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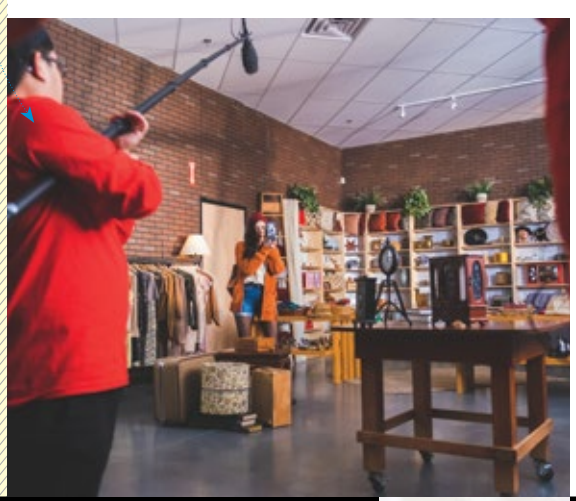

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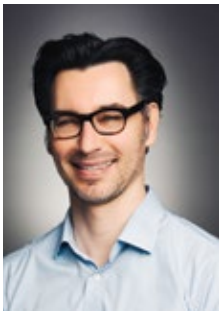
Editor's Note

YOU'RE TRIPPING

The idea for this month's feature, "Amazing Arizona," came out of this random effulgence of enthusiasm — at once singular and choral — from *Desert Companion* writers at one of our coffee-splashed, bagel-fueled story pitch roundtables. Matt Jacob was raving about wonders glimpsed during some recent seasonal trips to Sedona; Erin Ryan was going on and on about mixology in Prescott; and others chimed in about other sights and sites in the pretty purple desert to our right. Meanwhile, Greg Thilmont was readying to embark on a check-in trip to bright, burgeoning Phoenix. And veteran travel guidebook author Richard Quinn was at the ready with a sampling of the countless Arizona backroad curiosities that are practically engraved on his brain.



Heck, the feature pitched, assigned, and wrote itself. I offer this peek behind the curtain not just because it reflects an Instagram snap of the happy, emergent magic of magazine-making, but also because its animating spirit aligns so perfectly with that of the road trip itself: Sometimes, you just have to put your foot on the gas and drive — and trust you'll get somewhere interesting.

Andrew Kiraly
EDITOR

NEXT MONTH Get an eyeful of our 2019 "Focus on Nevada" photo contest winners.

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Desert Companion is published 12 times a year by Nevada Public Radio, 1289 S. Torrey Pines Dr., Las Vegas, NV 89146. It is available by subscription at desertcompanion.vegas, or as part of Nevada Public Radio membership. It is also distributed free at select locations in the Las Vegas Valley.

All photos, artwork and ad designs printed are the sole property of Desert Companion and may not be duplicated or reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. The views of Desert Companion contributing writers are not necessarily the views of Desert Companion or Nevada Public Radio.

