

The Brooklyn Brand Goes Global

By Abby Ellin

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Daniel Young and Jordi Aznar Peyra needed a name for the apparel brand they were starting in Dubai in September. They wanted something iconic, something that would “ring in the minds of people who don’t live here,” as Mr. Young put it. “Something they could associate with and say, ‘Ah, that’s American.’ ”

They considered using the American flag as a logo but worried that it would be overkill. “Chicago” and “L.A.” weren’t right, either. And then it hit them over the heads like a high-speed kickball: Brooklyn.

Brooklyn: the great cliché of New York City, the suburb of Burning Man, the borough of rooftop apiaries and sweater-wearing trees, home to all that is “artisanal,” “grass-fed” and gentrified. The clothing company would be named Brooklyn Cotton Company and would capitalize on the faraway borough’s modish reputation around the globe.

“In many ways, I think Brooklyn does represent America,” said Mr. Young, the managing partner of Brooklyn Cotton Company’s parent company, CgV Capital Advisors (the CgV stands for “center of gravity”), which is located in Scarsdale, N.Y. “Foreign people always talk of the Brooklyn Bridge. They want to cross the bridge, to see what Prospect Park and Park Slope are all about.”

It was inevitable that the New York City borough most known for its citizens’ desire to be counterculture, right down to their ubiquitous facial hair and food trucks, would be co-opted by entrepreneurs looking to sell the “Brooklyn brand” abroad.

It’s an easy sell, said Neil Eichner, the creative director and chief executive of Orbit 360, a branding and marketing firm in Manhattan. Long before the current residents were born, the borough held a mythology, especially for foreigners talking to friends and neighbors about the possibility of emigrating to America. “Brooklyn is like the history of the world; everybody came in there,” Mr. Eichner said. “Then it was the home of the Dodgers. It was in its glory then.”



Inside Nya Carnegiebryggeriet. Casper Hedberg for The New York Times

“Now it’s back to that level again, and further,” he added.

There is a Brooklyn Bowl in — where else? — London. It opened in March and is an almost exact replica of its namesake space in Williamsburg.

Don’t forget to drink a sudsy mug of Brooklyn beer the next time you’re in Stockholm. In partnership with Carlsberg Sweden, Brooklyn Brewery opened an outpost there, in a former light bulb factory (that, by itself, is pretty Brooklyn).

Brooklyn Brine exports its product to South Africa and Southeast Asia, where the company founders believe there is a market for Gowanus-adjacent pickles.

And Brooklyn Spectacles has distributorships in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Canada, Belgium and the Netherlands. Its tagline? “Bringing a little bit of Brooklyn to you.”

For people who live in New York, the so-called “Brooklyn brand” can connote a stereotype of a certain pretentiousness shown by people who talk frequently about their choice to live less-fancy-than-Manhattan lives — shopping for locally grown vegetables at cooperative markets and living in historic (and often very expensive) brownstones.

But entrepreneurs say that abroad, the image of Brooklyn is one of authenticity (a Brooklyn concept if there ever was one). “With Brooklyn, there is this inclusiveness versus the exclusiveness in New York,” said Gabriel Miller, president of the New York office of Resource/Ammirati, which is handling branding and marketing for Brooklyn Bowl in London. “In New York, there is a red velvet rope and V.I.P. list. Brooklyn is about democratization.”

It's not just Americans who are exporting Brooklynness. Some of the most ardent brand evangelists are foreigners who have spent time in Brooklyn and want to transport its ethos back home.

Francesco Panella (in tie) at Antica Pesa, the Williamsburg branch of his family's place in Rome.
Jolie Ruben for The New York Times

Diner Bedford, in the Marais district of Paris, came into existence because the owners “love Brooklyn” and what they called its generosity, according to the restaurant's website.

Bedford-Stuyvesant, an American-style, fair-trade (of course) coffee shop in Amsterdam, is decorated with a smattering of couches and chairs and a fresco of a row of brownstones. It sells coffee from Brooklyn Roasting Company, along with pastrami sandwiches.

Your Local, in Manila, is modeled after Williamsburg restaurants, said Ynigo Santos, an owner. He and his business partner drew inspiration from a visit to Brooklyn. “People from the neighborhood were particularly open to new things, and it seemed very natural to them to express themselves creatively through food,” said Mr. Santos, 30, who is also the executive chef.

The Hamburg-based Brooklyn Soap Company was founded by two German men who spent much of 2012 living in a Bushwick hostel.

“We had the typical Brooklyn lifestyle — no money, lots of alcohol on the weekend,” said Felix Ermer, 25, one of the founders.

Upon returning to Germany, he and his business partner, Viktor Dik, were eager to reinterpret personal hygiene products for men, as Mr. Ermer put it, “the Brooklyn way.”

He said that this means “being brave enough to start a business on your own and not under the cover of a large company.”

Diners at Antica Pesa. Jolie Ruben for The New York Times

To urban planners and dwellers around the world, Brooklyn represents renaissance and success, said Jay Gronlund, founder of the Pathfinder Group, a branding company in Manhattan. “Other cities like Paris are saying, ‘We want to do something like what Brooklyn did and establish ourselves as a mecca for young people,’ ” he said. “The world has become so much smaller and global, and these younger people are very aware of what’s happening in London or Paris or Berlin — they’re aware of what’s happening in Brooklyn. It’s become a benchmark or role model for other similar places in other cities.”

Adrienne Vansoeterstede, 21, an art history student at the Sorbonne, lived in Brooklyn while an intern at the Swiss Institute. “Since I was born, I always wanted to go there and live there,” she said. “In France — or at least in Paris — New York is *the* dream. A lot of people of my generation think the same way. So we all know the name of the different neighborhoods, what to visit. And New York is in so many films, so I think everyone knows about Brooklyn quite easily.”

Now back in Paris, “I really miss the atmosphere and energy of Brooklyn,” Ms. Vansoeterstede said. “I am trying to find things or products from N.Y.C.”

That sentiment is a boon for the businessman and restaurateur Francesco Panella, who is practically the Italian ambassador to Brooklyn. Mr. Panella, 44, and his brother, Lorenzo, run Antica Pesa, the Williamsburg branch of the Rome establishment that has been in their family since 1922. In addition to funneling pasta into the mouths of hungry patrons on both sides of the Atlantic, Mr. Panella has made it his mission to take Brooklyn — the concept, the aesthetic, the food — to Europe.

“Brooklyn Man,” his 12-episode series now in its second season, airs on Sky TV across the continent; a book of the same name was recently published in Italy, with a foreword by the director Paul Haggis. Over the course of the program, Mr. Panella ventures to every borough (except Staten Island): to the Fulton Fish Market, say, to Rikers Island and to a Park Slope soup kitchen called CHiPS. He hits the Kara Walker exhibit at the Domino Sugar Refinery and rides the Coney Island Cyclone.

“I want to show how cool New York is but not in the classic way,” Mr. Panella said in English spoken with such a thick Italian accent that it’s almost impossible to understand him without Google Translate. (His show is in Italian.)

“My show films in all the boroughs but focuses on Brooklyn,” he said. “Anytime my viewers ask me a question, it’s always about Brooklyn.”

Correction: December 11, 2014

An article last Thursday about entrepreneurs who use the name Brooklyn to sell products and services overseas misspelled the given name of a Manila restaurateur who modeled his business after restaurants in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. He is Ynigo Santos, not Yniga.

A version of this article appears in print on Dec. 4, 2014, on Page E14 of the New York edition with the headline: It May Be Paris, but It Feels Like Brooklyn