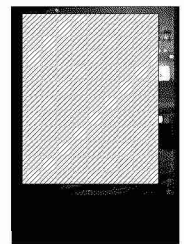


Ryman Auditorium, once home to the Grand Ole Opry, still hosts some of the world's top performers.

# SPOTLIGHT NASHVILLE

**KNOWN MAINLY FOR ITS HONKY-TONK TWANG, THE CITY HAS RECENTLY BECOME A SURPRISINGLY HIP DESTINATION, COMPLETE WITH BURGEONING ART AND FOOD SCENES.  
BY ANNA WATSON PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIC RYAN ANDERSON**

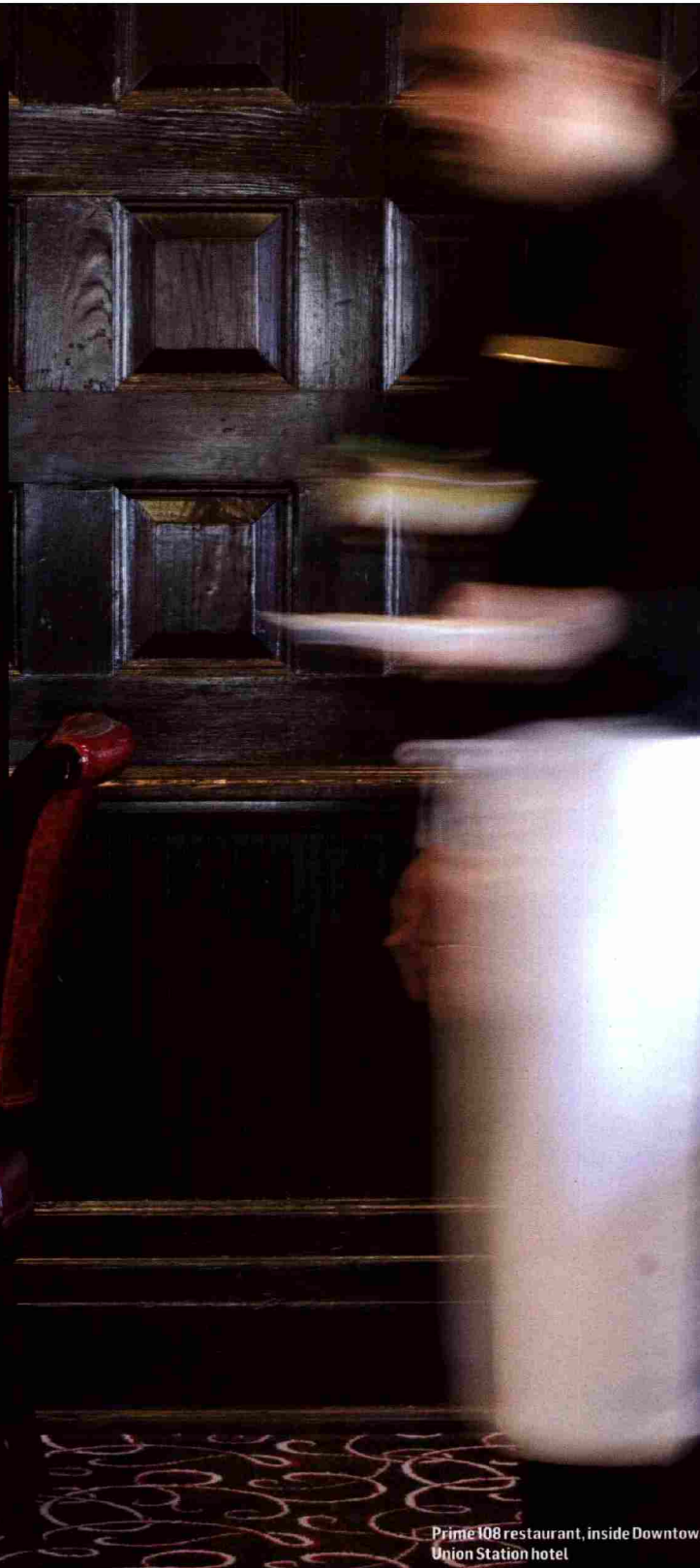




Nashville's rich country music heritage may have earned it the nickname Music City, but in recent years that mold has

been remade as an influx of creative talent has taken art, food, and even music in new directions. Attracted by its affordability and legendary Southern charm, artists and musicians are settling into gritty neighborhoods like East Nashville and 12South and infusing them with fresh energy. Downtown, once limited to office workers by day and tourists by night, has become central to the city's arts awakening, a trend that began with the unveiling of the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in 2001 and continues with forward-thinking galleries and artists' cooperatives. All over town, chefs are opening restaurants in repurposed spaces like former gas stations and grand old houses, retooling classic Southern dishes with local ingredients.