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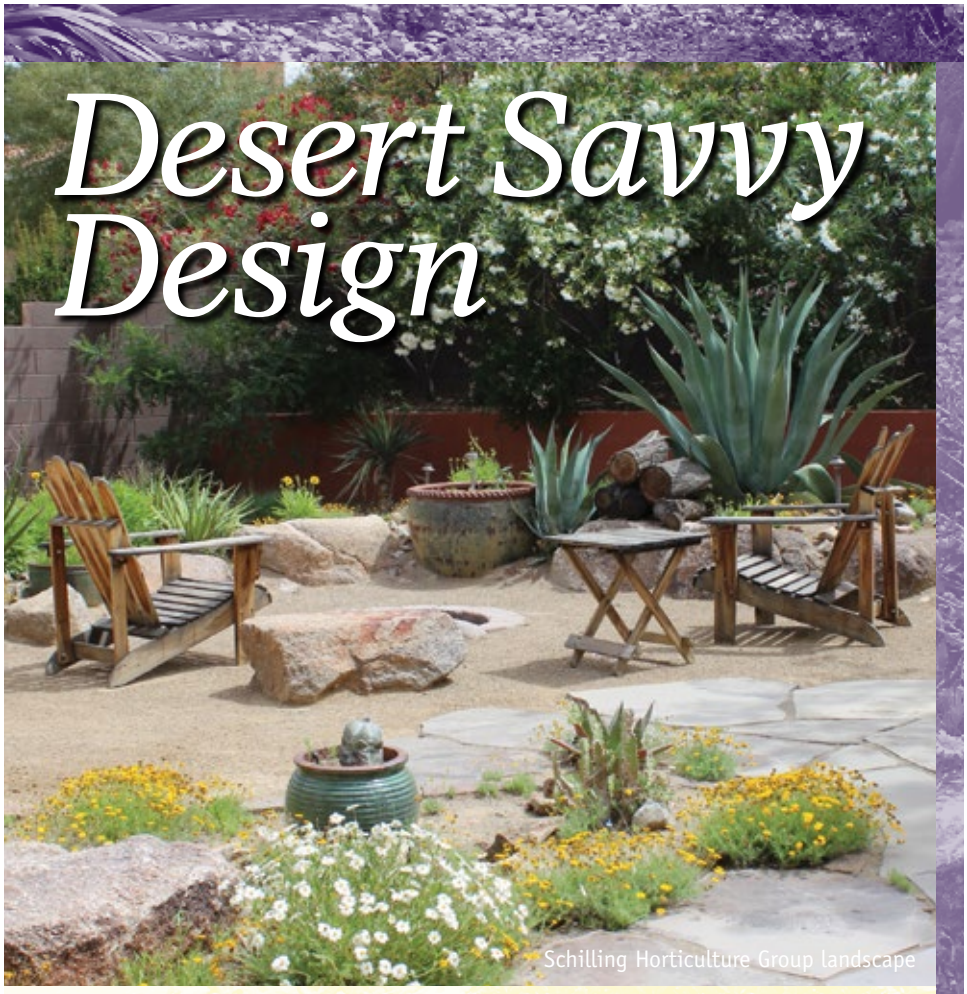

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ALL IN

8 PEOPLE, ISSUES, OBJECTS, EVENTS, IDEAS, AND CURIOSITIES YOU SHOULD BE AWARE OF THIS MONTH



ONE | Q&A

Back in a Big Way

Las Vegas native Heather Harmon comes home to lead the massive Symphony Park art museum project

BY ***Kristen Peterson***

When the Nevada Museum of Art, in Reno, appointed Heather Harmon as deputy director overseeing its Las Vegas museum effort — a $250 million project in Symphony Park being built from scratch — it seemed to thoroughly grasp the uniqueness of the city. In selecting Harmon, then the development director for the distinguished nonprofit Artists Space in New York, it chose a native Las Vegan who attended public school here, whose family has lived here for a century and served in politics, and who didn't grow up with art. So when she discusses art and its ability to transform, and, most of all, its potential to be accessible to everyone, she speaks from experience. Culturally bilingual — as fluent in Las Vegas as she is in the art world — she brings to her new role a distinct perspective on the city, as well as on the common disconnect between art and those who've never approached it or felt it relevant to their lives.

PHOTOGRAPHY ***Christopher Smith***

Harmon was two years into her political science major at UNLV when she had her first real exposure to contemporary art, in a class taught by then professor Dave Hickey. Before long, she knew she'd be changing her major. She graduated in 2001 with a degree in art history, then earned her master's in art theory and criticism at Art Center College of Design in California.

She arrives as the museum is forming an architecture committee in anticipation of selecting an architect by the end of the year, expanding its board, and meeting with potential donors for a $12 million single-donor naming opportunity. The clock is ticking, too: The museum has an October deadline to raise the funds necessary to unlock a grant of land and money from the city of Las Vegas.

We sat down with Harmon as she resettled into a hometown that has culturally changed in her 17-year absence, with the arrivals of The Smith Center, the Black Mountain Institute and Believer Festival, art-filled hotels, the Neon and Mob museums, and Golden Knights fever.

How would you define this experience?
I consider it to be an exciting institutional opportunity of the 21st century. We don't have to follow a predetermined set of rules. We're a town that was built by frontiersmen, adventurers, pioneers with true vision who could look at this city in the desert and visualize what it could become.

Las Vegas has a unique audience for art. Some have never paid attention to it. Others find the art world pretentious. What do you say to that?
We have this amazing opportunity right now to demystify that, to take away all those barriers, because when people fall in love with art, it's when they have that experiential moment, what I like to refer to as that "aha moment," where you look at it and you think, "I'm there, I get it. I see me. I'm reflected, my values, my ideas, things I think about no matter how they might relate to my identity politics, my social politics."

