



The vibrant capital of country music is making room for sassy shops and top-notch chefs

By Kathy Baruffi

Mental images of Minnie Pearl aside, newcomers to Nashville are more likely to arrive by jet than Greyhound bus—and they're not all carrying guitar cases. In case you missed the memo, the capital of Tennessee is now where some of pop culture's most stylish folks live and work, including Nicole Kidman, Faith Hill, and Sheryl Crow. The city's legendary twang is gloriously intact, but there's an increasingly sophisticated vibe on this storied bend of the Cumberland River.

An influx of inspiring out-of-towners is refining the energetic atmosphere of this city of 620,000, whose diverse neighborhoods make it feel like a collection of villages. One can still order a meat-and-three—Southernese for a main dish with three sides—at Arnold's Country Kitchen, yet worldly new restaurants have raised the culinary bar. High-end antiques shops have further enriched the neon-bright cityscape; ditto tempting fashion boutiques and art galleries.

An important Southern crossroads since French fur trappers settled here in pioneer times, Nashville was founded in 1779 as Fort Nashborough and later became a major railroad hub. For many years it has been one of America's educational centers, with Vanderbilt University and 17 other area colleges attracting thousands of the world's best and brightest. With a brain trust like that, it is easy to understand why the city was once called the Athens of the South, a nickname that led in 1897 to the construction of a replica of the Parthenon, now an art museum.

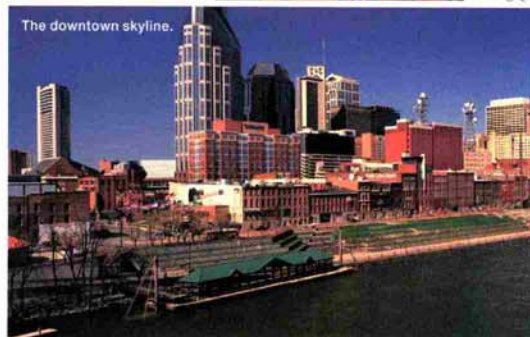
The city's thriving economy, past and present, is reflected in its architecture, particularly the abundance of neoclassical buildings. The Hermitage (Andrew Jackson's Greek Revival mansion), Belle Meade Plantation (the ancestors of Kentucky Derby winners once roamed its gorgeous >



Radius10 restaurant.



Robert's Western World bar.



The downtown skyline.

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The Acorn restaurant.

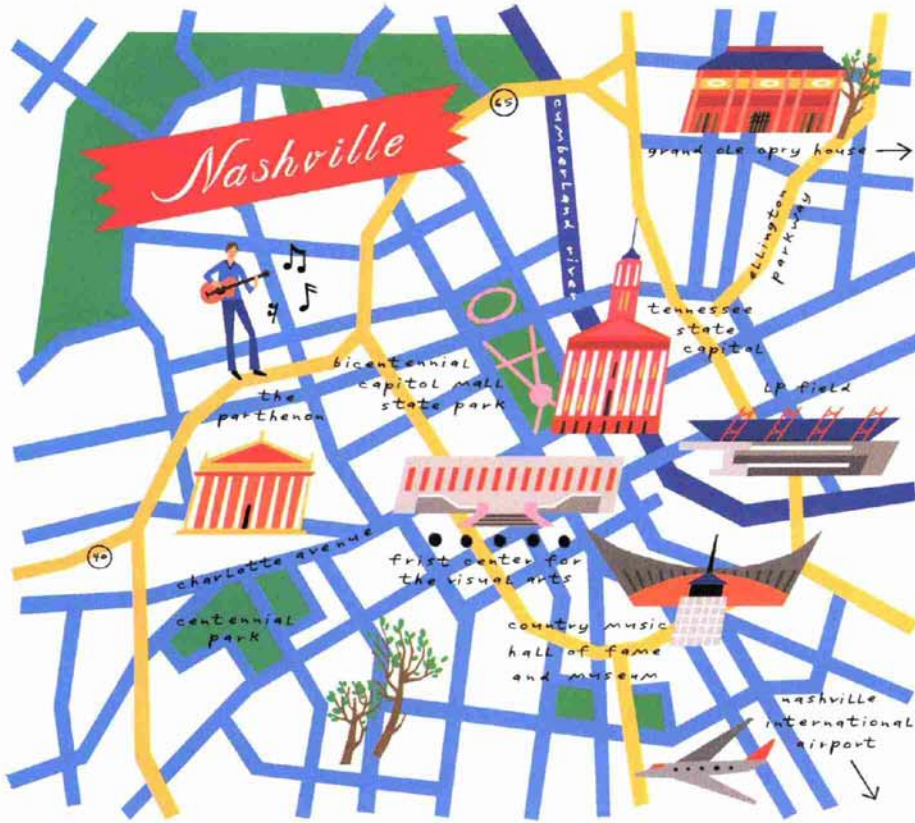
grounds), and the \$123.5-million Schermerhorn Symphony Center are standouts. The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum—where you can see Elvis's gold grand piano and Mother Maybelle Carter's guitar, among other treasures—has windows whose shape is inspired by piano keys, while the AT&T tower, the state's tallest, resembles Batman's ears.