Nashville's surprisingly diverse music scene means you might hear Elvis Costello perform at a used-record store or see Norah Jones do an impromptu midnight set with Gillian Welch and Dave Rawlings. Besides playing there, many high-wattage names now call Nashville home, including Sheryl Crow, Ben Folds, Keith Urban and Nicole Kidman, and Jack White and his supermodel wife, Karen Elson.



Prime 108 restaurant, inside Downtown Union Station hotel

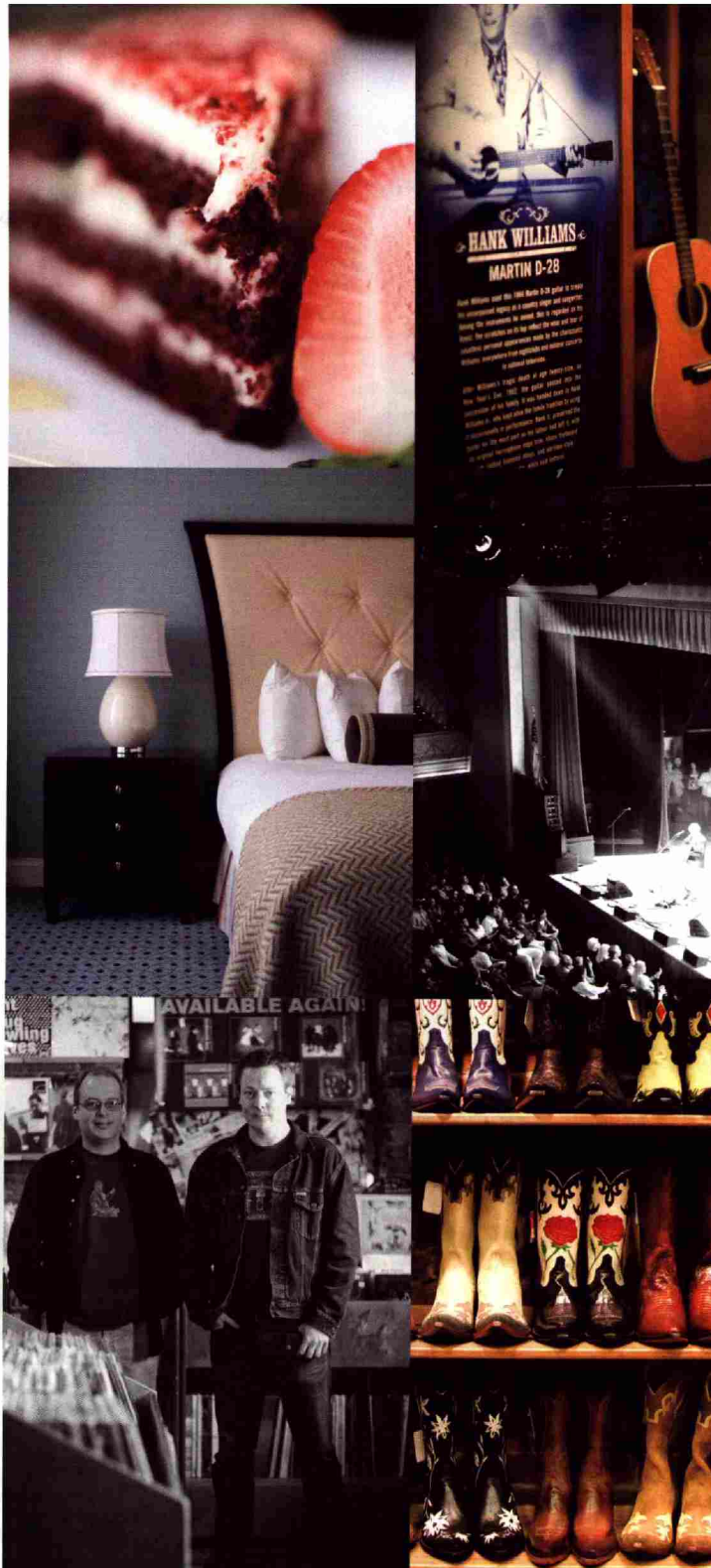
Our itinerary is ideal for a long weekend visit; you'll need a car, but most drives are short. The city is divided into east and west by the Cumberland River, which runs along the eastern edge of Downtown. The iconic sights, honky-tonks, and best hotels are clustered here around Broadway, the main drag that runs west from the river toward Vanderbilt University. West of Downtown Nashville, in neighborhoods such as The Gulch, 12South, Sylvan Park, and Hillsboro Village, happening restaurants and shops abound. Across the river in East Nashville, a roster of independent stores, galleries, and restaurants has made the area a can't-miss stop. Though it's hard to pinpoint when a city is having an "It" moment, Nashville seems to be in the midst of one.