How do you do this?
You find common ground, and you listen. As I move forward in conversations with politicians, with patrons, with students, I think, What does the community want? What institution would the community want, and how do we build an institution that reflects us, that is our mirror? This should be ours.

(Q&A has been edited for length and clarity.)

How sincere is this effort?
We have a great moment here in letting our community dictate what kind of institution would serve them best, and how we can best represent them. And, also, in taking apart that hierarchy and letting people know, "It's okay to like art." It's not classicist. It's not hierarchical. It's actually one of the most direct experiences you can have with an object or an idea.

Maybe you look at a work of art and maybe it's an artist like Kara Walker, who deals with the dark underbelly of what our American history is, be it oppression, be it gender marginalization, be it ethnic marginalization — no matter how different our demographics are, there are things that we share in the human struggle, and we should be able to open up those conversations because art ultimately teaches tolerance. A great work of art can cross economic boundaries, cultural boundaries, social boundaries, and people who don't share anything in common can share this art.

You've heard the concerns from Ward 5 regarding diversity in museum board members, employment, and educational opportunities?
Yes. I'd like to do a listening tour of Ward 5. We'll be a true success if, when we open our doors, our community will see themselves reflected in the institution. We won't be doing what we are responsible to do if we can't hit all of the different demographics that make up Las Vegas and give people point of entry.

KERLIN: CHRISTOPHER SMITH



WALLS COULD TALK
Barrick Museum director Alisha Kerlin with an untitled work by Justin Favela

Why a single donor for the $12 million?
Having a single donor allows for that heroic gesture that can set the tone for future donation. And it is a naming opportunity, and in the scale of naming opportunities for public institutions, a $12 million naming opportunity is really rare.

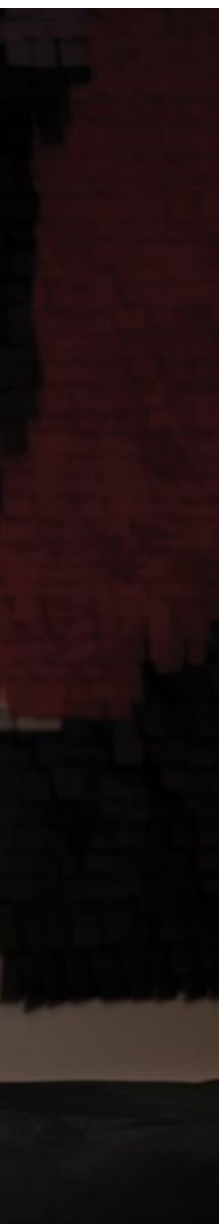
What type of architect are you looking at?
We're looking at architects who haven't fully been canonized. We like the idea of doing an artist who hasn't yet won the Pritzker Prize. Maybe it's not the first project in the architect's career, but it's definitely going to be the most defining one.

This museum has been a long time coming. Why now?
It's the first time we've had an institution (the Nevada Museum of Art) that's been open for 86 years join us and provide this incredible infrastructure, this dialogue, this visionary type of thinking — the Center for Art + Environment, the conference that we do every two years. We have a real family we can grow through these partnerships.

The Smith Center set the precedent. Even though Nevada Ballet has been with us for more than three decades, them having a home there, and the Las Vegas Philharmonic, you're in a place where there is a collaborative spirit. Every person running those institutions is dynamic and knows, too, that our audience, to sustain us now, and our audience to take us into the future, is local. They're our people. That's our core audience. So we get to grow together.

Are you surprised to be back here?
I have wanted to come home for a long time, and it was just about the right time and the right project. There are days when I just drive out to *Double Negative* (a land-art piece by Michael Heizer near Moapa). It's one of my favorite works of art, and I've been driving out there for I don't know how long. I love the West. It's in your blood. You don't get away from it. ✦

Hear More To listen to Heather Harmon interviewed on KNPR's "State of Nevada," search her name at *knpr.org*



TWO | **ASKED AND ANSWERED**

A Bit of Everything

Barrick Museum director Alisha Kerlin on the life and future of the city's only existing art museum

Both as an artist and as the newly permanent executive director of the Barrick Museum of Art, Alisha Kerlin has been fixated on the moment of viewership: the thoughts and feelings you have when first viewing a piece of art. That's a big upside of her job directing Las Vegas' only existing art museum. "It's such a privilege to do that," she says. "I love that we've created a welcoming and safe place for dialogue here."

