



HIDDEN *Gems*

*Some lesser-known treasures
on the Church Street path*

STORY BY JOHN ARTHUR
HARWOOD CROUCH
PHOTOS BY
ALEJANDRO SANTIAGO

TRANSPLANTS TO OUR fair city will admit there are few better feelings than when Toronto finally starts feeling like home, as opposed to just a place they are crashing for a while. Toronto has always been a city of neighbourhoods, each with its own distinctive identity, and while we gays have our choice, the one neighbourhood we cannot seem to escape is the one that surrounds the Church and Wellesley intersection. Now, don't get it twisted. This is not some sort of "post-mo," everyone-flee-the-gaybourhood manifesto — it's safe to say *Fab* is a staunch proponent of the Village experience. But who doesn't find himself occasionally getting slightly bored with the cheap pitchers at **Woody's** (\$14 before 8pm and \$17 after) or **The Firkin's** steal of a deal on tall cans of local beers (\$4.99 plus tax all day, every day). At times like these, we must not bemoan the Acme hamburgers and Starbucks lattes and give up, but rather put on our sleuth hats and do a little snooping into the full extent of our Church Street options.



↑ Shazid is hunting for hidden treasure on Church Street.

⇒ A wise woman once said, “If I ever go looking for my heart’s desire again, I won’t look any further than *my own back yard.*”

The Bishop and Belcher, originally located on Queen Street and for the last six years found at the northeast corner of Church and Hayden, just south of Bloor, is a classic British pub with a decidedly modern twist. It’s surprisingly spacious on the inside, despite a somewhat understated exterior, though still maintains an intimate feel. A perfect spot for an after-work drink (or few), the kindly Bishop offers up happy-hour deals that just won’t quit, like any combo of house wine, pint of beer or shot from the well for \$10, from 4pm to 6pm and after 11pm. Combined with daily specials on treats totally worth cheating on your Pride diet for, this Bishop isn’t going to be the subject of any pointed letters to the Vatican. A tip: on Thursdays, the Asian Wonton Nachos (\$11.95) and a 32-ounce Thunder Mug of beer (\$9.95) will make you forget your troubles and get happy.

A hop, skip and a jump down and across the street will take you to another sort of British grub, at **The Indian Hut**. With lunch and dinner buffets for \$12.95 and \$17.95 respectively, plus plenty of vegetarian and gluten-free options, it’s a great place to grab a midday nosh or perhaps go on a dinner date — so long as you’re comfortable with his seeing you demolish an all-you-can-eat buffet.

The butter chicken is delicious and the naan is fresh, but those looking for more “delicate” options might want to head next door, to the warm embrace of **Lola’s Kitchen** and its promise of locally supplied food and seasonal menu changes.

Fabarnak, located in the 519 Community Centre, is socially conscious dining done right. With an exciting and evolving menu made up largely of locally sourced ingredients, you can get a gourmet meal for a cafeteria price. The most famous item on the menu, the Square Peg, offers a twist on the classic plastic lunch tray, offering up a four-item sampler of daily specials. At \$11, it really cannot be beat. The bourbon pecan chocolate pie is the number one dessert, and it, like all the other baked goods (including the cupcakes on popular cupcake Wednesday), is made in-house. More important than the food, perhaps, is the community role Fabarnak has taken on, offering on-the-job training to people who have had a hard time entering the workforce. All restaurant proceeds and servers’ tips go straight back into The 519’s community programs.

By now, you’ve minced your way down to Wellesley from Bloor. First off, congratulations — you’ve worked off approximately a third of a french fry from the Bishop and Belcher (perhaps

even half a fry if you are really sissing that walk). Secondly, it has come to our attention that it is time for some reader-suggested Village treasures. Sung to the tune of “My Favorite Things”:

The Wine Rack: it’s open till 11pm. **Wellesley Convenience**: your one-stop shop for plastic shot glasses and deodorant. **Pizza Pizza**: \$5 medium walk-in special, for when you spend all your money at the Wine Rack.

Second verse — we hope everyone is following along with the bouncing ball:

Super Freshmart, full stop — the song’s over. But in all seriousness, a special shout-out goes to the ham-and-cheese croissants, which anytime after 2am are filled with hugs from your mom, compliments from complete strangers and a magic hangover cure, likely rendered from unicorn hair-trimmings. The same can be said for **Express Pizza**, where you get the choice of pepperoni or cheese, either of which results in your not feeling like a piece of garbage in the morning.

Nestled above The Village Pharmacy and staffed by a team of four — soon to be five — artists and one bably receptionist, **Passage Tattoo** has called its second-floor studio home for almost two decades. With its off-the-street location, Passage’s clientele hear about it mostly by word of mouth, and a good chunk of their patrons are repeat offenders. Though lead times can be long and an appointment is always suggested, the gang tries to accommodate walk-ins whenever possible (even more so with the new addition to the family). *Fab’s* very own graphic design genius and former cover boy Darryl Mabey got his first tattoo in Toronto in the hallowed halls of Passage and says he has been hooked ever since.

Now, all joking aside, and not to razz on the Second Cup and Davids Tea, but it’s the **Chino Locos** (where you can get an out-of-this-world fish burrito made with noodles instead of rice for under \$8 after tax) and **Fuel Pluses** (with its Toronto-roasted, organic and fair-trade coffees) of this world that keep neighbourhoods like the Village interesting.

A wise woman once said, “If I ever go looking for my heart’s desire again, I won’t look any further than my own back yard.” So the next time you’re thinking of making the trek over to Kensington because you think you’ve exhausted your options, take two seconds and a look around to see if you can find a sweet new (old) spot in your own back yard. **F**