

**Holiday shopping spree may ease EU crisis fears**

There is no sign that investors' headaches from Europe are going away, but early indications of strong holiday spending and an improving labor market could soothe Wall Street this week. Fears that Europe's debt crisis could spiral out of control have pushed stocks off two-year highs from earlier this month.

**'Harry' parries weekend challenge from 'Tangled'**

Harry Potter almost got beaten up by a hairy princess at the weekend box office. The seventh movie in the franchise, "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1" narrowly led the field for a second weekend, distributor Warner Bros. Pictures said. The film, which stars Daniel Radcliffe, grossed about \$50.3 million in North America. Close behind with \$49.1 million was the new Walt Disney 3D animated film "Tangled."



**Radcliffe**

(REUTERS)

# Baker hoping he has sweet spot

BY LANA BORTOLOTT  
Special to amNewYork

George McKirdy is hoping that now that he's built it, they will come.

The chef-owner of Astor Bake Shop, another Manhattan-to-Queens defector, opened his chic business in what can politely be called a fringe part of Astoria, a pocket with light industry and few services.

He was introduced to the area by a friend who happens to own Hell Gate Social, the only bar in the area. McKirdy, whose career includes tours in the city's finest kitchens — Butter

and Café Boulud among them — was enchanted.

"It was always my desire to have my own shop," McKirdy, 43, said. "My gut feeling was that this was the right spot."

The challenges were steep: the chef created a business plan based on the unknown — a still-emerging residential neighborhood that didn't have a history of similar services.



**Behold Astor Bake Shop's rustic apple tart.**

The site required a costly gut renovation. And

McKirdy was intent on serving French-influenced pastries in a neighborhood loyal to its baklava and cannoli.

"I wanted [Astor Bake Shop] to reflect something I wanted for a long time, and some-



**George McKirdy is Astor Bake Shop's chef and owner.** (RANDI ALEGRE)

thing outside the usual Greek and Italian bakery."

Light streams in through large storefront windows, and when you turn your attention away from the simple beauty of the place, the pastries will perform their sweet seduction. McKirdy's love affair with France is evident here.

Recently, the chef added a light brunch menu, with classics such as croque monsieur and seasonal tarts, some-

times featuring fresh figs or peaches picked from a nearby yard.

Annie Leah Sommers, a frequent patron, is keeping her fingers crossed.

"It's a beautiful space, and a really good neighborhood place," said Sommers, 41, a freelance editor. "It's extremely convivial and welcoming. It's obvious that he doesn't want to just make a buck, but that he really cares about his clients."

**Astor Bake Shop**  
12-23 Astoria Blvd., Queens  
718-606-8439

**\$230K**  
Cost of renovation

**\$2,000**  
Monthly rent

**1,200**  
Square feet (+900 SF basement)

**6**  
Full-time employees; 3 part time

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