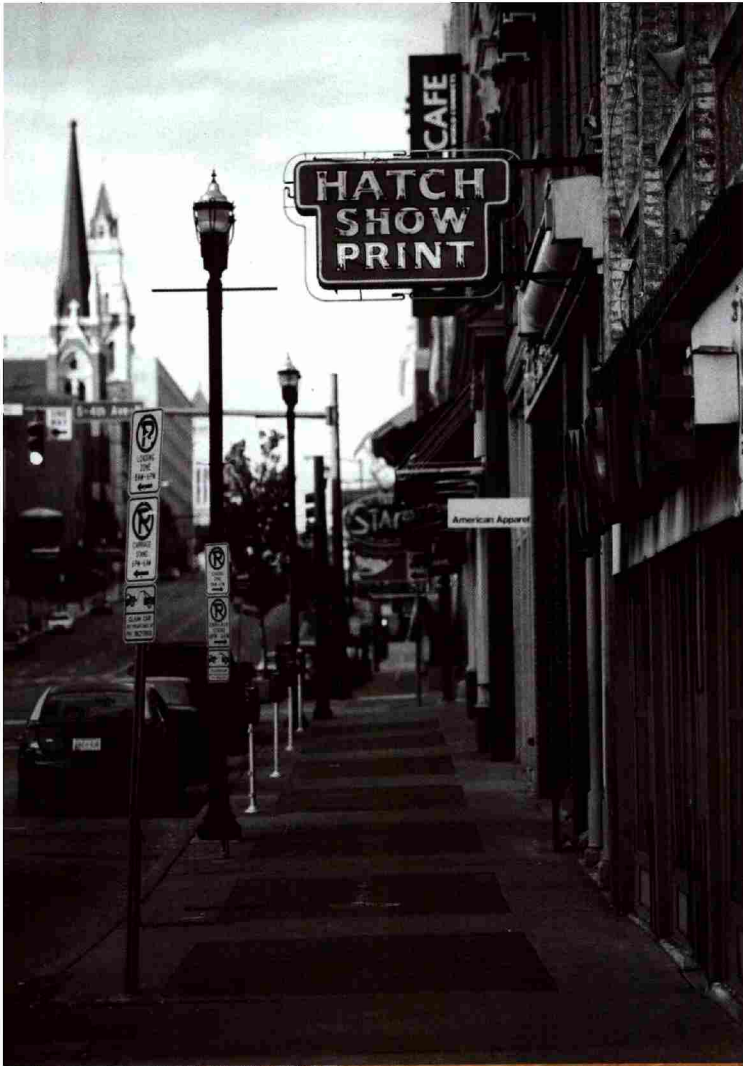
## Downtown and Nearby

Situated between East Nashville and neighborhoods to the west, Downtown is the ideal base for exploring the city. For a slice of Southern history, stay at **Union Station**, a stunning circa-1900 Romanesque former train station with vaulted Tiffany-style stained-glass ceilings. Now a Wyndham Hotel, Union Station still houses in its lobby the departures and arrivals boards from its days as a major terminal. **Hotel Indigo**, Nashville's only true boutique hotel, has 139 sleek rooms with the usual amenities—modern furniture, flat-screen TVs—at reasonable prices. Bonus points go to Phi, the lobby's intimate wine bar. The lavish **Hermitage Hotel** underwent a multimillion-dollar renovation several years ago to restore its 1910 glory. Even if you don't stay there, you'll be tempted to stop for afternoon tea near the fireplace in the elegant lobby.

