

Newark's Old-School Ironbound Area Appeals to Millennials (Wall Street Journal, November 6, 2017)

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Newark's Ironbound neighborhood celebrates its Iberian heritage, as millennials, many from New York City, settle in the quickly gentrifying New Jersey city.

By

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Newark's Ironbound district is known for two things: Its hard-working immigrant community and no-frills, good food.

The city's culinary crown jewel neighborhood a few blocks east of downtown and Penn Station is rich in diversity and economic activity, with about 200 restaurants and markets reflecting a melting pot of Portuguese, Spanish, Brazilian, Ecuadorean and Mexican cultures.

The conveniently located enclave that often is overlooked, is preserving the old despite new development.

“It’s definitely evolved. There’s a gentrification that’s happening because all of the companies coming into downtown Newark,” said Tony Martinez, owner of Mompou, a Spanish-style tapas restaurant on Ferry Street that has been around for more than a decade. “We have a modern, yet rustic feel. We tend to appeal more to millennials these days that are working in the area and coming to us for happy hour.”

The main drag of Ferry Street is a feast for the eyes. Portuguese flags hang inside windows of tiny markets with terra-cotta style rooftops in the Iberian-influenced neighborhood that feels a bit like Lisbon. Fare such as Mexican tortilla soup, seafood paella, calamari and spicy chorizo entice eaters all within a one-block radius.



Streets signs in the Ironbound district of Newark. The working-class neighborhood offers a melting pot of Portuguese, Spanish, Brazilian, Ecuadorean and Mexican cultures. Photo: Mark Bonifacio for The Wall Street Journal

In the early 19th century, the Ironbound became a powerhouse for urban development, with new factories, schools and churches emerging amid an industrial boom that shaped the neighborhood as a result of the completion of the first railroads. With more job opportunities came an influx of European immigrants who brought culinary traditions with them.

Today, 72 percent of Ironbound residents are foreign born, according to a report by East Ward councilman Augusto Amador. A new wave of people are discovering it—mostly Brooklyn and Manhattan transplants.

“It’s a good investment because it’s trending up,” said Seth Grossman, director of the Ironbound Business Improvement District. “It’s affordable and somewhat overlooked. It’s still a great deal and it’s not going to last.”