How did the time you spent studying and creating art prepare you for your current role?
My background as an artist gives me some insight between the artists and the museum staff. When an artist is, say, obsessing over a word in the press release, as an artist I understand why that's important. When something is confusing with a contract or you're fighting for your rights, for example, that's important to me. I strive to pay artists, because I know how long it takes to make something. I'm sensitive to what it takes to make art and show it. When you put your art into a space, you have to let go, and that loss of control is sometimes fraught.

What does a typical day at the Barrick look like?
We're very busy, so a day is a ton of creative energy. We might have 40 students come in on a bus in the morning. We're making new projects, meetings are happening, talking about future collaborations both on and off campus. We might have a 13-hour day because in the evening, we might have a poetry reading, or a University Forum (lecture), or a workshop, or a tour with a curator. It's an active, active place. We all (my staff) do a little bit of everything. The same people who are writing grants or booking facility rentals or working with interns are hanging the shows, packing the artwork for shipping out, doing lighting, customer service, and public speaking. To work in an art museum means you have to be skilled in a lot of things. It's not boring.

What are some of your goals moving forward?
Well, accreditation with the American Alliance of Museums. And in order to be accredited, you have to strengthen your infrastructure and your policies. This museum has gone through a lot of transitions. We changed the name when I was interim director and added "of Art" to it. It was a natural history museum before that. We're gonna strengthen those policies and go up for accreditation. I also want to strengthen our commitment to inclusion and diversity. I want to continue to bring shows that link us to a national and international art world conversation. I want to continue with a lot of what we're doing for students and being a creative nexus for collaboration.

Are there any recent installations at the Barrick that you've found particularly inspiring?
Andrew Schoultz painted from the floor to the top of the walls. He covered the entire museum with paint, and I've never thought of the space that way. The walls of a museum are white; it's a white cube, it's a ritual space, and to paint on top of it is a *statement*. So I felt like I broke some rules there. ***Summer Thomad***

THREE | **FIELD NOTES**

Mammoth Achievement

For the Tule Springs fossil park, and its striking public art, we have persistent women to thank

BY ***John M. Glionna***

It began three years ago as a teenager's crude sketch of what she called the Monumental Mammoth, which she envisioned as a gatekeeper to the Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument, the trove of prehistoric remains in North Las Vegas. "I had this idea," says Tahoe Mack, now 18, "wouldn't it be cool to create a sculpture that looked to the past, but included the trash that people picked up to make this all happen?"

Now, sitting in an industrial steelyard just west of the Strip on a recent spring morning, the sculpture stands half-built but definitely mammoth — at 24 feet long and 6,000 pounds, it clearly evokes the Ice Age *Mammuthus columbi*. A group of politicians, activists, and well-wishers is on hand to celebrate the piece, meet the San Francisco-based artist, Dana Albany, and give props to Mack.

Then 15, she was looking for an idea for a Girl Scout Gold Award project when she attended a presentation given by Tule Springs activist and former scout leader Sherri Grotheer. Grotheer spoke emotionally about the local site containing thousands of fossils dating back 300,000 years.

By an act of Congress, the 22,000-acre grounds would soon become Nevada's first national monument, carved out of an ancient, windswept expanse that for years had served as an industrial dumping ground for nearby cities. "The fact that all of these Ice Age fossils that are in our own backyard never came up in school just astounded me," Mack says. Wanting to get involved, she sketched out a crude rendering of a mammoth, its skin composed of repurposed metal discarded at from the site.

As much as it's about fossils and statuary, this is really a story about passion, persistence, and female mentorship.

"This is a great example of older women inspiring a girl who is influencing the next generation of girls," Grotheer, a board member of the grassroots group Protectors of Tule Springs, tells the gathering, her voice breaking with emotion.

The story starts with five women, all residents of Sun City Aliante, a retirement community in North Las Vegas, who in



PHOTOGRAPHY ***Mikayla Whitmore***

2006 attended a meeting sponsored by the BLM. Officials were seeking public input on a plan to sell off for development a site that contained hundreds of thousands of precious Ice Age fossils.

"A voice inside me said 'This is just ridiculous,'" says Jill DeStefano, a special education teacher. "I mean, you can't build on everything."

