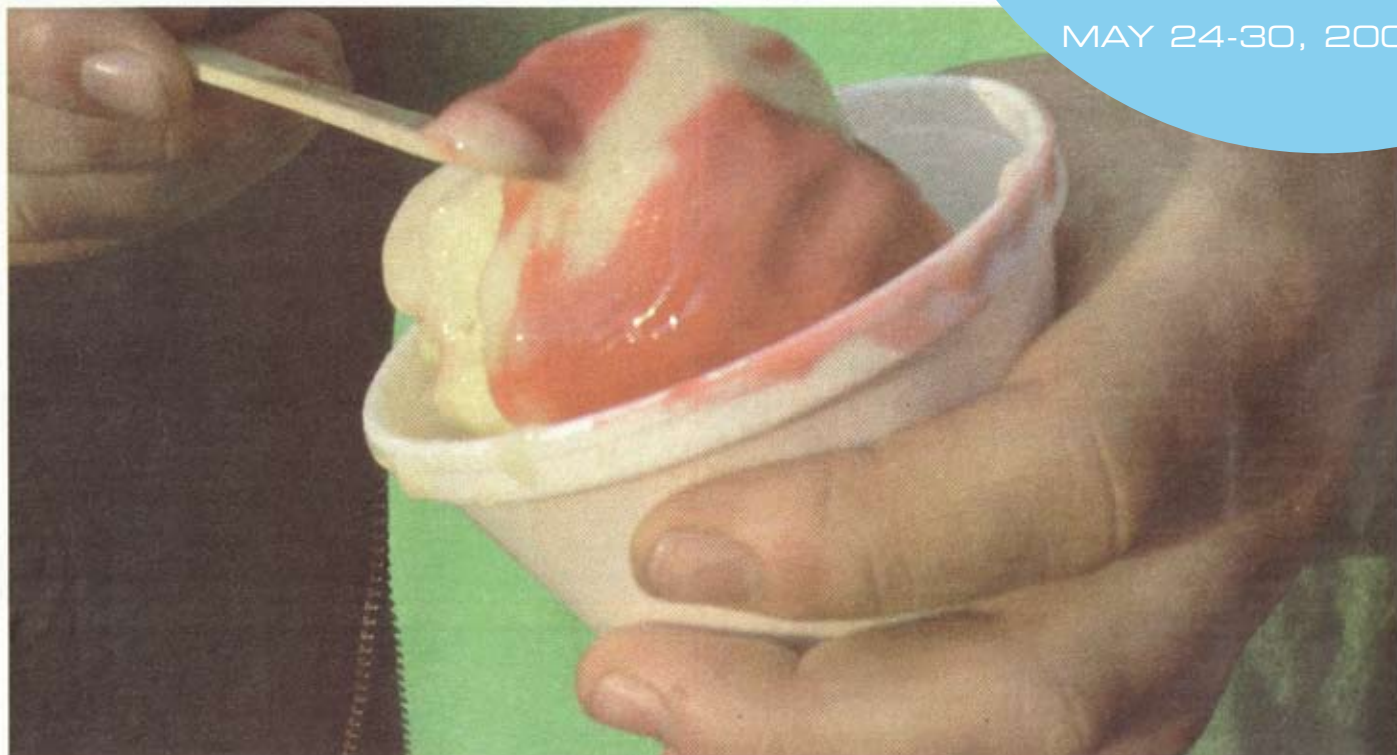


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SUMMERGUIDE: OUTDOOR



SCREAMING FOR ICE CREAM

Five of the best places to score the cold stuff

by Lisa Gross

Nothing says summer like an ice cream cone melting down your wrist. A scoop or two will turn any dour adult into a squealing child, and it's no coincidence that ice cream is the most commonly cited comfort food among both sexes. Ice cream epitomizes easy pleasure. But there's no reason to settle for average, tasteless glop or hard supermarket fare when New York is home to some of the best homemade ice cream around.

