: Exploring Mental Health Through Art highlights the powers of creativity and expressiveness through sculptures, drawings, and other works. (Through April 22)

FILM

Harvard Film Archive
www.hcl.harvard.edu/hfa
Caught in the Net: The Internet in the Paranoid Imagination surveys films from the 1980s to the present, including *eXistenZ, Personal Shopper, Pulse, Ghost in the Shell,* and *Southland Tales.* (March 9-18)

Events listings are also found at www.harvardmagazine.com/harvard2-events.

Hidden Treasures

New Britain's "Little Poland" and museum of American art

by NELL PORTER BROWN

April's Little Poland Festival; an elegant vista in Walnut Hill Park; the New Britain Museum of American Art—and images from two current exhibits, on American Sign Language and pulp-art paintings

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF THE LITTLE POLAND FESTIVAL, NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT; WIKICOMMONS; ALAMY STOCK PHOTOS; FRANCISCA BENTEZ, *AMERICA*, 2016 COURTESY OF THE NEW BRITAIN MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART; ANDREW E. TOOS, *THE BRIDGE*, 2004 COURTESY OF THE NEW BRITAIN MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART; ROBERT LESSER COLLECTION OF PULP ART, 2009.22.51.UC, COURTESY OF THE NEW BRITAIN MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

On a recent visit to Broad Street, the heart of New Britain's "Little Poland," not a word of English was heard.

Customers lining up for kielbasa at Krakus Meat Market, picking out blintzes and *cukierki czekoladowe* (chocolate candies) at Polmart down the street, and crowding into Kasia's Bakery for babka and puffy donuts called *paczki* all spoke Polish.

"And it's not just markets and restaurants, it's bank tellers, accountants, and doctors, art galleries. This is becoming the cultural Polish center for all of New England," says bilingual attorney Adrian Baron, president of the Polonia Business Association, formed a decade ago to help focus revitalization efforts begun in the late 1990s. "This area was littered with pawn shops, a strip club, and empty storefronts," he says. Even when he relocated his law office, Podorowsky, Thompson & Baron, from Hartford to Broad Street in 2006, "There was a heroin dealer doing business on the front steps. Today, there's a school bus stop, and I put in a welcome bench for parents waiting for their kids."

New Britain is about 15 miles southeast of Hartford. It was a Colonial-era settlement, but rose to prominence as a manufacturing center, dubbed the "Hardware City," when companies like P&F Corbin Company and Stanley Works (now Stanley Black & Decker, still headquartered there) were founded in the mid nineteenth century. These enterprises anchored the cultural and community attractions that are thriving there today.

Poles began arriving in the late 1800s and joined other immigrants—Irish, German, and Italian—working in the booming factories. The fast-growing Polish community was soon buttressed by the neo-Gothic Sacred Heart Church, built in 1897, which looms

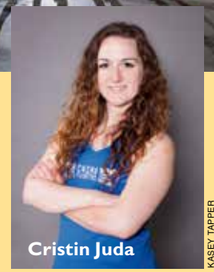
large on the Broad Street hill and still holds services in Polish. Another wave of Poles arrived after World War II, then a third influx associated with Polish independence in 1989.

Immigrants were once so crucial to New Britain commerce that company representatives sought to recruit them as they disembarked from ships in New York City, says Min Jung Kim, director and CEO of the New Britain Museum of American Art (NBMAA). The museum traces its roots to the New Britain Institute, founded in 1853 to foster learning and cultural awareness among the new arrivals. In 1903, John Butler Talcott, a former mayor, chair of the Institute's building committee, and founder of the American Hosiery Company, donated $20,000 in gold bonds for an art-acquisition fund. This transformative gift was part "of a civic and cultural consciousness that began to develop in the first part of the nineteenth century in prosperous cities in the Northeast and gradually spread throughout the country," Kim wrote

CURIOSITIES: Boston Roller Derby

JOE MEDOLO

The Cosmonaughties roll out for a game



KASEY TAPPER

Cristin Juda

When not holed up in a Harvard chemistry lab, fifth-year graduate student Cristin Juda lets loose as her alter ego, "Brutyl Lithium." The Boston Roller Derby track name is a play on the compound *tert*-Butyllithium, she says with a smile: "When it comes into contact with air, it catches on fire."

