

A Timely, Comprehensive Guide to All Your Favorite Upstate Restaurants and Businesses

Michael Bruno's Tastemakers Guide to support small businesses through the pandemic



An overhead view of the Valley Rock Inn & Mountain Club in Sloatsburg

VALLEY ROCK INN & MOUNTAIN CLUB

BY CARINA KOEPPICUS / MAY 20, 2020 10:59 AM

Michael Bruno, founder of the high-end design marketplace 1stdibs, is fascinated by the trend of hip city dwellers moving to Upstate New York. A resident of Tuxedo Park and owner of [Valley Rock Inn & Mountain Club](#), the aesthetically focused entrepreneur has been keeping an eye on the area's development for years. His new site, [Tastemakers Guide](#), highlights more than 300 destinations spanning art, design and hospitality that cater to a discerning clientele.

Even before COVID-19 pushed New Yorkers with homes Upstate to wait out quarantine in a more rural setting, Bruno wanted to create a resource that would connect new residents and weekenders alike with the best-in-class businesses around the region.

"There were so many places opening, from small inns with their own restaurants to makers' studios doing the best knives and cast-iron pans, that I wanted to make it easy to find them and support them, especially now," Bruno tells InsideHook.

The project was launched in direct response to COVID-19, so Bruno assembled a team of volunteers to work on the site. He started by collecting intel from in-the-know area residents and frequent visitors to determine which businesses to include. Sixty days later, TastemakersGuide was live, providing up-to-date information about business status including how to place pickup and delivery orders, where to buy gift cards, and how to make future reservations.

In addition to connecting businesses with potential customers, Bruno also recruited a team of lawyers to help owners through the complicated process of applying for grants and loans. Services like this are invaluable to small operations struggling to adjust to today's new economic landscape.

Bruno is no stranger to operating a luxury marketplace during difficult times. In its 17-year history, 1stdibs has survived 9/11, Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, and the 2008 financial crisis, to name a few. When talking about the future, he remains optimistic about how consumers will adapt in the aftermath of coronavirus.

“Since we are all spending a lot more time at home, I think once the shock wears off and we see the world hasn’t ended, people will allocate more of their spending to making their home the place they always wanted it to be but never got around to. They won’t want to do big construction projects, so they will decorate and do a lot of it themselves,” says Bruno.

As social-distancing measures begin to relax across the United States, the TastemakersGuide team is looking towards the future. They’ve started pushing out more editorial content, including [a series of Q&A’s called From the Field](#) with business owners like Kortney Lawlor of Wild Common Wine and Sara Mae and Sohial Zandi of Brushland Eating House, both in Bovina, NY. They’re also working to develop an app that will allow tourists and day-trippers to easily find locations they’ve saved, which Bruno believes will be critical in the coming months.

“I believe people will want to have solid plans before leaving home, and they won’t want to go too far from home,” Bruno tells InsideHook.

While the TastemakersGuide provides valuable services to business owners and consumers alike, Bruno’s deep connection to Upstate New York is the real driving force behind the project. With picturesque hiking destinations, charming inns and craft breweries galore, there’s a lot to love in New York’s lesser-known areas.

“The region is unique in that there are small villages you can drive to from day to day and find cool places to stay, shop, eat and visit, more like the European countryside than the American suburbs. I have sought out most of America’s design shops and antiques stores while founding and running 1stdibs for 12 years, and I can assure you there is no place like it,” he said.