


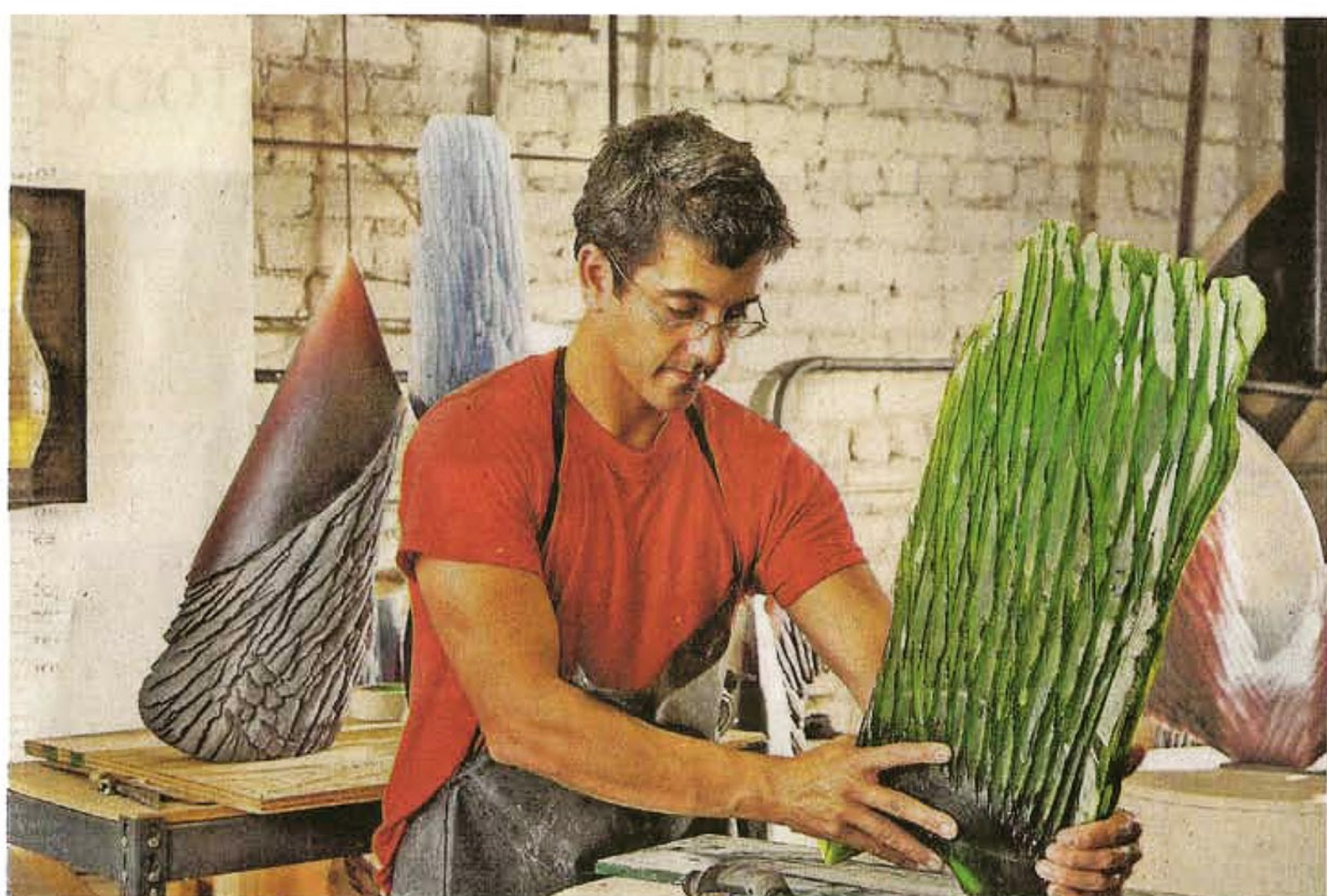
TRAVEL

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QUICK TRIPS

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ASHEVILLE CVB PHOTOS

LOCAL CONNECTION: Work by Miami artist Jonas Gerard, whose bright paintings and tiles appear in collections including the Bass Museum in Miami Beach and the Museum of Art Fort Lauderdale, is available at his gallery in the River Arts District. At right, colorful glass sculptures are available at the Alex Bernstein Studio in the River Arts District.