That's a handy trait for playing a rigorous sport rooted in targeted aggression and strategic containment. Two five-player teams skate furiously around a track in the same direction while the designated "jammer" from each side fights to get past the pack of opposing "blockers" without being knocked out of bounds. As everyone plays offense and defense simultaneously, and boundaries shift with the pack, the action can get chaotic. About 18 officials are required to run a given game, and strict rules govern hitting.

Skaters can't use elbows, hands, head, or feet, or "hit directly in the back or the face, or below the knee," says Erica Viscio, graphic designer and marketing coordinator for Harvard Medical School's office of global education. "You use your body, usually hips or shoulders, to initiate contact. I have bruises, and my face is a bit scratched, so it can get a little rough," she allows, but "I grew up playing sports with the boys and it was nice to play with women—and have that intense physical outlet when going to the gym doesn't really cut it."

JOE MEDOLO

An estimated 1,200 amateur roller-derby leagues for women, men, and juniors compete across the globe. American derby's origins date to popular roller-skating marathons in the 1930s, which then morphed into a "kitschy sport that appealed to nontraditional sports fans: skaters wore fishnets and tutus and put on sort of a stage show," says Viscio, who plays as "Maul" (short for "Agent MauledHer," inspired by the *X Files* protagonist) for the Boston Massacre team that last year won the Division II world championship against Paris.

STEVE JURKOVIC

Erica Viscio, a.k.a. "Maul," slams by opponents on the track.

That campy element still exists, but has waned since the mid 2000s, when roller derby began to emerge as a more serious competitive sport—it was short-listed for inclusion in the 2020 Olympics—played predominantly by women.

Boston Roller Derby, among 400 leagues in the Women's Flat Track Derby Association, began in 2005 and has since grown to seven teams as well as a junior-level training program, headquartered at a warehouse in Lynn. Games are played at Shriners Auditorium, in Wilmington, except those in May and June, which are held at Cambridge's Simoni Skating Rink.

The all-volunteer league (only some game officials are paid) is a tight-knit community. "Not only do you practice with the team three to five days a week," Viscio says, "we travel and train together." She and Juda also coach and teach. "Graduate school is very stressful, and this is a sport where you can really get out your frustration," says Juda, a blocker with the Cosmonaughties. "People outside of the derby community think I'm really tough. Roller derby does build confidence—knowing you can play a contact sport," but for her the appeal also lies in its "welcoming environment. People are very open-minded and tolerant. It's a sport where you can be whoever you want to be."

Viscio joined Boston Roller Derby when she moved from Vermont for her Harvard job, not knowing a soul. "I thought it would be a good way to make some new friends," she says, "and it turned into this incredible adventure that has altered the entire course of my life."

—N.P.B.

LITTLE POLAND FESTIVAL, NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT

Children in traditional dress perform at the Little Poland Festival.

in "American Art in the 21st Century: Building Bridges, Not Walls," for *Art New England* (May-June 2017). "In short, the NBMAA was uniquely positioned to reflect the new, unifying, and 'American' visual rhetoric."

Local leaders also commissioned the adjacent Walnut Hill Park in 1870, now on the National Register of Historic Places. It was designed by the office of Hartford-born landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, A.M. 1864, LL.D. '93, as a respite for residents—and is still a picturesque place for exercising, walks, public events, and simply relaxing. In 2009, the Friends of Walnut Hill Park Rose Garden organized to re-create and maintain that garden (originally added in 1929) by moving it to the courtyard by the World War I memorial and planting more than 800 bushes, representing 75 varieties, as a purposeful symbol of the city's diverse population.

The NBMAA was the nation's first institution dedicated solely to American art, Kim says; its permanent holdings stand at more than 8,300 works, including pieces by the Connecticut-raised Sol LeWitt. It also owns prime examples of Colonial portraiture, the Hudson River School, and works by Winslow Homer, Mary Cassatt, Thomas Eakins, Childe Hassam, and Thomas Hart Benton.

In 2015, an addition greatly expanded gallery and classroom space. The museum continues to serve as a vibrant community resource, offering lectures, concerts, and classes for all ages. "NEW/NOW: Francisca Benítez" (through April 29) highlights video and photographic works exploring the power and diversity of sign languages and deaf culture, including a collaborative project with children at the American School for the Deaf, in West Hartford, the birthplace of American Sign Language. The museum also holds upward of 200 original oil paintings created for inexpensive pulp-fiction publications such as *The Shadow* and *Doc Savage*, hugely popular from the Great Depression through World War II. The sensational graphics often depict archetypal characters—barely clad "damsels in distress," "heroic" tough guys—engaged in adventures, mysteries, and science-fiction narratives that influenced a collective understanding of American values and success stories.

