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Why Brooklyn and Rome Are More Similar Than You Think

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Courtesy of Antica Pesa

Antica Pesa's Williamsburg location is both elegant and inviting.

Brothers Francesco, Simone, and Lorenzo Panella—the restaurateurs behind Antica Pesa in Williamsburg and Trastevere—discuss the similarities between the Brooklyn and Rome neighborhoods and where to hang out in each place.

A formerly downtrodden, ethnically diverse neighborhood that became a haven for artists, writers, and musicians. An area across the river from the big city that developed a culture all its own. A district where historical reminders sit next to trendy restaurants, bars, and boutiques. All are true of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, but also describe Trastevere in [Rome](#).

It's a comparison not lost on the Panella brothers, who, when location scouting for a second outpost of their Trastevere osteria, picked Williamsburg for its similarities. “They are both artsy, creative, and bohemian. Both are located on the other side of the river, separated from the big part of the city,” said Francesco Panella. “When we first visited Williamsburg almost 10 years ago, it wasn't a destination yet, but we saw so much potential. Now it's thriving and full of people who enjoy the arts, dining, culture, and history, just like in Trastevere.”

The Panellas were inspired to open a second restaurant in Williamsburg because of its similarities with Trastevere.

Francesco, Simone, and Lorenzo come from a long line of restaurateurs. After World War I, when Trastevere was one of the poorer neighborhoods in Rome, their ancestors began feeding hungry neighbors out of their home, using their dining room for prayers before meals and their backyard as a bocce court. In 1922, they decided to turn their humble project into a full-service restaurant and [Antica Pesa](#) was born.

Over the years, the intimate osteria has grown to be a neighborhood fixture. It's been included in the Michelin Guide every year since 2009 and has welcomed everyone from U.S. presidents to international celebrities. Eager to capitalize on its success, Francesco, Simone, and Lorenzo opened a second location in Williamsburg in 2012, drawn to the area's shared character with Trastevere.

Today, [Antica Pesa Williamsburg](#) is as popular as its Roman cousin, drawing sophisticated diners with a mix of expertly prepared Italian dishes and more seasonal, experimental options. The Panella brothers, especially the mustachioed Lorenzo, can typically be found buzzing around the elegant space, greeting diners, dropping off a plate of *spaghetti cacio e pepe*, or pouring another glass of natural wine from Sicily.

When they're not on site, however, they're usually out enjoying Williamsburg or spending time back home in Trastevere. Below, they share their favorite places in each neighborhood, where you, too, can find a bit of la dolce vita.

Williamsburg Bars

Lorenzo: [The Big Whiskey](#), [The Whiskey Brooklyn](#), and [The Whiskey Annex](#) are my favorites. The owners are extremely hospitable and friendly; they run true neighborhood bars.

Francesco: I love [Hotel Delmano](#). It's a true neighborhood gem with a fantastic cocktail program.

Trastevere Bars

Simone: [Pimm's Good](#) is a nice neighborhood pub for locals, [Santo](#) is a great cocktail bar with a lot of character, and Caffè delle Arance has outdoor seating and is located in one of the most historic squares in Trastevere.

Williamsburg Shopping

Francesco Panella likes shopping for fresh, local cuts at the Meat Hook in Williamsburg.

Lorenzo: Bedford Avenue has many cute shops, but I personally like [Pema](#) for [women's] clothes, [Red Pearl](#) for knickknacks and gifts, and [Amarcord](#) for vintage and accessories. I also love the weekend farmers' markets at [McCarren Park](#) and [McGolrick Park](#) in Greenpoint.

Francesco: I love the vintage shopping in Williamsburg, especially [10 Ft Single by Stella Dallas](#) on North Sixth Street because I can always find some of the most unique vintage pieces there. They also have a great selection of leather jackets. [For food], I enjoy spending time at [North Brooklyn Farms](#), right next to [Domino Park](#). It's a great place for fresh produce and has amazing views of the skyline. I also frequent [the Meat Hook](#) in East Williamsburg for their selection of fresh meats from farms in the tristate area; they're very knowledgeable about the best cuts to use for certain recipes.

Trastevere Shopping

Francesco: I like Scala Quattordici; you can get handmade suits there. Piazza San Cosimato is also a nice area to explore, with various shops and boutiques. There's a cute children's store there called [Nati Nudi](#).

Simone: Antica Spezieria is an old pharmacy and Innocenzi is a famous spice shop. In San Cosimato square, every day except Sundays, you can also find a great neighborhood farmers' market.

Williamsburg Sites

Lorenzo: In Williamsburg, we have amazing views of the city from our shoreline. We also have quite a few nice parks; one of them [East River State Park] hosts [Smorgasburg](#), which is an outdoor food market in the warmer months.

Francesco: I love to stroll through East Williamsburg, where there is a large Italian American community with lots of history. I always make sure to stop and pick up pastries at [Fortunato](#)

Trastevere Sites

Lorenzo: Go to the Gianicolo, a hill overlooking Trastevere, for amazing views of all of Roma.