The women, ranging in age from early 50s to late 70s, launched a campaign to convince the public and decision-makers that the land should be preserved as a park — a priceless aid to teach visitors and schoolchildren about the area's distant past. They circulated fliers and walked neighborhoods, attended night planning meetings, lobbied politicians with calls and letters and office visits. They consulted experts, stood out in the summer sun gathering 10,000 petition signatures to convince then-U.S. Sen. Harry Reid that the movement had real public support.

Time and again, the women faced off against developers and other monied interests who dismissed their cause and wrote off their zeal to preserve the area. The women were particularly irked that the land had already been earmarked for private interests, with the proposed streets already mapped out and named.



"One lobbyist told me to my face to just go home and play some bridge, because they were going to build all over that land," DeStefano says. "I told him that I didn't play bridge, and that we weren't about to let that happen."

Group member Sandy Croteau recalls another lobbyist icily imploring: "Can't you ladies find another corner of the Mojave Desert to save?'

The women organized teams to remove trash from the site, hauling off more than 400 tons of car engines, doors, a jacuzzi, washers, and miscellaneous metal, much of it dumped there during the area's early 2000's building boom. There were so many discarded mattresses the women began using the term "desert bordello."

Grotheer got involved in the movement in 2009. On one hand, she used her experience working for a local law firm to help the group establish nonprofit status

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EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

and liaison with congressional staff. But she also got involved as a site steward, doing occasional patrols to guard against vandalism and venturing out after rainstorms to scout out new emerging fossils.

She also assisted on a few digs. "Most everything that I've done in life has been on some kind of deadline — people saying 'Hurry! Hurry!'" she says. "Then, there I was lying on my side with a brush in the desert, helping to excavate a prehistoric rib bone, having a scientist tell me to go slower, that slower was better. There was just the wonder of watching this mammoth bone emerge. I was hooked. At that point, I would have done anything to preserve those fossils."

The national monument was established in 2014, nearly a decade after the five women began their crusade. President Obama's signing of the bill to create the new monument amazed even the original five activists. Says DeStefano, "Five old ladies got a bill through the United States Congress and Senate, and signed by President Obama as a law."

In 2015, Grotheer gave the presentation that inspired 15-year-old Tahoe Mack. Eventually, Mack reached out to artists to help bring her vision to reality. One was Dana Albany, a San Francisco sculptor and Burning Man contributor who has become famous for creating public art from recycled or discarded materials.

On the morning of the sculpture's unveiling, Albany is buffing the mammoth's metal toenails as dignitaries cluster around. She has spent months tutoring Mack and other activists on how to weld the recycled metal. (Grotheer also contributed a spoon and salt shaker from her mother's collection of sterling silver. "I just wanted a piece of my mother in that mammoth.")

"It's just so beautiful to be approached by a young girl who wanted to build a monumental mammoth out of recycled materials but who didn't know how to weld," Albany says. "How could you say no?"

Neither the sculpture nor the park are finished, and activists continue to fundraise, but this spring ceremony is a step toward a young girl's dream of seeing her Monumental Mammoth perched outside the gate of the new natural history attraction.

Before that, the sculpture will visit this summer's Burning Man Festival. Mack and some of the older activists have been invited to attend. Asked if she was ready for such hedonism, Grotheer quips: "Oh, honey, I grew up in the '70s. I've already seen it all." ✦

4 TIPS FOR WORLD NAKED GARDENING DAY, MAY 4



1. Careful with the pruning shears!



2. Don't confuse your mulch for your sunscreen



3. Maybe plant the cactus some other day

ILLUSTRATION *Lo Wall*

FIVE | **BIG BREAK**

Wishing Big

Two UNLV film students make the finals of a national film competition

BY ***Heidi Kyser***

Those Coca-Cola-themed trailers that play before a movie starts at Regal theaters may look like mere commercials. But to someone at the beginning of her filmmaking career, the chance to write, direct, and produce such a 30-second spot is priceless, because it comes with training by seasoned industry professionals.

"We went to an orientation, and I was sitting there thinking, 'Am I in the right place? Did they pick the right student?'" That's UNLV senior Nicolle Peterson describing how she felt in December at the Los Angeles studios of eFilm, one of the sponsors of a student film competition that Peterson won, along with her collaborator Lily Campisi, a junior. "Listening to the other filmmakers talk about the stuff they'd done, I was sitting there thinking, 'I've only done one short that I don't want anyone to see, and you guys are so much more experienced than I am.'"

