

Artist John Donohue Is on a Mission to Draw All the Restaurants

BY JOHN CAPONE



Wandering the streets of **New York**, pen and paper in hand, John Donohue stopped in front of **The Odeon** and drew quickly, his fluid lines capturing the manic energy burbling inside the restaurant and bearing the influence of his 20 years spent as an editor (and occasional cartoonist) at **The New Yorker**. More than five years ago, Donohue had set himself the near Sisyphean task of drawing all the restaurants to find an inexhaustible resource to sketch. He moved from drawing innumerable iterations of the dishrack in his kitchen to setting down in reverberating black ink—with splashes of color here and there—the fronts of New York's eateries, coffee shops, slice joints and watering holes. The scene's consistent oscillation meant he might never run out. At any rate, it struck him as more interesting than his dishrack.

But before he could finish drawing all the restaurants in New York, Abrams commissioned him for three books, starting with **All the Restaurants in New York**. His pen next brought him to **Paris** and then **London**, where he continued to document the pulse emanating from *bôîtes*, bistros, pubs and patisseries. An invitation brought him next to **Napa**, where, of course, he brought his pen and pad.



MCSORLEY'S OLD ALE HOUSE, NYC BY JOHN DONOHUE

How do you decide which places you're going to draw?

When I started in New York, it was just by my gut, having lived in the city for decades and knowing it. To me, The Odeon was, in my mind, a place where dining, as we understand it now, started. It's not true at all in any way, but for my generation, it was, or is, this iconic place. It seemed like a good place to pick.

Then for London and Paris, I developed a working method in which I reached out to people who knew those cities, either lived there or were food journalists or chefs. I got their recommendations and then triangulated between people.



HOMESTEAD STEAKHOUSE, NYC BY JOHN DONOHUE

Walking around with a pen and sketchbook in Paris or New York is one thing. But Napa's 30 miles long and spaced out. How did you approach Napa?

I looked mostly at the places with Michelin stars and then, like, at Eater's 30 places to eat in Napa list or something. I asked some food writer friends for their recommendations. I tried to hit the best known, best regarded places as well as the local favorites.



LE JULES VERNE, PARIS BY JOHN DONOHUE

What is the importance of Napa's restaurant and dining scene to it as a wine region?

Wine's often best with food, right? You need to have great food to go with great wine. I'm not sure how it compares to other wine regions. There's this perception as an American that, "Oh, everywhere you go in France, you're going to get good food." I don't know if people have that perception about America.

When you have an agricultural region— it's not just wine that comes out of Napa. You get a lot of produce. You get a lot of other things that come out of Napa. When restaurants have access to those kinds of ingredients, things are going to be exceptional almost by default.