NORTH CAROLINA

Look what they're cookin' up in Asheville

The downtown River Arts District is lined with antique shops, funky boutiques, gourmet restaurants and art galleries.

BY JANE WOOLDRIDGE
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ASHEVILLE, N.C. — The neighborhood has that wrong-side-of-the-tracks feel about it, and sure enough, the railroad runs right through the middle and sometimes backs up traffic. Great hulking warehouses look slightly shabby; from a distance, the barbecue joint across the narrow road looks like ptomaine central.

But appearances are deceiving. The ramshackle warehouses and factories comprise Asheville's up-and-coming River Arts District, and the 'cue shack is the famous 12 Bones Smokehouse that earned top honors in *Good Morning America's* "Best Bites" competition last fall.

It's not that the arts are a new thing in this edgy mountain city. Since early railroad days, Asheville has drawn people with wealth, talent and style.

In the 1890s, George W. Vanderbilt purchased 125,000 acres and built his palatial Biltmore Estate here. In the 1900s, the great Art Deco architects created an extraordinary collection of flashy Art Deco buildings. In the 1930s, F. Scott Fitzgerald used the clubby Grove Park Inn as his base. For decades, the area has been known for its crafts; the Southern Highland Craft Guild's Folk Art Center is just outside of town, on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

ARTS DISTRICT

Still, Asheville isn't too cute — at least not yet — and the burgeoning River Arts District helps keeps things that way.

Eileen Black, a potter who moved here from Greensboro, N.C., is president of the area's association. In her five years in town, the district has grown from 30 artists to about 85 — people like Genie Maples, who moved here from Atlanta with her teens two years ago, and Laurie McCarriar, a photographer who moved here two years ago from Northern Virginia.

Says Black, "You get the young hippies and the old hippies." Her husband Marty, a former electronics engineer sporting a *Need a little pot?* T-shirt, has joined her in the pottery business.

"It's hard to find us, that's one of our biggest challenges," she says. The group sponsors two annual Studio Strolls, in June and November. Most studios are open to the public on weekends, and even on a Monday, you'll find a few busily working at their



JANE WOOLDRIDGE/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

COME 'N' GET IT: The 12 Bones Smokehouse's signature slow-smoked ribs come with a variety of sauces.

But the hard times that hit much of America after the 1929 stock market crash lingered here, and it's only in the past 10-15 years that the downtown has filled with antique shops, funky boutiques, gourmet restaurants and a dozen galleries show-

casing contemporary painting, glass, pottery, quilts and jewelry. Though a surprising number of homeless hang out on the streets, in summer they're pushed aside by bustling cafés and outdoor performances like the weekly summer drumming circle.

NEW RESTAURANTS

In recent years, the district has spruced up and two restaurants have opened. The Clingman Café — which serves gourmet coffee, biscuits and sandwiches — serves breakfast and lunch six days a week. On the other side of the tracks, in a former diner, 12 Bones dishes up chicken, sliced brisket, pulled pork and its signature slow-smoked ribs — full or half rack — that patrons smother in sauces flavored with blueberry chipotle, horseradish, strawberry and rhubarb, chili and ginger, mango and jalpeño, or mocha, stout beer and cherries.

Be warned: It's only open weekdays at lunch. And despite its humble appearance, the line is always out the door.

craft or packing up orders for shipment. Many of the buildings are artist-owned, says Black — meaning they won't be chased out by high rents as the district becomes more popular.