Despite their relative inexperience, Peterson and Campisi were not in the wrong place. They had indeed placed in the top five — out of more than 600 applicants — of this school year's Coca-Cola Regal Films Competition. As finalists, they got the trip to L.A., along with several months of mentoring in the commercial filmmaking process, from budget and casting, through shooting and postproduction.

Their success is all the more remarkable because UNLV is new to the 20-year-old competition. "This is (the university's) second year participating, their first time having a finalist," says Aviva Kleiner, who runs the Coca-Cola Regal Films program. "We have schools that have participated for many years who've never had a finalist. So UNLV doing it on their second year out is extraordinary."

To improve their odds of winning, Peterson and Campisi submitted 17 scripts. The one that made the cut shows a young hipster girl browsing a thrift store. She happens on a vintage film camera, picks it up, and an equally hip genie pops out, granting her one wish. The girl says she wants to be in her "happy place," and is immediately

FILM: COURTESY UNLV; BASEBALL: CHRISTOPHER SMITH









MAKING A SCENE Student filmmakers Nicolle Peterson, left, and Lily Campisi share a laugh between shoots. Right: outtakes from the production of their Coca-Cola Regal Films Competition project.

transported to a movie theater, where she gets popcorn and a soda, and settles in for a movie next to the genie. He leans close to her and whispers, "This would have been my wish, too."

Campisi says she actually preferred another idea, which included characters turning from black-and-white into color when they get their coke and popcorn, but she understands why the genie idea was more appealing to the judges, now that she's been through the process.

"I don't think playing with color like that is what they would've wanted," she says. "What we have now is more focused on the actual product itself."

This need to balance creativity with client requirements was one of the many things the duo says they learned: the art of collaboration, the importance of peer involvement, the reward of working in a small community that supports its entrepreneurs.

"One of the big moments for me on set was when we were one or two takes in, and I was really nervous about being a first-time director," Peterson says. "I was like, 'I don't know what I'm doing, and everybody knows it.' Then I saw something on the monitor, and the fear went away. I realized we all shared the vision of doing something great, and I'd surrounded myself with people who weren't going to let me fail."

Peterson and Campisi did not take the grand prize, which included a new camera, but their film, *The Big Wish*, will be played at Regal Cinemas around the country starting in May. That and the experience of getting it made, they say, is more than enough of a win. ✦

6



BALLPARK FIGURES Last month, the Las Vegas Aviators — formerly the 51s — debuted in the team's new home field, the Las Vegas Ballpark, located in Summerlin. *Desert Companion* Art Director Christopher Smith was on hand for that first game, training his camera on every aspect of the experience: the players, the game, the crowds, the posh new stadium, the two new mascots (one of which employs a jet pack). We've gathered his images into a slideshow. Visit **desertcompanion.vegas,** click the link to our blog, and let us take you out to the ballgame.





7

I, WITNESS

TAKING FLIGHT

Sure, flight attendants bring you pretzels. They can also save your life.

LAUGHTER AND SQUEALS (and yes, a few excited screams) erupt in this cavernous building on Decatur Boulevard on a recent Tuesday evening. But this isn't a playground or parkour gym. It's a high-tech facility where Allegiant Airlines flight attendant trainees are practicing a plane evacuation. All the giggles aside, airline safety training is serious business; flight attendants are schooled in so much more than passing out bags of pretzels and dispensing pillows. In Allegiant's intensive, five-week course, trainees learn how to stabilize a heart-attack victim, evacuate an aircraft in 90 seconds, defend against physical threats, and more. "They're the first responders of the sky," says Jay Lee, director of in-flight training, standards, and compliance for Allegiant. Allegiant employs 1,200 flight attendants, including the 200 it hired this year. All new hires go through this course; after that, they take an annual refresher.

"It was fun, it was intense!" says trainee Kareena Goodwin after performing the slide-jump drill. But her enthusiasm isn't just from an adrenaline high. Goodwin and her 34 classmates are set to graduate next week and subsequently receive official certification from the FAA.

