

# Vinegar Factory and E.A.T.

## New York, USA

*Opposite This shows an interior shot of the Vinegar Factory check-out. The produce is at low level, while the stock is stored all around the perimeter at high level.*

*Below This shows Eli Zabar, the founder of the Vinegar Factory. He is pictured standing within the polytunnel structures on top of the roof where fresh produce is grown for his stores and restaurants below.*

Eli Zabar, born in 1943, is a scion of the family that created the landmark delicatessen on the upper west side of New York. The family deli Zabar's is the quintessential New York brunch venue famous for its smoked fish. Eli had a different vision – he was inspired by the food halls and markets of London and Paris, and developed his keen sensibility for food into a passion.

He established his first store, E.A.T., in 1973. This small upmarket gourmet store, directly across town on Madison Avenue, sells housewares and pre-packed foods. At first it was not a great success, but after a lot of hard work it became recognized for its quality.

Eli's Bread started in 1985, in the basement of E.A.T.. Unable to find the kind of bread he wanted for his sandwiches and bread baskets, Eli decided to bake his own but it was a struggle to get the ingredients right. Initially the shop only produced rolls, many of which he had to give away. Finally he gave them away long enough that people actually began to like them and demand grew. In 1987, once the demand was established, Eli began to sell bread wholesale. New doughs were created and more breads were added to his repertoire. He began to supply bread to many of New York's finest hotels, restaurants and retailers, and today Eli has his own bakery that can produce up to 500 loaves of bread per hour.

Eli's Vinegar Factory is Eli's think-tank. While E.A.T. is about perfection – the best sandwich and the perfect loaf of bread, the Factory is all about experimentation.

Eli's strengths lie in his ability to assess the market and his willingness to change direction according to his vision and the needs of his customers. When E.A.T. was first launched no one bought his pots and pans so he decided to put the idle pots and pans to use. Eli bought cookbooks and thought hard about food, whilst he taught himself to cook. He developed some very simple but definitive ideas and created a distinctive aesthetic which is still the hallmark of Eli's today.

When Eli bought the Vinegar Factory (the last working Vinegar Factory in Manhattan) it was instinctive. He did not have a clear idea of what he would do with it, but he moves intuitively, guided by his passions.

The Vinegar Factory opened in 1993 and maintains the integrity of the former factory by retaining many of its original features. This late eighteenth-early nineteenth century industrial warehouse has a rugged industrial aesthetic which has been left exposed. Eli and his architects have combined the building's structure with fixtures of rough wood and stainless steel. They have deconstructed the tall wooden silos originally used to distil vinegar and converted the aged wooden planks into display fixtures, islands and restaurant tables.



### PROFILE

**CLIENT:** Eli Zabar

**FUNCTION:** Food

**CONSULTANTS:** Richard H Lewis