Kim wants the museum to reflect the "rich and varied" aspects of American culture and experiences, and on mounting shows that speak to local and regional residents. With a Polish community constituting about 20 percent of New Britain's nearly 73,000 residents, the museum has hosted events and exhibits over the years exploring Polish and Polish-American arts and heritage, she explains. Last year's "Vistas del Sur: Traveler Artists' Landscapes of Latin America from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection," which featured more than 150 works created between 1638 and 1887, together with English and Spanish exhibit texts, reached out to a Hispanic community encompassing nearly 44 percent of city residents. "Ghana Paints Hollywood" (through February 19) presents hand-painted African movie posters for U.S. films from the mid 1980s through the early 1990s that represent a Golden Age of pre-commercial, "imagination-driven" advertisements by individual artists. Such shows purposely "flip the gaze," Kim says, because the focus "is not always about our declaration of what American art is, but about opening ourselves up to other global representations of us—and that only contributes to a more informed consciousness about what American art is and how America is perceived."

In May, the museum's gaze returns to New Britain's industrial legacy with "New/Now: Paul Baylock." His works integrate iconic factory and hardware motifs reflecting his own experiences growing up in the city, where he was part of an Irish-Lithuanian family of 10, and taught art in the public schools for decades. He also witnessed the postindustrial decades of economic challenges, demographic shifts, and the blight that still plagues some sections.

HARVARD MAGAZINE/NPB (2)

Krakus Meat Market offers all kinds of sausages, along with homemade blintzes, stuffed cabbage, poppy-seed bread, and other Polish delights.

YET IN AN age when many ethnic neighborhoods that coalesced around that long-ago heyday are gone, Little Poland, designated in 2008, is thriving.

And it's serving as an inspiration elsewhere. The New Britain Latino Coalition is developing the "Barrio Latino" (renamed a few years ago) around Arch Street, which holds a cluster of Latin-American organizations and businesses, including the Criollisimo Restaurant and the Borinquen Bakery. "We're in the infant stage," says coalition chairman Carmelo Rodriguez, "working on getting more businesses to the area, and with landlords to fix up their buildings." The city already hosts annual Latino and Puerto Rican Festivals; this spring, following a six-year effort, the new Borinqueneers Monument (honoring the 65th Infantry Regiment from Puerto Rico, the last U.S. Army unit to be desegregated) will be dedicated in a new city park, Rodriguez says.

"New Britain is a melting pot of cultures," he continues, "we have Polish and Central and South Americans, and Laotians and Vietnamese and Yemeni. You name it, we got it. We have seen the fruits of their hard work in Little Poland, and it's awesome. We are all proud of each other here. It's not about competitions." Many city residents and officials are also increasingly joining forces to clean up and revitalize other areas—and the Polonia Business Association wants to help. "We try to be inclusive and support each other,"

Adrian Baron says, "because helping the city helps all of us."

Still, these projects take time. Lucian Pawlak, who settled in New Britain with his emigré parents in 1956, is credited with spearheading renovation and eradicating gang activity in Little Poland when he was mayor, from 1995 to 2003; the recently refurbished sidewalks and new street lamps were improvements he began pushing for in 1999. He and Baron agree the still emerging transformation has hinged, in large part, on a loyal base of second- and third-generation Polish Americans (and recent immigrants) who patronize the professional businesses, markets, and restaurants—like Belvedere Café, Staropolska, and Polonia Taste—even after they move to nearby communities. "The place is a way for many Polish-Americans to reconnect with their heritage," Baron says. "They're in language classes, buying books and music, and sampling the food." But the reversal also reflects the locals' initiative, he adds: "We don't wait for things to happen. Instead of complaining to the city about cleaning up an empty lot, we'll clean it up ourselves. If there's a problem with a drug dealer on a corner, then we'll call the police and say we've got footage, we'll speak out in court."

