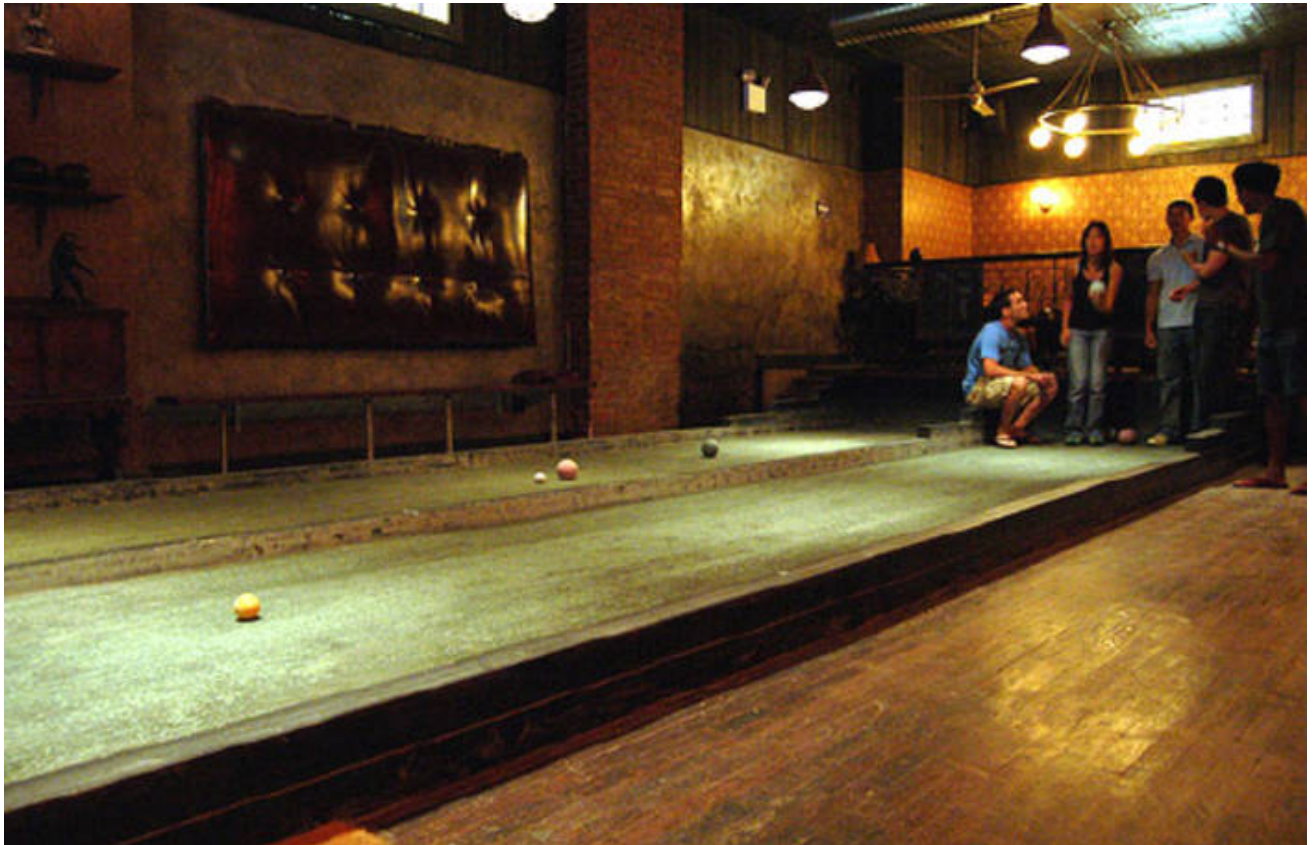




Bocce, a “chic” pastime

Gianluca Taraborelli (September 23, 2007)



In Italy it is a popular game only among seniors. In New York it is not only cool, but also very chic among young professionals. A number of bars and clubs around the city opened indoor bocce courts.

If they were to hear about this in any village in Italy I’m sure it would create endless amounts of laughter and the word would quickly spread around the “piazza” to the seniors. Who would have the courage to explain that the latest fad amongst New York’s young people was in fact the ancient game known as bocce?

While on the other side of the pond in Italy a daily battle is waged by the elderly to improve their bocce courts and facilities, the game is enjoying a renaissance in New York. The sport has been elected the favorite pastime amongst the city’s young hipsters.



The rules are simple and anyone can play the game of bocce on any given New York City evening.

Considered an Italian version of bowling, the game of bocce draws crowds of people to the Big Apple’s parks and venues where the game is played.

There are numerous variations to the rules of this sport, particularly regarding the number of players per team. The most common setup is to start with two players per team. As per the rules, each player rolls his bocce ball intermittently with the ball of the opposing player. The game’s objective is to roll the ball as close as possible to the “boccino” or “pallino” (usually a smaller white ball).

The “bocciata” or “spazzata” is a ferocious defensive toss meant to break up and distance the opposing team’s balls from the “boccino”.

The game, originally brought to the United States by Italian immigrants, has progressively become more popular. It is even enjoying success at the youth level. Last month, the first official indoor tournaments unexpectedly, yet successfully, attracted a great number of participants.

According to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, the city operates 44 bocce courts in the five boroughs. In contrast with the bocce courts present in Italy, New York has a high number of indoor bocce courts that are integrated parts of social clubs and bars. Among the most popular are Floyd NY, located at 131 Atlantic Avenue between Brooklyn Heights and Carrol Gardens, and Union Hall, situated at 702 Union Street and 5th Avenue in Park Slope.

Rome, NY recently hosted the World Series of Bocce (four men’s teams), from the 20th to the 22nd of July, attracting many of the sport’s aficionados.

For Jim Carden, director of the Union Hall Bocce Club of Park Slope and founder of Brooklyn’s Floyd NY, the success of the sport is due not only to the simplicity of the game but also to the animated, colorful gestures of the participants. “Bocce reminds me of New York summers many years ago, when I would pass entire afternoons watching the old Italian immigrants argue for hours and measure the distance from the bocce to the pallino. Only after the adults had finished their match could the children collect the balls and play”.

Many locals have installed garden-enhanced bocce courts in which their clients can play. It’s the ideal evening activity; it’s not very demanding, but it’s so very chic.

(Translated by Robert Cavanna)

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