As far as its fans are concerned, Nashville is an embarrassment of riches. "I've lived in Boston, Washington, D.C., near San Francisco, and outside London," says hometown boy Bill Frist, the heart-transplant surgeon turned U.S. senator, "but where else can you visit a honky-tonk like Tootsies Orchid Lounge and find one of the largest Civil War collections in the country at the Tennessee State Museum?" And the city has four mosques to serve the local Kurdish population, which is the most substantial in the States.

The array of antiques outlets might come as a surprise too. Elegant shops along Eighth Avenue South have turned this unlikely stretch of asphalt—with its Dollar General store and nail salons, as well as lovingly restored old buildings and a rash of new condos—into a destination for collectors looking to round out their living rooms. "The under-40 crowd here really cares about design," says Julie Goad of Epiphany Design Studio, where Crow and other cosmopolitan Nashvillians snap up rustic French antiques and tailored contemporary furniture. The 20 dealers at Fine Offerings Antiques carry carefully vetted 18th- and 19th-century European furniture, 17th-century books, and Staffordshire dogs (Nashville is plantation territory after all, so traditional accoutrements proudly reign). Next door at Classic Modern are (text continues on page 75) ▷



Union Station Hotel.



Essential Nashville

The area code is 615. Take in some tunes. Nashville is country-music central, with clubs and stages galore, including the storied Grand Ole Opry (2802 Opryland Dr., 871-6779; opry.com). Go Greek. The Parthenon (2600 West End Ave., 862-8431; nashville.gov)—an 1897 replica of the Athens temple—is an art museum with Hudson River School paintings and a prominent statue of Athena. Toga not required. Stroll memory lane. The 19-acre Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park (600 James Robertson Pkwy., 741-5280; tennessee.gov) celebrates Tennessee history, and a large farmer's market is a block away.

What to See

Belle Meade Plantation, 5025 Harding Pike, 356-0501; bellemeadeplantation.com: The bloodlines of several Kentucky Derby winners, including Barbaro, are traced to this historic estate. Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, 222 Fifth Ave. S., 416-2001; countrymusicshalloffame.com: Everything from Elvis's white Cadillac to over-the-top costumes worn by three generations of Hank Williamses.

Frist Center for the Visual Arts, 919 Broadway, 244-3340; fristcenter.org: This monumental Art Deco former post office features world-class art and live music—and it's a romantic spot for a sip of wine and a bite to eat. The Hermitage, 4580 Rachel's Ln., 889-2941; thehermitage.com: Andrew Jackson's gracious Greek Revival mansion and final resting place. Travellers Rest Plantation & Museum, 636 Farrell Pkwy., 832-8197; travellersrestplantation.org: The oldest house in the city open to the public and a former headquarters of Confederate General Hood.

Where to Stay

The Hermitage Hotel, 231 Sixth Ave. N., 244-3121; thehermitagehotel.com: The high and mighty favor this Persian-carpeted grande dame. Hotel Indigo Nashville-West End, 1719 West End Ave., 329-4200; hotelindigo.com: Funky modernist interiors; young crowd. Loews Vanderbilt Hotel, 2100 West End Ave., 320-1700; loewshotels.com: A sports-team favorite (the NFL stays here), the hotel has also hosted every sitting U.S. president since its doors opened in 1984.

Renaissance Nashville Hotel, 611 Commerce St., 255-8400; marriott.com: Newly updated digs not far from the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum and around the corner from the popular Jack's Bar-B-Que. Union Station-A Wyndham Historic Hotel, 1001 Broadway, 726-1001; unionstationhotelnashville.com: Housed in a 109-year-old, marble-and-stained-glass train station recently refurbished with a stylish hand.

Where to Eat

The Acorn, 114 28th Ave. N., 320-4399; theacornrestaurant.com: Try the chorizo-and-potato-crust-ed halibut or the crowd-pleasing farmer's market vegetable plate. Andrew Chadwick's at Rutledge Hill, 37 Rutledge St., 254-8585; andrewchadwicks.com: At this little bit of Napa in Nashville, California transplant Chadwick drizzles delicious infused syrups with the mastery of Jackson Pollock. Jack's Bar-B-Que, 416 Broadway, 254-5715; jacksbarbque.com: Brave the line—the brisket, pork, chicken, and turkey are worth the wait. Miro District Food & Drink, 1922 Adelia St., 320-1119; mirodistrictnashville.com: Opened in August,

this newcomer is already winning raves for inventive and mouthwatering dishes such as pappardelle with duck, figs, and fennel. Ombi Restaurant, 2214 Elliston Pl., 320-5350; ombirestaurant.com; Chef Laura Wilson's comforting fare includes pan-seared grouper over porcini risotto and decadent foie-gras-stuffed burgers. Radius10, 1103 McGavock St., 259-5105; radius10.com: Mies-modern interiors complement memorable recipes that update Old South favorites with artful panache. Tayst Restaurant and Wine Bar, 2100 21st Ave. S., 383-1953; taystrestaurant.com: Though standards include bread pudding made with Krispy Kreme doughnuts, much of the menu changes with the season. FYI: Tayst is the first Nashville restaurant certified by the Green Restaurant Association for its sustainable practices.