Such active participation has helped bolster the annual Little Poland Festival (on April 29 this year), where performances by Polish polka, rock, and jazz bands, by the Polish Language School, and by traditional Goral singers and dancers from southern Poland, among others, now draw thousands of people. "And there's great food," says the organizer, Pawlak. "Everything from pea soup that your spoon stands up in to, obviously, *parówki*, *kapusta*, *pierogi*, and *golabki*"—hot dogs, sauerkraut with bacon and onions, dumplings, and stuffed cabbage, respectively.

"It's very heart-warming," he adds, to see this "amazing turnaround." He remembers arriving in New York Harbor as a boy. "We were at the port and company agents picked us up and dropped us off at a 13-story hotel—I had only ever known a hut. None of us spoke English, and my father had two slips of paper because he had a sponsor in New Britain and one in Chicago." He figured out that the train ride to Connecticut was three hours, while Chicago took 20, "and chose New Britain, because my brother was sick. When we arrived, the agents threw us in a two-family house, and there were eight other families living in that house, too. It was terrible," he says, "but that's another story."

ALL IN A DAY:

Cambridge Science Festival

COURTESY OF THE CAMBRIDGE SCIENCE FESTIVAL(2)

Options: Robots at the MIT Museum, and viewings through a solar telescope at the Museum of Science

The twelfth annual Cambridge Science Festival offers more than 200 events, promising something for all ages—"Science Carnival and Robot Zoo," "Astronomy on Tap," "You're the Expert"—in locations across Greater Boston. Founded by MIT Museum director John Durant, the 10-day event was the "first of its kind in the United States," says festival manager MaryCat Chaikin: "You get to engage in hands-on, creative activities directly with scientists" working in a world-class research hub.

Also unique is the fair's breadth, from math challenges, lab experiments, citizen-driven data drives, and philosophical debates to activities that underscore the essential roles of math and science in food, the arts, business, education, human development—and even comedy. "You're the Expert" is a hilarious attempt by comedians to guess scientists' areas of research through a 20 Questions-style game. The Boston Public Market hosts a daylong focus on science and edibles, while Red's Best opens its Boston fishery to explain technologies used by sustainable seafood markets. At "Be A Medicine Hunter," the Novartis open house, visitors can talk with researchers; meanwhile, the City of Cambridge offers "How Cambridge Works—Science at City Hall." Harvard events range from "Cambridge Explores the Universe," at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, to "The Invisible Chef"—ferreting out microbes in food with the Harvard Microbial Sciences Initiative.

Most activities are free, accessible by public transportation, and open to families. But it's adults-only at "Astronomy on Tap," where postdocs present their research over pints. The challenge mounts as the night wears on. ~N.P.B.

Cambridgesciencefestival.org
April 13-22

Broadsheet Coffee Roasters

An antidote to Starbucksification?

by NELL PORTER BROWN

Clockwise from far left: Broadsheet is an open, light-filled space for working or socializing; the view from Kirkland Street; baristas and servers customize coffee orders; Broadsheet owner and coffee connoisseur Aaron MacDougall

FIGURING THAT "day-trading my stock portfolio was not the best use of my time," former banker Aaron MacDougall '94 chose instead to open Broadsheet Coffee Roasters, a specialty coffee house in Cambridge that aims to educate as it caffeinates.

MacDougall "curates" the raw green beans—mostly from growers in Ethiopia, Peru, and Guatemala—and convection-roasts them in the gleaming and efficient Loring S-15 that sits behind a rope like a museum piece in the Kirkland Street café. It perfectly browns coffee that's sold in bags or brewed for customers (using water thrice filtered and re-mineralized in the basement) by discerning baristas. "What we're really fighting here is the fast-food mentality of the United States," says MacDougall. "Across the country, coffee equals 'caffeine-delivery mechanism' for the working person. We've been trained to just dump in the cream and sugar and not even taste the coffee." He's trying to communicate the "value proposition" of fine coffee: to help consumers think differently and not waste their "caffeine capacity on something that's inferior."

A 12-ounce brewed cup costs from $3.25 (plain) to $5.00 (vanilla latte, mocha); a 12-ounce bag of roasted beans is $18 to $22. When asked about what some patrons see as steep pricing, MacDougall counters: "But I always think, 'Why is it so cheap?'"