From the Hermitage, it's an easy walk to some of Nashville's must-see sites. Start the day with a visit to the first-rate galleries that have recently popped up at **The Arcade**, a fin de siècle-iron and glass passage modeled after the enclosed shopping galleries of Milan and Florence. Check out **Twist**, which features rotating large-scale installations and frequent concerts, and if you're around on the first Saturday of the month, join the evening gallery crawl, when hundreds of artists and collectors flood The Arcade (and surrounding Downtown galleries). The area's art anchor is the **Frist Center for the Visual Arts**, housed nearby in a gorgeous Art Deco former post office on Broadway. Showing everything from blockbuster traveling exhibits (Rodin,

**CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT:** Red velvet cake at the café in the Frist Center for the Visual Arts; Hank Williams's Martin guitar at the Country Music Hall of Fame; Robert Earl Keen performing at the Ryman Auditorium; ornate boots at Downtown's Nashville Cowboy; Doyle Davis and Mike Grimes, owners of Grimey's New & Preloved Music; a Union Station hotel guest room





anyone?) to local students' work, the Frist is a nexus for all kinds of visual art. **Estel Gallery**, a sunny space on Rosa L. Parks Boulevard near the Frist, shows paintings on wood by urban folk artist Harry Underwood, once a construction worker and now a breakout art star on the Nashville scene. At lunchtime, try **Monell's** in nearby Germantown for pure Southern comfort food. In an old Victorian mansion, diners share communal tables and indulge in platters of fried chicken, mashed potatoes, and buttermilk biscuits, all washed down with sweet tea.

Whether you're a country fan or not, no trip to Nashville is complete without visiting a few of the genre's legendary sites. The **Country Music Hall of Fame**, located Downtown in a space-age building off Broadway, takes visitors on an interactive tour with lyric sheets, instruments, and memorabilia of superstars from Loretta Lynn to Shania Twain. Just a short walk away, the **Ryman Auditorium** has hosted some of the world's top performers. Built in 1892, it was the Grand Ole Opry's sole home from 1943 to 1974, when the much larger Opryland USA complex was built to house the Grand Ole Opry Show. Today, the Ryman's stellar acoustics and rich history still make it one of Nashville's favorite spots to hear country music stars and others in concert. Around the corner, **Hatch Show Print**, a letterpress print shop that's been in business since 1879, has handprinted all of the Ryman's collectible show posters. Now a store and gallery as well, you can buy vintage posters (like a late-1960s Johnny Cash print for \$14) as arty souvenirs.

The highlight of what Nashvillians call Lower Broad is the cluster of honky-tonks—fabulously gaudy hole-in-the-wall clubs, open day and night—where wannabe country stars croon old tunes in hopes of being discovered. (Grammy Award-winning singer Gretchen Wilson got her start singing in a bar nearby.) Order a Pabst Blue Ribbon with a shot of Jack Daniel's, a popular combo, at **Robert's Western World** and watch the regulars tear up the dance floor. Next door, at **Tootsies Orchid Lounge**, you never know who may be onstage—the list of past performers reads like a who's who of country music. For one of Nashville's favorite underground music venues, drive about 5 minutes south on 8th Avenue to **The Basement**. Though it specializes in up-and-coming indie rockers, it's an equal-opportunity venue: Metallica recently played a secret show there for 175 committed fans. "The scene on the noncountry front has developed exponentially over the past couple

**CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT:** Letterpress legend Hatch Show Print on Broadway; the Hermitage Hotel's grand main lobby; and its 6th Avenue entrance

# MAKING IT HAPPEN

**Sherman's Picks:**

- ★ = **Smart Splurge**
- ✓ = **Great Value**

## DOWNTOWN/NEARBY

**WHERE TO STAY**

- ★ **Hermitage Hotel** 231 6th Ave. N.; from \$250/night; 615/244-3121. thehermitagehotel.com
- ✓ **Hotel Indigo** 1719 West End Ave.; from \$109/night; 615/329-4200. hotelindigo.com
- Union Station** 1001 Broadway; from \$170/night; 615/726-1001. unionstationhotelnashville.com

**WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK**

- ★ **Miro District** 1922 Adelia St.; entrées from \$18; 615/320-1119. mirodistrictnashville.com
- ★ **Watermark** 507 12th Ave. S.; entrées from \$22; 615/254-2000. watermark-restaurant.com
- ✓ **Lime** 1904 Broadway; entrées from \$14; 615/340-0762. limenashville.com
- ✓ **Monell's** 1235 6th Ave. N.; dinner is \$15; 615/248-4747. monellsdining.ypguides.net

- Las Paletas** 2907 12th Ave. S.; 615/386-2101
- Miel** 343 53rd Ave. N.; entrées from \$19; 615/299-3663. mielrestaurant.com

