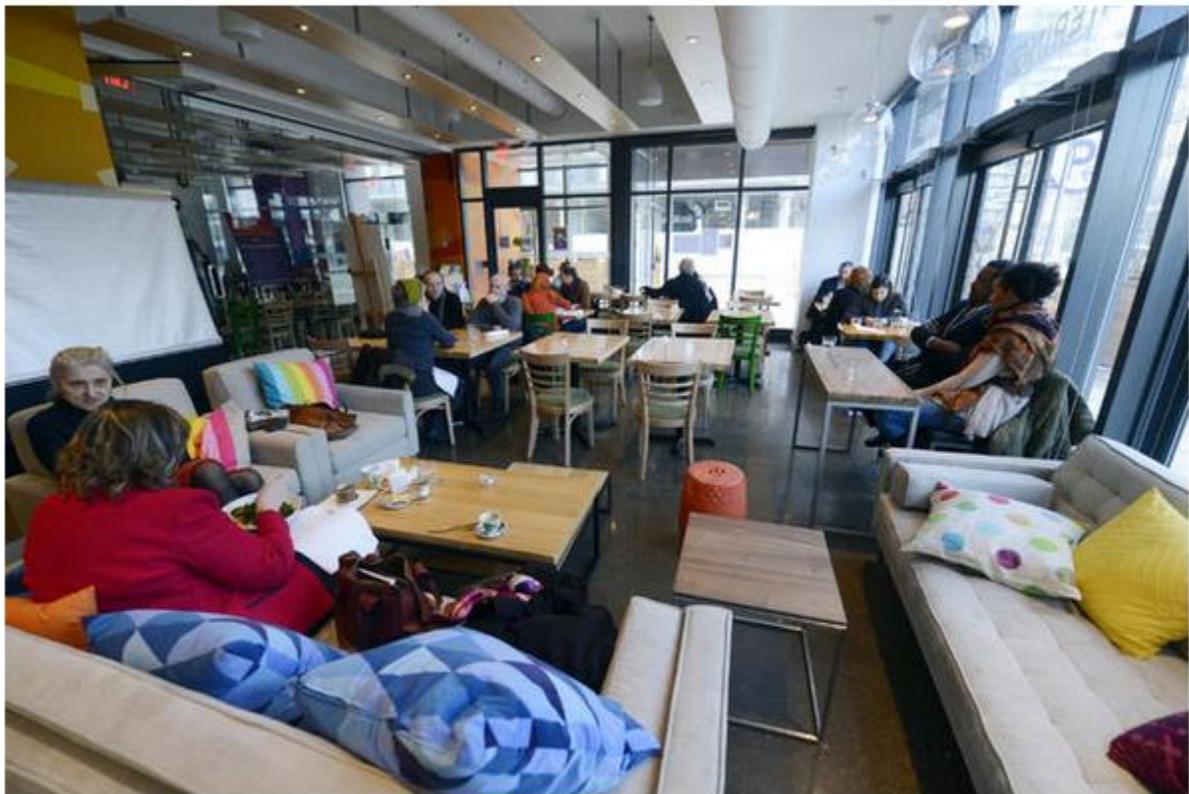


<http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/article/1319341--the-paintbox-bistro-brings-light-to-regent-park-in-toronto>



The Paintbox Bistro brings light to Regent Park in Toronto

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The Paintbox Bistro at Dundas and Parliament by day.

AARON HARRIS FOR THE TORONTO STAR

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I will admit: the weather can be terrible. I will concede that there are times in the depths of winter when choosing between a vibrant downtown and a warm one begins to look like it might be a difficult decision. A Toronto in January is about the one thing that can make Fort Lauderdale look good.

So let's forget the weather, shall we? Which is exactly what happened at the Paintbox Bistro in Regent Park the other night. It didn't take long for everybody there to warm right up.

The Paintbox, which is on the south side of Dundas, just east of Parliament, is a hallmark of the transformation taking place in Regent Park. I'm tempted to say the "astonishing transformation," but that wouldn't be very Torontonion of me.

Sometimes it feels as if the city of Toronto does its level best never to get too excited about what's really going on in the city. Even on those occasions when things are truly exciting, we remain distinctly unanimated about our metropolis.

But if you want to see what the astonishing, ongoing revitalization of one of Toronto's most diverse neighbourhoods looks like you might want to drop in at the Paintbox one of these nights. Like I said, it's in Regent Park. I can recommend the cod fritters, the burger and the Ontario Merlot.

It was the celebration of the 80th birthday of the Toronto drummer Archie Alleyne at the Paintbox the other night.

The evening featured the dapper and ebullient Mr. Alleyne and his trio, along with the trumpet of Alex Brown Cabrera, and the majestic presence and unmistakable voice of Jackie Richardson.

Alleyne's birthday party marked the launch of the Paintbox's "Season of Entertainment": six weekend nights of jazz, comedy and an "indie night with The Breakdown and Maya Killtron." This series continues until Feb. 15.

I think I can say with some confidence that "happy" has not been the description of many a Toronto street corner in January. Less often still when the corner in question happens to be just east of Parliament St. But that was the word that came to mind as I crossed Dundas St. the other evening.

In the cold darkness of a Toronto winter night, the Paintbox looked more like a golden container of light than a box of colour: the lively glow of stage lights, the reflections of overheads in wine glasses and cutlery, the burnish of piano and standup bass, the sheen of cymbals, the brassy gleam of a trumpet.

The place was packed.

This felt immediately familiar to me, as I stopped for a moment to take in a sight that not very many years ago at that same corner, at that same time of night, could only have been a hallucination. And a pretty wild one at that.

I stood watching the crowd and the hurrying servers and the bustling kitchen and I realized how much the Paintbox fit into my own memories of warm, happy, swinging little spots in Toronto where it was possible to get a good meal, some reasonably inexpensive wine and hear some really great music.

George's Spaghetti House came to mind, when Moe Koffman always used to play there. And the Colonial on Yonge St., where somehow, as a teenager, I impersonated a 21-year-old successfully enough to hear jazz legends such as Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk.

Once — a highlight of my underage frequenting of the Colonial — I stood (speechless, needless to say) at a urinal beside Muddy Waters.

These small, vibrant, crowded little spots — like the Rex, like Hugh's Room, like the Communist's Daughter and, now, like the Paintbox — have always been the real beacons of light for me in downtown Toronto.

Food, and wine, and good conversation help dispel the seasonal gloom. But there's nothing like the glow of good, live music to illuminate the city. Especially in the dead of winter.