Raising the profile is former Miami artist Jonas Gerard, whose bright paintings and tiles appear in collections including the Bass Museum in Miami Beach and the Museum of Art Fort Lauderdale, and the private holdings of Miami collector Marty Margulies and the late President Gerald Ford. Gerard moved here just over a year ago, taking over 5,000-square-foot of a furniture factory-turned-storage warehouse-turned-clay-making shop.

"It was time for me to move on, to make a fresh start," said Gerard, who wanted to be in the mid-Atlantic.

"We drove in and saw the art galleries, the cafés, the hippies, the drumming circle on Friday night. I didn't see any Victoria's Secret or McDonalds. It was a nice homey feeling. Everyone seemed to be grooving."

VISITING ASHEVILLE

• **Getting there:** Asheville has its own airport but flights from South Florida tend to be expensive. It's often cheaper to fly to Charlotte or Greensboro and rent a car; the drive takes about two hours.

WHERE TO STAY

• **Grove Park Inn:** This historic "parkitecture" style resort a few miles from the town center offers a soaring lobby with grand fireplace, golf, good restaurants and a spa. From \$345 in summer, \$305 in winter; see website for promotions. www.groveparkinn.com; 800-438-5800.

• **Black Walnut Inn:** Asheville features a number of B&Bs; this is one of the best known, with a fine restaurant, luxury rooms and downtown location. From \$175. 800-381-3878; www.blackwalnut.com.

• **Inn on Biltmore Estate:** Luxury lodging on the historic Biltmore Estate. Special summer packages include a third-night free promotion on specified dates. Rates from \$189 in winter, \$289 in summer. 800-411-3812; www.biltmore.com.

• **Haywood Park Hotel:** The best choice in the cozy downtown, this all-suite hotel is short on character but offers spacious rooms and an outstanding location. From \$189 winter; \$249 in summer. 800-228-2522; www.haywoodpark.com.

WHERE TO EAT

Asheville has become a gourmet mecca specializing in local cuisine. For info on local farms, beers, wines and markets, see www.foodtopiansociety.com.

A few dining recommendations:

• **Early Girl Eatery:** The place for casual but yummy Southern dining, with breakfast or lunch Monday-Friday; with dinner Tuesday-Saturday and brunch on

weekends. Breakfast and lunch under \$10; dinner entrees under \$16. Downtown. 828-259-9292.

• **12 Bones:** If you're a barbecue fan, don't miss this spare lunch spot. Open 11-4 p.m. weekdays; go early or late to avoid the lines. Barbecue with two sides runs \$5-18; sandwiches with sides from \$4. River Arts District. 828-253-4499; www.12bones.com.

• **Marketplace Restaurant:** This has long been considered one of the city's best, featuring creative cuisine fashioned from local ingredients, with the casual Bar 100 (snacks and mains under \$16) and dinner in the main restaurant, entrees \$26-\$36. Downtown. 828-252-4162; [//marketplace-restaurant.com](http://marketplace-restaurant.com).

ART

• **River Arts District:** www.riverdistrictartists.com. The next Studio Stroll is Nov. 8-9.

• **Downtown galleries:** Two dozen galleries dot central downtown; most are closed on Monday. Next Art Walk is slated for Oct. 3; www.ashevilledowntowngalleries.org.

ASHEVILLE ART MUSEUM

In downtown; closed Monday. 828-253-3227; www.ashevilleart.org.

FOLK ART CENTER

of the Southern Highland Craft Guild; Milepost 382 on the Blue Ridge Parkway, at Asheville; open daily. 828-298-7928; www.craftguild.org.

MORE TO DO

• **Biltmore Estate:** If you've never visited the expansive estate and gardens, don't miss it. Facilities now include a winery, hotel, equestrian center and restaurants. www.biltmore.com; 800-411-3812.

BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS

Drive the Parkway built by the WPA, go rafting or hike.

INFORMATION

• www.exploreasheville.com.



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