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When the Power Came Back, So Did the Crowds



Katie Orlinsky for The New York Times

Outside a parking garage on the Lower East Side that was transformed into a “Power-On” party. [More Photos »](#)

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AT 9 p.m. Friday, the [Eastern Bloc](#), a popular gay bar in the East Village, was ready for business. The Beastie Boys’ “(You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (to Party)” blared, and the room was bathed in a red glow.

"The power's on, the ice machine is going, we threw out all the bad fruit," said Matt Nasser, the bartender. "We're cutting fresh ones and the alcohol didn't go bad."

But not a single customer was yet in sight. Most still seemed to be at home, recovering from Hurricane Sandy by cleaning out their refrigerators and reflexively turning on every light switch and testing every household appliance, just to reassure themselves that power had really returned to Lower Manhattan.

That would soon change. For four sleepy nights, the bars, restaurants and A-list spots that make downtown Manhattan a party capital went dark. So when the lights flickered back early Friday evening in the East Village, SoHo, Chelsea and elsewhere, bars were open practically within seconds, with patrons partying at the (aptly named) Electric Room at the Dream Downtown hotel past 3 a.m.

They were mindful, of course, that many in the region were still without power, or even homeless, but there was a need to get back as fast as possible to their old routines.

Diners trickled back to their favorite restaurants, TriBeCa and Chelsea residents swapped tales about what it had been like to live in the foreign land of the Upper East Side or Brooklyn, and a wedding went off without a hitch, even though the bridal party didn't know for sure until Saturday morning where the reception for 300 would take place that afternoon.

Around 10:30 p.m., the veteran party promoter Erich Conrad was having a drink with friends at the Bowery Hotel. He stayed there all week in the dark because at least it had cold water, which was more than he could say for his apartment. And as he told it, he'd had a blast.

"It was very 'Downton Abbey,'" Mr. Conrad said. "We were kind of sad when the lights went on. It was really nice to be here with people. It was beautiful, and the staff was so nice."

Matt Misbin, 22, who was sitting at [Calliope](#), a neighborhood restaurant, agreed. "It was a democratizing experience," he said. "Because no one had power."

The meatpacking district, which suffered extensive flooding, was devoid of the outer-borough visitors who swarm its cobblestone streets on weekend nights. Most establishments were closed, but life was returning to the Dream Downtown just north on West 16th Street near Ninth Avenue.

By 11 p.m., a small crowd was gathering at the [Electric Room](#), a popular underground club that decided at the last minute to hold a Sandy recovery party. "With the name, it was just too good — the irony," said Nur Khan, who runs the club.

Mr. Khan, a SoHo resident, said that he had spent the last few days holed up at the [Carlyle](#) hotel on the Upper East Side, where fashionable downtowners had camped out and partied during the blackout. It was "going off every night" with the "downtown kids shaking up the stodgy, conservative scene," he said. "But things closed at 12:30. I was itching to get back."

"The scene up there is hilarious," added Sophie Sumner, a model who won "America's Next Top Model: British Invasion," and had arrived early to the party. She, too, had fled to the Carlyle. "You have the

fashion set and then you have the 19-year-old who's Botoxed out of her mind."

By early morning, a lively crowd had converged, ready to shake off the previous week, even as basic provisions like food were hard to come by. "I had to ask my roommate if I could have our last can of chicken and bean soup before I came tonight," DJ Elle Dee said.

The mood picked up Saturday night. After power was restored to the West Village and the rest of Manhattan, and residents had time to put their apartments in order, night life came roaring back.

Over at the corner of Kenmare and Elizabeth Streets, a parking garage was transformed into a "Power-On" party, hosted by the owners of [the Smile](#) and [Tacombi](#).

Downtown artists, models in short boots and fashion insiders hiked up three flights of concrete stairs and took over an entire floor of the garage, which had been decorated with a disco ball and dry ice. Chicken, pork and corn tacos were dished out of a VW bus. Vodka and fruity flavors of Red Bull, mezcal shots and beer were served. Everything was free, but the point of the party was to raise money. Donations were taken for storm relief efforts.

