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Madiba Restaurant and Shebeen

This little bar and restaurant, seemingly woven out of straw, old wood and scrap metal, may be New York's only South African restaurant, and one of the most intriguing spots in the city. The owner, Mark Henegan, was born in South Africa and, since coming to New York, has worked in Manhattan at Payard and Il Buco. His extensive menu includes unfamiliar dishes like uphuthu, a ground corn porridge not unlike polenta, with marinated tomatoes and onions, and sauteed chicken livers peri-peri, a spicy dish of Portuguese origin, delicious on toast. Durban samoosas, excellent crisp vegetable pastries served with a fine carrot-and-raisin slaw, reflect an Indian influence. The menu offers far more, like various sorts of dried meats, potjie (a kind of oxtail stew) and a small South African wine list

Eric Asimov (3/00)



The Brooklyn Papers / Greg Mango

Walking into Madiba is like crashing a party thrown by the friendliest people in town.

You're greeted with, "Welcome. We're so happy you're here!" The hostess chats with you on the way to your table, then owner Mark Henegan describes the history of the restaurant. Your waiter and host, Ridley, stops at the table and quizzes you about the ingredients in the dishes, and the hostess recommends her favorite dessert. All that talk is enough to make a native New Yorker feel homesick for South Africa.

Madiba is the only South African restaurant in the city. It bills itself as a "shebeen," or roughly translated, a "beer bar" where music plays late into the night. In its two years, Madiba has become a gathering spot for the Fort Greene community, and a home away from home for transplanted South Afrikaans. Performers as diverse as Ladysmith Black Mambazo and cast members from "The Lion King" entertain regularly, and on the evening we were there, Paul Simon's band was quietly tuning instruments and settling in for a long night of music.

Shebeen? Oh, yes, stay awhile, a good time is guaranteed."