Consider the labor-intensive process of bringing coffee to the market, he explains: the cultivation, hand-picking, sorting, and cleaning that mostly occur in high-altitude, rural areas that are hard to reach; then add transportation costs. His raw coffee is a "dramatically" higher grade than any Starbucks offering, and costs customers only about 50 cents more per cup. Like fine wines, he points out, specialty coffees have distinctive nuances. Describing two varieties from Ethiopia, which holds near-mythic status among serious coffee-drinkers as the origin of the indigenous arabica coffee shrubs, he says, "The best-selling Qonqona brew tastes of rich, dark cherries," whereas "the classic Yirgacheffe Kochere is a lighter roast with "a strong bergamot, herbal note."

Broadsheet also customizes grinding, brewing, and roasting. "Starbucks uses super-automatic machines; they just press a button and out it comes. They have built-in grinders and their espresso-makers are notoriously crappy," he adds. "*And* we use a steam wand, which forces hot steam into the milk, creating micro-foam [versus the frothers at Starbucks], and milk from a local farmer, too."

MacDougall spent 17 years in banking, ultimately as a managing director in the global markets division of Deutsche Bank in Tokyo. In starting Broadsheet, he considered the paths of some peers. "I know a lot of people in their forties and fifties who were in the finance industry and are now doing nothing, or going through the motions, doing more of the same—really bright, really capable—and they're managing their portfolios all day, watching Netflix, and trying not to pay taxes," he says. "I just had a negative reaction to the money making money." Instead, he sees his café (which also sells excellent, house-made baked goods, along with breakfast and lunch fare) as a means of "doing something fun that I love, and building something: employing people, creating community." He enjoys applying his banking acumen to the specialty coffee industry (understanding relative value, and global and commodities markets, for starters), as well as to running a small business.

But his infatuation with java began only after he'd left finance—and moved with his wife and their young son (then suffering from myriad allergies) to Hawaii. It was a purely sensuous pursuit: "In Hawaii I could go into the mountains and pick coffee with friends and bring it home and roast it myself," he says. Analytical and detail-oriented by nature, he soon found a local coffee-roasting mentor and began experimenting, testing various beans and temperatures, learning the art and science of extracting and honing flavor. "My wife told me, 'This is so much better than any other middle-aged-guy hobby.'"

Five years ago, the family moved to the mainland United States and settled in Brookline, closer to MacDougall's parents, and he sought out the local specialty coffee subculture, attending seminars and trainings at the Somerville outpost of Counter Culture Coffee company. In 2015, he sat through a six-day exam period to become a certified Q-grader ("Like a master sommelier, but for coffee," he says; "there are only maybe 300 to 350 of them in the United States"), entitled to officially evaluate the quality of coffees.

Here's his quick lesson on grading: green arabica coffee is scored on a 100-point scale; anything below 80 points is priced off of

Photographs by Jane Messinger.
Photograph of Aaron MacDougall courtesy of Broadsheet Coffee Roasters

Visitors can see MacDougall's prized coffee roaster at his Broadsheet café.

the commodities futures markets and sold in grocery stores, although the top-shelf brands at big coffee chains rate as high as 84. Most lower-grade arabica coffee comes from Brazil and Colombia, while robusta (which MacDougall calls "crap") is from Vietnam; and the specialty coffees are grown largely in East Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi) and Central America (Guatemala, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Panama); those above 86 points are generally produced in micro-lots of under 10,000 pounds. Broadsheet's beans, he adds, are scored from 86 to the low 90s: "Coffees over 92 points are unicorns, there are almost none, and often go for hundreds of dollars a pound raw."

MacDougall now puts his connoisseurship to the test. He won the Genuine Origin Coffee Project's debut "Roast and Go" competition in 2016, and last year placed fifth in the United States Cup Tasters Championship (against experts from companies like Green Mountain Coffee Roasters and Blue Bottle). Contestants strive to be the fastest and most accurate in identifying the odd one out of three cups of coffee. If that sounds easy, he says, it's not: "They try to select coffees that are very similar. You can have two coffees from the same farm, but one's grown on one side of the plantation, and the other, on the other side."

Appreciation of fine coffee (and the price point that often goes with it) already exists in Los Angeles and New York City, he says, and is slowly emerging in Greater Boston, through the work of companies like Counter Culture and the Acton-based George Howell Coffee. And MacDougall concedes that he was once as naïve as anyone else: "Before I got into this, I thought of a coffee bean as a grain of rice: every one was perfect. And it couldn't be farther from the truth."