Il Laboratorio del Gelato on the Lower East Side is the place to go when you're craving some black sesame in your life. If you've never had such a craving, it's probably because you've never tried it. Owned by the founder of Ciao Bella, this tiny, immaculate, white shop is truly a lab for creating unique and unusual flavors of gelato—the Italian version of ice cream that's frozen at a lower temperature and made from whole milk instead of cream. Their flavors change daily, so you can never be totally sure what you'll get. The milk chocolate tastes like frozen hot cocoa. The malt is like a box of Whoppers and the green tea has the subtle bit-

terness of powdered matcha tea. Skip the blackberry, mint chip and vanilla can; all are a bit too prosaic, especially when there are so many other exotic and delicious options. The fruit sorbets are robust and potent, though a little too icy for my taste. Tangerine has a concentrated citrus punch with just a tad of bitter zest. Honeydew is fresh, sweet and juicy, and the black grape actually tastes like a bunch of grapes, not "purple flavor." The shop sits adjacent to the Tenement Museum, and you can bet that none of the building's former residents would ever have imagined a gourmet gelato shop squatting next door.

Australian Homemade looks like it should be selling snowboards or sunglasses, but don't let the surfer decor turn you away. Their ice cream is rich and creamy, and their sorbet is silky smooth. Their pear sorbet perfectly captures the taste and texture of a ripe pear, or the lychee, which is like eating a bowl of the cold, juicy fruit. Their chocolate ice cream is a rich, dark chocolate, and the macadamia crunch is a more sophisticated praline and cream. They also sell gourmet chocolate bon bons if you feel you haven't indulged enough. The shop is right next to Tompkins Square Park, which makes it a perfect place to grab a cone to take on a stroll.

If you're looking for some good old-fashioned American ice cream, check out **Ronnybrook Farm Dairy** in the Chelsea market. All their ice cream is made from fresh premium milk and cream that is produced in small batches at the Ronnybrook Farm Dairy in Ancramdale, N.Y. This is the best place to

get the classic, hard, creamy ice cream of your childhood. But stick to the basics: vanilla or chocolate. The "Hudson Valley Vanilla" has a strong flavor of real vanilla bean, not just a cheap flavoring, and "Sid's Chocolate Silk" is the perfect balance between milk and dark chocolate. The other flavors are all a bit too sweet or a bit too mild. The shop itself is an odd combination of farm kitsch and fluorescent-lit utilitarianism, so it's best to take your scoop to go.

If straight up vanilla or chocolate just doesn't do it for you, walk a few hundred feet to **L'arte del Gelato** (formerly Jimmy's Gelato), a tiny stand hidden in the back of the Bowery Kitchen Supply. They make fresh gelato everyday, and it's real Italian-style: each tub is topped with the flavoring ingredient (fruit, chocolate, coffee, etc.). Try the dark chocolate with chili pepper and get ready for some Aztec heat. The coffee tastes like a good cappuccino and the coconut is fruity, smooth and flavorful.

Cones is conveniently located a few doors down from Murray's Cheese Shop, Amy's Bead and Faicco's Pork Shop in the West Village, making it the perfect place to get a snack when picking up a few gourmet goodies. The glass-fronted shop has an '80s futuristic look, complete with large, fading light-box photos of grotesquely ornate sundaes and ice cream cakes. Thankfully, the gelato they serve doesn't resemble the photos. The zabaglione is addictive and tastes exactly like a colder version of real zabaglione—rich egg custard with sweet Marsala wine. The Mate tea tastes like bubble tea without the tapioca pearls. Corn has the flavor of

sweet, canned corn and the strawberry is pleasantly fragrant and tangy. Their chocolate, vanilla and coffee are all solid renditions of these classic flavors.

Though these five shops may be cursed with bad lighting and bizarre décor, each one offers a little taste of pure, unadulterated, frozen pleasure. And who sits in an ice cream store anyway? Ice cream cones are the most mobile of foods, meant to be eaten while strolling down the sidewalk on a hot summer afternoon, or perched on a park bench on a warm summer evening. So take your favorite flavor on the road—before it melts.

Il Laboratorio del Gelato
115 St. Marks Pl. (betw. 1st Ave. & Ave. A)
212-228-5439

Australian Homemade
115 St. Marks Pl. (betw. 1st Ave. & Ave. A)
212-228-5439

Ronnybrook Farms Dairy
75 9th Ave. (at 16th St.), in Chelsea Market
212-741-6455

L'arte del Gelato
75 9th Ave. (at 16th St.), in Chelsea Market
212-366-0570

Cones
272 Bleecker St. (at Morton St.)
212-414-1795