"I'm just as ready to put out a fire and evacuate an aircraft as I am to pour a Coke," Goodwin says. "We're firefighters, we're doctors, we're nurses, we're babysitters. It's way more than what people think." **Andrew Kiraly**

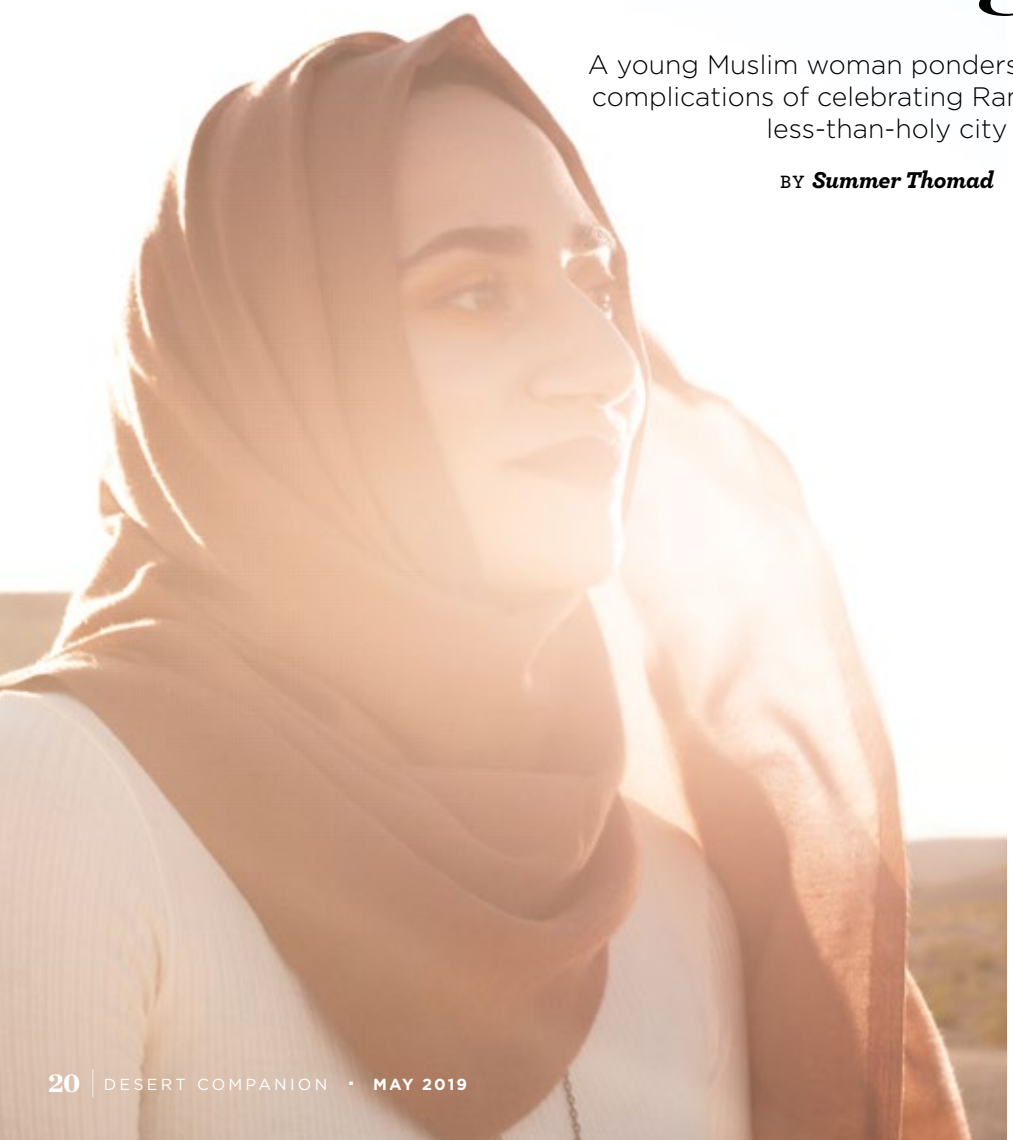
PHOTOGRAPHY ***Christopher Smith***

EIGHT | **OPEN TOPIC**

Heaven or Las Vegas

A young Muslim woman ponders the joys and complications of celebrating Ramadan in this less-than-holy city

BY ***Summer Thomad***



Around 5 a.m., two hours after taking a final sip of water and setting the intention to fast, I lie awake watching the sunlight stream through my bedroom window and try not to notice my sandpapery throat and mouth. I lift myself out of bed and shuffle into the hallway to peer through the windows. Dawn is descending upon the desert outside my house. I'm not a morning person. This is the only time of year I watch the sunrise. A bright orange slowly fills the hazy gray sky. Ignoring my discomfort, I pray, because it's all I can think to do.

