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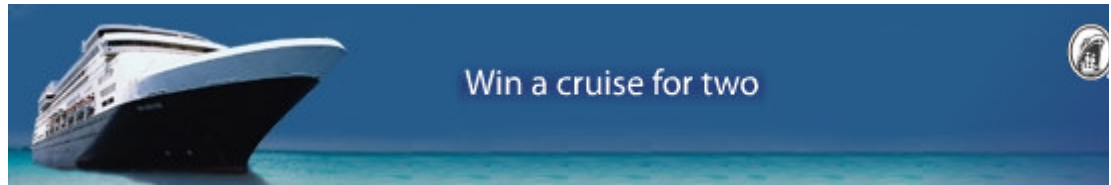
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DAY OUT | FISHTOWN, PHILADELPHIA

Rebirth Along the River

By JESS McCUAN
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THE Fishtown district of [Philadelphia](#) was known as a tight-knit Irish Catholic enclave — and a place to score drugs. Set along the Delaware River in the northeastern part of the city, the area was the former home of a Stetson hat factory and a Schmidts beer plant, before its brick warehouses and shad markets were abandoned.

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But these days artists easily outnumber fishermen and heroin addicts. Thanks to a recovering waterfront and spillover from gentrifying neighborhoods like Northern Liberties, Fishtown is joining the ranks of warehouse districts nationwide that have undergone a renaissance. Young professionals and creative types are moving into renovated apartments and luxury condos. Upscale restaurants, galleries and high-end shops have followed.

Leading the neighborhood revival is [Johnny Brenda's](#) (1201 Frankford Avenue; 215-739-9684; www.johnnybrendas.com), a stylish gastropub that manages to feel both macho and intimate. Named after the original owner, a Philadelphia boxer, the restaurant has vintage lamps salvaged from the street, local beers on hand-pumped tap (Victory

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Juliette Borda

HopDevil, Yards ESA), and a mixed crowd of would-be artists, musicians and even some Penn grad students from clear across town.

An open kitchen lets you watch the pierced, tattooed chefs whip up seasonal dishes that have included goat cheese, arugula and watermelon salad (\$8), and tuna steak with tempura rice cakes (\$15). Littleneck clams are \$1.50 each — half price during weekday happy hours (4 to 6 p.m.).

After dinner, the action moves upstairs to a new [music](#) hall that holds 250 and has played host to indie rock acts like the Walkmen, [Tokyo](#) Police Club and Thurston Moore from Sonic Youth.

During the day, Fishtowners roam between coffee shops, thrift stores, an underground bookstore and other low-key arty hangouts. At [Bambi](#) (1817 Frankford Avenue; 215-423-2668; www.bambiproject.com), a gallery and artist consignment shop, the owner, Candace Karch, sells local fashions, including her own kitschy Mexican belt buckles (\$50 to \$75) and handmade tunics by the Philadelphian Nicole Carey (\$45 to \$60). Rotating works by photographers and mixed-media artists grace the walls.

Down the street is [Villa & Hut](#) (1105 Frankford Avenue; 215-425-1014; www.villaandhut.com), a new boutique that sells funky, high-end imported furniture from Southeast Asia, including Indonesian armoires (\$1,199) and teak chair and table sets (\$299).

Several notable restaurants have opened in recent months. [Ida Mae's Bruncherie](#) (2302 East Norris Street; 215-426-4209; www.idamaesbruncherie.com), a homey corner diner, serves a full Irish breakfast, with eggs, rashers, bangers, white pudding, fresh soda bread, baked beans and more (\$9).

And [Hot Potato Cafe](#) (529 East Girard Avenue; 215-425-0905; www.hotpotatocafe.com) opened last March with a nod to Fishtown's working-class roots: specialties include Port Richmond pierogies (\$6), named for a nearby Polish neighborhood, and bacon-wrapped meatloaf (\$12).

The local favorite, however, is still [Johnny's Hots](#) (1234 North Delaware Avenue; 215-423-2280, though the staff frequently gets too busy to answer), a cinderblock shack along the Delaware. Hot sausages are the staple, served by John Danze Jr. the same way his

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father did: on a fresh, crusty Italian torpedo roll with “the works”: mustard, relish and pepper hash (\$3.25).

“It’s a tough guy’s hot dog,” Mr. Danze said.

Old-timers, however, prefer a crazy Philadelphia concoction — hot sausage with a fish cake smashed on top (\$5.25). Two years ago, Mr. Danze also started serving cheese steaks — no small undertaking in the cheese steak capital. It was named Best of Philly cheese steak by Philadelphia Magazine.

The secret, Mr. Danze said, is thick cuts of hanging beef, the kind Rocky used as punching bags.

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