Where to Shop

À la Maison, 2108 Eighth Ave. S., 942-7046; shopalamaison.com: Picture frames constructed of wood salvaged from Hurricane Katrina wreckage and 19th-century French beds reflect the owner's Louisiana roots and European sourcing. Artifacts Antiques, 224 White Bridge Pike, 354-1267; artifactsantiquesonline.com: Nicole Kidman shopped here for her garden. Vintage lighting and custom-made iron and copper furnishings are among the specialties. At Home Nashville, 2104 Crestmoor Rd., 463-8865; atomenashville.com: This shop, a must for designers and stars alike, stocks hip vintage accessories alongside furnishings by Oly and KnollStudio. Classic Modern, 2116 Eighth Ave. S., 297-5514; americanclassical.com: Enticing antiques and so much more. Epiphany Design Studio, 2115 Eighth Ave. S., 385-3289; epiphanynashville.com: Carrie Underwood is a customer of this eclectic home-furnishings shop. Fine Offerings Antiques, 2116 Eighth Ave. S., 460-7992: Twenty dealers sell American and European antiques, French manuscripts, and evocative finds such as a deck chair from an Italian yacht. Hatch Show Print, 316 Broadway, 256-2805; hatchshowprint.com: Bob Dylan, Shania Twain, and Bruce Springsteen have had posters created by this letterpress legend. Jamie, 4317 Harding Pike, 292-4188; jamie-nashville.com: A luxury boutique with designer and couture threads. Posh Boutique, 1813 21st Ave. S., 383-9840; poshonline.com: Jeans that fit and flatter, bohemian tops, and cool cocktail dresses.

American Empire pieces and streamlined leather seating, and down the street await À la Maison (French antiques, artisanal gifts) and the Country House (Georgian furniture, antique glassware). Hillsboro Village, a neighborhood near the Vanderbilt campus, is like a compact version of New York's SoHo, and it's here that Kelly Clarkson and Carrie Underwood find edgy fashion at Posh. Within one block stand Clothing Xchange for gently used threads, Carissa's Armoires & Antiques, and Zeitgeist gallery, home of emerging and established artists.

Berry Hill, meanwhile, is an up-and-coming area where bungalows along Bransford Avenue have been converted to trendy shops. Go to Gilchrist Gilchrist, two side-by-side cottages with lots of white furniture and Bella Notte linens. A sign across the street in the shape of a giant red pocketbook marks Designer Renaissance, a blue-chip resale shop with Prada, Fendi, and more.

Best-dressed singer Faith Hill stocks up on all the top labels at Jamie, a clothing boutique "where everything is luxurious and fine," she says. The Nashville resident also haunts shops in nearby Franklin, a quaint town where ▷



Fashion boutique Jamie.

she and husband Tim McGraw own a farm. "The Iron Gate is a must" for antiques, says Hill (Franklin local Ashley Judd is a fan too), "and the Registry is good for fine dinnerware." And if you begin feeling peckish, Judd recommends the Southern treats at Dotson's.

When it comes to restaurants, it is difficult to narrow the choices in Nashville. Frist is a fan of both Lime and Watermark, but when Martha Stewart came to town last fall, she opted for homey Täyst, where a chalkboard lists the farmers who supply the certified-green restaurant. A new generation of chefs is shaking up the city menus, integrating fresh ingredients from farms in the middle of Tennessee. Margot McCormack of Margot Cafe and Bar is a case in point. "She always has something delicious on the stove," says Jason Love, who is the sous-chef at Ombi but has a soft spot for Margot, where dishes such as steamed Maine mussels with pesto and Pernod grace the menu. Martha Stamps of Martha's at the Plantation, located at the historic stud farm Belle Meade, excels at sublime fried chicken and catfish. The stylish Radius10 serves black-truffle grits and the like to Jessica Simpson and other high-wattage diners.

Music, of course, is the pinnacle of the Nashville experience. From the Grand Ole Opry to the Schermerhorn Symphony Center, this is a surround-sound landscape. Signs shaped like gigantic guitar picks guide visitors to live-music venues, both immense and minuscule. Kenny Chesney, for instance, got his start at a hole-in-the-wall near Ryman Auditorium, and though it is long gone, he says, "You can still find that vibe in lots of little bars," Tootsies among them. Nashville International Airport has five stages where musicians perform regularly, and the wake-up calls at Loews Vanderbilt Hotel have been recorded by Vince Gill, Sugarland, and others. Everywhere you go, Nashville is music to your ears. ■

FROM TOP: COURTESY FRIST CENTER FOR THE VISUAL ARTS; COURTESY EPIPHANY DESIGN STUDIO