**WHAT TO DO**

- Country Music Hall of Fame** 222 5th Ave. S.; 615/416-2001. countrymusichalloffame.com
- Estel Gallery** 115 Rosa L. Parks Blvd.; 615/251-8997. estelgallery.com
- Frist Center for the Visual Arts** 919 Broadway; 615/244-3340. fristcenter.org
- Grand Ole Opry** 2802 Opryland Dr.; 800/733-6779. opry.com
- Robert's Western World** 416 Broadway; 615/244-9552. robertswesternworld.com
- Ryman Auditorium** 116 5th Ave. N.; 615/889-3060. ryman.com
- Tootsies Orchid Lounge** 422 Broadway; tootsies.net
- The Arcade Building** 244 5th Ave. N. (between Union and Church streets); artatthearcade.com
- The Basement** 1604 8th Ave. S.; 615/254-8006. thebasementnashville.com

- Twist Art Gallery** 73 Arcade; 888/535-5286. twistartgallery.com
- WHERE TO SHOP**
- Grimey's New & Preloved Music** 1604 8th Ave. S.; 615/254-4801. grimeys.com
  - Hatch Show Print** 316 Broadway; 615/256-2805. hatchshowprint.com

## HILLSBORO VILLAGE

- WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK**
- ✓ **Pancake Pantry** 1796 21st Ave. S.; entrées from \$6; 615/383-9333
  - ✓ **Fido** 1812 21st Ave. S.; entrées from \$7; 615/777-3436. bongojava.com/fido.php

**WHERE TO GO**

- Belcourt Theatre** 2102 Belcourt Ave.; 615/383-9140. belcour.org
- Fannie Mae Dees Park** (aka Dragon Park) 2400 Blakemore Ave.; nashville.gov

**WHERE TO SHOP**

- ★ **Venus and Mars The Showroom** 2009 Belmont Blvd.; 615/915-4846. venusandmarsvintage.com

## EAST NASHVILLE

- WHERE TO STAY**
- ✓ **Top O' Woodland B&B** 1603 Woodland St.; from \$160/night; 888/228-3868. topofwoodland.com

**WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK**

- ★ **Margot Café & Bar** 1017 Woodland St.; entrées from \$17; 615/227-4668. margotcafe.com
- ✓ **Family Wash** 2038 Greenwood Ave.; entrées from \$9; 615/226-6070. familywash.com
- ✓ **Marché Artisan Foods** 1000 Main St.; entrées from \$8; 615/262-1111. marcheartisanfoods.com
- Bongo Java Roasting Company** 107 S. 11th St.; 615/777-3287. bongojava.com
- Red Door Saloon** 1010 Forrest Ave.; 615/226-7660. thereddoorsaloon.com
- Rumours East** 1112 Woodland St.; entrées from \$10; 615/262-5346. rumourswinebar.com/east

**WHAT TO DO**

- Art & Invention Gallery** 1106 Woodland St.; 615/226-2070. artandinvention.com
- Plowhaus** 808 Broadway, 2nd floor; plowhaus.org

**WHERE TO SHOP**

- Alegria** 307 N. 16th St.; 615/227-8566. alegriagifts.com
- Woodland Wine Merchant** 1001 Woodland St.; 615/228-3311. woodlandwinemerchant.com

## GETTING THERE

From NYC and Chicago, American, Continental, and Delta have the most affordable nonstop routes. From the western U.S., Southwest has affordable rates. All of the major car rental agencies have outposts at the Nashville International Airport.

## WHEN TO GO

Summers get pretty hot and sticky, so the best times to visit are spring, fall and winter (which is mild). Festivals worth checking out are the Tin Pan Alley Songwriter's Festival in March and the Music City Marathon in April. The CMA (Country Music Association) Music Festival, in June, attracts thousands of fans, so don't go then if you want to avoid the crowds.



For more information, visit our **Nashville Travel Guide** at **ShermansTravel.com**



Downtown Nashville skyline at night



**CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT:** At the Frist Center for the Visual Arts; Family Wash owner Jamie Rubin (left) with manager Greg O'Loughlin; Family Wash, a former self-service laundry turned restaurant; the Pancake Pantry's sweet potato treats

of years," says Mike Grimes, owner of The Basement and Grimey's New & Preloved Music, the popular record store next door. "I've been blown away by some of the new musicians moving to town." Grimes is a pro when it comes to discovering talent—his New Faces series helped launch Kings of Leon and Marc Broussard.

