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Up in Harlem

The future looks golden for New York City's famous quarter, but what role will the past play?

By Rob Gurwitt

These are not easy issue to untangle. New York is about change and and growth and dynamics, as Andrew S. Dolkart, the coauthor of *Touring Historic Harlem* and an architectural historian who teaches at Columbia University, points out. It s never been a static city. One way to think about it is to look at Settepani, a new bakery on Lenox Avenue below 125th Street in the Mount Morris Park Historic District.

Settepani is owned by Leah Abraham, who is Eritrean; for years, she and her Italian husband have run bakeries in Lower Manhattan and suburban Dobbs Ferry. On their way into town each morning, they would drive past the vacant building that now houses their Harlem bakery, noticing there was no upscale cafe or bakery to serve either locals or the numerous European tourists. We walked it, Abraham says. There was nothing for 20 blocks around.

Early one morning last December, after a year s work, Abraham was finally ready to open/ For hours she d been straightening up the marble-topped tables, cleaning off the curved blond-wood benches, getting the coffee ready, filling the display case with butter-cream cakes, thick breads, Italian cookies, and chocolates. Then she noticed a line had formed of people waiting to get in. She poked her head out to tell them she d be opening at 10, but no one moved. A little later, she went out to repeat herself.

So this older woman said, We re just trying to give you our business! Abraham recalls. I explained, I ve been working on this for a year. I want it to be perfect for you. And she said, One year?! Listen, I ve been waiting 30 years for this! Abraham smiles. So what could I do? I told them, Come in!



Settepani | BAKERY