Alumni

The Dorm Chef's New Menu

By
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Jonah Reider serves guests at his Brooklyn supper club, Pith. Photo: Nina Westervelt

Jonah Reider ’16CC has always been an accomplished multi-tasker. But even he will admit that his senior year at Columbia got a little, as he puts it, “goofy.” While he was finishing his thesis in economics and sociology (“a statistical analysis of worker-owned cooperatives in the United States”), working as a research assistant to Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz, and playing jazz piano in a number of student bands, he was also casually running a restaurant out of his dorm room with a waitlist of over four thousand eager diners.

As for the origins of his legendary supper club, Pith, “Seriously, it wasn’t even that deep,” Reider says. “I’d just text a few homies and tell them to give me five bucks for groceries. But, you know, word got around …”

Indeed it did. In October of 2015, *Spectator* ran a review of Pith, touting it as the campus’s best new date-night spot. The *New York Post*, the *New Yorker*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times* all picked up the story. Four months later, Reider was a guest on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, feeding the host truffle-honey-infused phyllo dough with pear-nectar sorbet.

Sudden fame does have its drawbacks, though, particularly when running an underground restaurant. Reider was eventually evicted from his University housing because of concerns from the New York City health department. He also sometimes felt conflicted about the attention.

“I didn’t want to be known as the dorm-room chef for the rest of my life,” Reider says. “People thought that it was a gimmick, but entertaining has always been something that I’ve taken very seriously.”

After graduating, Reider moved to Brooklyn, crashing on a friend’s loveseat while hosting food events at venues around the city. One of his favorites was a collaboration with the Bronx Brewery in which he turned their fermentation tanks into big vibrating speakers and served a menu incorporating their signature brews: celery-root soup with Citra hops, beer-braised short ribs, and panna cotta with espresso milk-stout foam.



Nina Westervelt

Last fall, Reider went on a culinary tour of Australia sponsored by KitchenAid and then headed to the Chicago restaurant Intro for a one-month residency. The restaurant featured several of Reider's dishes, and on the weekends he took over the space entirely, curating every detail from the menu to the playlists (the *Chicago Tribune* gave him three stars).

Reider is now back in New York, and, thanks to a pair of benevolent Brooklynites with a too-big townhouse, he now operates Pith as a supper club several nights a month. Reider lives and works in the house and runs the dinners cooperatively with his landlords. He's traded his dorm-room toaster for a wood-burning pizza oven, his Ikea plates for hand-crafted pottery, and supermarket groceries for truffles and caviar, fiddleheads and morels.

Instead of asking guests to chip in for groceries, Reider now charges ninety-five dollars for an eight-course tasting menu, with an optional forty-five-dollar wine pairing. Nonetheless, reservations remain as elusive as they did at Columbia. Reider, who hosts ten to fifteen dinners a month, says that tickets sell out almost instantly.

In between the dinners, Reider is taking time to travel, write a cookbook, and eat at some of the restaurants he couldn't afford while in college. But he doesn't want to start a restaurant, at least not in the traditional sense.

"I think people don't want fine dining anymore; it's too stuffy. I like thinking about how to present a meal more creatively," he says. "With really dope food."

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