Many of Nashville's best new dining spots are opening up in pocket-size neighborhoods surrounding Downtown and farther west. **Watermark** opened in 2005 in The Gulch—a former warehouse district—to instant raves thanks to its modern design, a patio overlooking the city skyline, and high-end Southern cuisine, like the stone-ground grits soufflé with goat cheese. Just a mile away, Watermark's new sister restaurant, **Miro District**, serves chic Mediterranean fare with excellent wines to match. Try the braised beef cheeks with golden chanterelles and potato puree. Around the corner, **Lime**, on Broadway, dishes up South American tapas with excellent mojitos and caipirinhas in a modish setting. **Miel**, a tiny French bistro run by the husband and wife team of Jimmy and Seema Phillips, recently opened in a former meat market in the Sylvan Park neighborhood. They pride themselves on using quality local ingredients, and it shows: Their perfectly crisp, herb-roasted chicken (from nearby Ashley Farms) is a study in simplicity. For a decidedly non-fine-dining treat, visit **Las Paletas** in 12South, where Mexican popsicles in wonderful and wacky flavors like chili pineapple and avocado are freshly made.

## Hillsboro Village

If you're itching to get out of your car and stroll, head three miles south of Downtown to Hillsboro Village, where great cafés, coffee shops, and boutiques abound. Start your jaunt at the reliably long line in front of **Pancake Pantry**. Serving the best breakfast in town for more than 40 years, the Pantry is a favorite for both its food—stacks of featherlight buckwheat pancakes, warm maple syrup, and Tennessee country ham—and its friendly servers, many of whom have been there for decades. Just across the street, browse the quirky collection of shops: several emporiums with antiques and vintage goods, a fabulously funky shoe store, a mazelike used bookstore, and a family-run cookware store.

Prime people-watching happens at **Fido**, a pet shop turned coffee shop (the original Jones Pet Shop sign still hangs outside) where, in warmer months, the coveted

sidewalk tables fill with songwriters—dogs and guitars in tow. Walk down Belcourt Avenue past the historic **Belcourt Theatre** (check the schedule for art-house flicks and concerts) to **Fannie Mae Dees Park**, aka Dragon Park, nicknamed for its whimsical mosaic dragon sculpture. A short drive away is model Karen Elson's clothing store **Venus and Mars The Showroom**, which offers vintage duds for men and women.

## East Nashville

Once considered one of the roughest areas in town, East Nashville underwent a cleanup recently when artists and musicians started to open shops and renovate old Victorian homes. Off the tourist grid, it has a small-town vibe and is as walkable as Hillsboro Village. Depending on your mood, grab a locally brewed Yazoo beer at **Red Door Saloon** or a freshly roasted Dancing Goats coffee at **Bongo Java**. For gifts to either take home or enjoy in Nashville, visit **Alegria**, which carries handcrafted leather goods, and **Woodland Wine Merchant**, which sells well-priced, small-production vino. The best of the eastside B&Bs (no hotels yet) is **Top O' Woodland**, a turreted manse that has an expansive master bedroom (with a fireplace) and a cottage set in its garden.

Chef Margot McCormack helped jump-start the area when she converted an old gas station into the cozy **Margot Café & Bar** in 2001. "I knew that being 'across the river' afforded me the freedom from a certain prescribed formula," she says. With its Provençal-inspired seasonal menus and well-edited wine list, it quickly became a destination. Around the corner, McCormack's second restaurant, **Marché Artisan Foods**, is a popular weekend brunch spot with a decadent French toast made from croissants. Wine bar **Rumours East** has a back garden that's magical in the summer. For live music and upscale pub fare, check out **Family Wash** (formerly a self-service laundry) for addictive hummus and stellar shepherd's pie.

When Meg McFadyen opened her **Art & Invention Gallery** in East Nashville seven years ago, "people thought I was a little crazy," she says. Now her welcoming gallery is a hub of community activity. **Plowhaus**, an inventive artists' cooperative, also features local—as in East Nashville—artists in shows with cheeky names like Value Menu and Festivus. Spend time in East Nashville, and you'll notice there's a feeling of playful competition with the more established west side of town. But no matter which bank you prefer, one thing is clear: The creative surge is transforming both sides of the river.

**CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT:** Provençal-inspired Margot Café & Bar in East Nashville; gourmet popsicles at Las Paletas; Top O' Woodland B&B; huevos rancheros at Fido