By 11 p.m., it was mobbed. The D.J. Roctakon played tracks by Snoop Dogg and Destiny's Child, while single women gushed about the abundance of attractive men. "It's a dude fest in here," one young woman said happily.

For those already taken, the storm had provided plenty of romantic moments. "My girlfriend wanted to kill me because I wanted to stay, but every night it was just us two: no phones and wine by candlelight," said Matt Kliegman, an owner of the Smile, who lives two blocks away.

There were also moments of kindness. "I couldn't believe the people who stepped up," said Dario Wolos, the owner of Tacombi, who also lives nearby and stayed through the power failure. "One of our staff is from Yonkers and he would go to his local gas station and haul in gallons of gas just so we could get around."

And life went on, if not resiliently, then with a new lens. Carlos Quirarte, another owner of the Smile, had trained for Sunday's canceled marathon.

"Some of us guys are going to do a run tomorrow anyway, maybe a 20-miler," Mr. Quirarte said on Saturday. "After that, we're going to the Rockaways to help out."

No Reservations Needed

On Saturday morning about 4:30, Steven Abramowitz, an owner of Cafe Cluny, got a call from an employee who was spending the night inside the West Village restaurant. "Steven," he said, "the power's back on."

Roughly three hours later, Judi Wong, another owner, was up at the Fairway market at Broadway and West 74th Street, trying to pull together a limited charcuterie menu for the restaurant's rushed

reopening, with Ms. Wong being perhaps a bit too aggressive as she grabbed as much food as she could.

"Judi, these are Upper West Siders. They are going to kill you," Ms. Wong said her boyfriend told her as they, in her words, "hogged the checkout line."

By around noon, the sunlit dining room on the corner of West Fourth and West 12th Streets began to fill up, mostly it seemed, with regulars, including one couple whom Ms. Wong said had been customers on the day the restaurant opened in 2006. "It is a special time in a special neighborhood," Ms. Wong said. "We couldn't wait to get open."

A few blocks away, Kate Todd, who had been without power in her West Village apartment for five days, was impatiently waiting for her favorite restaurant, Perla, to reopen, checking Instagram regularly for updates.

When word emerged Saturday morning that Perla would reopen that evening, Ms. Todd, an account manager for a media company who eats there at least twice a week, contacted three other friends whose power had also been out until that morning. The four agreed to meet at the Minetta Lane restaurant when the doors opened at 6 p.m.

When they got there, the coveted tables were, for a change, open to walk-ins and the four quickly settled in for a welcome meal. (Ms. Todd ordered one of her regular dishes, the roasted duck breast, as well as "several rounds of our favorite gin cocktail, the 'Yellowjacket Opera.'")

As patrons started filling the restaurant, "Bonita [Applebum](#)," by A Tribe Called Quest, started thundering over the sound system. "Rebirth music!" Matt Kebbekus, the restaurant's general manager and a partner, shouted triumphantly.

For two of Ms. Todd's dining companions (Sarah Pierce and Kayla Zemsky, who are roommates in a nearby high-rise) the meal marked a celebratory end to a week of Everest-like climbs up a darkened stairwell to the 28th-floor apartment they share.

For Ms. Todd, a return to Perla felt overdue. After a traumatic week, she wanted to be among friends, and Perla was the closest thing she has to a Cheers. "I had one of the last meals before Perla closed on Sunday, and one of the first meals when it reopened," she said. "That's what it means to be a regular."

MARY BILLARD and ALEX WILLIAMS

That Glow of Shopping

There were batteries to replenish, groceries to stock and flashlights to buy. But Saturday morning found Michelle Jank, a fashion consultant who lives in the West Village, engaging in less urgent pursuits at the brightly lighted Uniqlo store on Broadway in SoHo.

"The dark puts everybody in a sullen mood," said Ms. Jank, who was about to buy a pair of gloves. "In this very retail-driven city, shopping reinforces a sense of community. It puts people in very good spirits

because they've got some sensory contact again."

Despite the storm's devastation, guilt and piety were in short supply. No one seriously tried to justify a spree by claiming, as people had in the wake of 9/11, that shopping would somehow energize the economy.

"Shopping isn't necessarily what you want to do right after a storm like this," said Edwin Torres, a high school junior from the East Village, as he checked the racks at the rear of the store. "But it is a stress reliever."

It provided the retail version of a happy ending for Elana Rosenblatt and Yael Aflalo, who stopped in at Alexander Wang on Grand and Mercer Streets to replenish their winter wardrobes.

While Ms. Aflalo, flipped through racks of striped jersey dresses and leather pants, Ms. Rosenblatt, who was swaddled in a leopard-patterned coat, perched on a sofa, a tiny French bulldog nestled in her lap.

"It's kind of nice to get into the groove of life again," said Ms. Rosenblatt, the chief operating officer of Reformation, which sells repurposed vintage clothing. She and Ms. Aflalo, the owner, had been camping at a friend's apartment on the Upper East Side.

"Everyone on the Upper East Side is so chic," Ms. Rosenblatt marveled. "Now all of a sudden Yael wants to buy a Ralph Lauren blazer with elbow patches."

RUTH LA FERLA

Amid Families and Volvos

Some residents of Lower Manhattan sought refuge in particularly unfamiliar terrain: Brooklyn.

"I didn't move to New York 18 years ago to move to Brooklyn," joked Adam Rapoport, the editor in chief of Bon Appétit magazine, who decamped to a friend's home in Fort Greene when he and his family lost power in their Chelsea garden apartment. "But we have arrived in the land of family and dogs and Volvos."

Manhattan and Brooklyn have always had an uncomfortable rivalry: Brooklyn with its self-satisfied 20-somethings and literary types; and Manhattan with its smug professionals and establishment class. When Mr. Rapoport returned home, his attitude had softened. "It was a nice departure," he said.

Mr. Rapoport learned, too, that the boroughs had more in common than he initially thought. On Thursday night, he took his hosts, the architect Elizabeth Roberts and her husband, Michael McKnight, to dinner at Roman's, an Italian-inspired restaurant on DeKalb Avenue, as a thank-you.

"The restaurant was packed and it was going to be a two-hour wait," Mr. Rapoport said, a hint of awe still in his voice. "It felt like I was in Manhattan."

By Saturday, Mr. Rapoport had packed up his family and car, bought some yogurt and eggs at Pioneer

supermarket (near Fort Greene) and arrived in Chelsea around noon. With the electricity now on, he said he cleaned out his refrigerator and tidied up the house. He roasted a chicken for dinner, grateful for his friend's generosity, but pleased to be sleeping in his own bed.

"Some of my friends were making fun of me for crossing over," Mr. Rapoport said, with a laugh. But, he added later, "I'm happy to be home."

LAURA M. HOLSON

A Wedding Story

Jacqueline Polce, who was married to David Stockel at the Church of Ignatius Loyola on Saturday, had her first look at her wedding reception venue, Espace on West 42nd Street, at the same time as most of her guests — right before the cocktail hour.

"We made it!" she laughed during a phone interview on Sunday.

The couple's original choice, Capitale on the Bowery, had lost power along with much of Lower Manhattan last week, and as the day of the wedding quickly approached, it was unclear where exactly the reception for 315 would take place.

Seth Greenberg, an owner of Espace and Capitale, said he "felt terrible" when it became clear that the Capitale would not be available for the Polce-Stockel reception. But when his operations director told him that the bride was getting married "no matter what," he said he decided to offer an alternative space.

Mrs. Stockel said that the staff, many of whom also worked at Capitale, and the other vendors were so thrilled that she and Mr. Stockel had persevered through one of the worst weeks in modern New York history (the couple lost power in their Chelsea apartment) that they "went above and beyond."

"Given the situation, everyone was so excited that we were going on with the wedding," she added. "Our photographer said a lot of weddings had to be canceled."

The Capitale, housed in an 1895 Roman Revival landmark designed by Stanford White, is back in operation. "We're up and running," Mr. Greenberg said. "I assume this building has survived many a storm."

JOHN HARNEY