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. The month-long holiday is observed by Muslims worldwide to commemorate the first revelation of the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad. Fasting during Ramadan is one of the Five Pillars of Islam — the others are *shahada* (faith), *salah* (prayer), *zakāt* (charity), and *Hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca), all of which are considered mandatory acts that serve as the foundation to Muslim life. From sunrise until sunset, those fasting must refrain from food and water (yes, even water; we're fine, relax), sex, violence, and generally sinful speech and behavior; the practice is one of self-control, accountability, and empathy. Throughout the month, Muslims are encouraged to forgive anyone who has wronged them, and to seek forgiveness from those they have wronged.

Ramadan lasts 29 or 30 days, depending on the visual sighting of the crescent new moon. The Islamic calendar is lunar, which means the month of Ramadan shifts forward about 10 days every year. In my 21 years, I've fasted during winter, fall, and summer. The beginning of May this year will be my first time fasting during the spring, though the 90-degree weather of May in Las Vegas hardly feels like springtime.

To other Muslims, Las Vegas can be seen as a depraved hellscape, diametrically opposed to the Islamic vision of holiness, with all the sins we are meant to abstain from (sex, booze, overindulgence, dishonesty) on bright, glaring display. Still, Las Vegas is not the sinful, wild place of myth. As those of us who were raised here know, there are two versions of this city: the Strip, where one can indulge in excess without consequence and everything exists in a vacuum, and the dark, quiet suburbs.

Here, the selling of sin is ubiquitous and becomes so ordinary that it often goes unnoticed. Driving alongside a taxi or truck or van emblazoned with a mobile billboard reading "GIRLS DIRECT TO YOU" is typical and unvexing. My parents might let out a disapproving "*astaghfirullah*" (an expression of shame or exhortation to seek forgiveness from God), but there would be no further discussion. The culture of this city has never felt antithetical to my family's faith. I love the audacious nature of my hometown, and I also love the values of my faith; I don't believe the two are mutually exclusive.

Of course, as a child, I lived in something of a Muslim bubble. The city didn't endanger our values because it barely impinged on our daily lives. My parents spoke Arabic. Most of my parents' friends were Muslim. We ate halal food. And from kindergarten to seventh grade, I attended a private Islamic school in Henderson, where I was immersed in a small, almost exclusively Muslim community, save for a few non-Muslim teachers and administrators.

During Ramadan, *iftar*, or the meal eaten after breaking fast at sunset, was held every Friday night in my school's gymnasium, which, at the time, was also a makeshift mosque and multipurpose space. While our parents sat inside socializing over food, my friends and I would run around the school reveling in our unsupervised freedom. The older kids would play basketball or Truth or Dare. My best friend, Zaina, and I would sit on the slides, playing make-believe, talking, and kicking up sawdust.

One night, a boy around our age (about

PHOTOGRAPHY ***Lucky Wenzel***

8 years old) whom we didn't know ran up, kicked Zaina, and punched me in the stomach. We got revenge by pushing him down, stealing his shoes, and throwing them into the street outside of the playground. The forgiveness and mercy of Ramadan weren't exactly a priority for us.

❊ ❊ ❊ ❊ ❊

THIS TIME LAST year, I spent the first 10 days of Ramadan in my father's hometown of Baghdad, Iraq. It was the first time I had been to Iraq since I was 3, and also the first Ramadan I spent outside of Las Vegas.

Every night for *iftar*, I broke my fast surrounded by family, with *leben*, a sour, fermented milk drink, and soft dates rolled in sesame. We'd sit outside at a long dining table and dig into a huge meal that my aunts spent the day preparing, then stay up all night, sharing another meal (*suhoor*) before sunrise. Each morning, a group of young men marched in a drum line through the neighborhood to wake up the sleeping neighbors and remind them to eat *suhoor*.

Storefronts were decorated for Ramadan with paper stars and lanterns and crescent moons. In a Dubai mall, I saw a Juicy Couture window display with mannequins wearing hijabs and traditional garments. For the first time, I experienced Ramadan as a true holiday season.

There was an effortlessness and freedom to fasting in Iraq that I had never experienced in Vegas — there were no lunch invitations to decline or explanations to be given or excessive apologies from non-Muslim friends after every sip of water in my presence. All the local businesses kept "Ramadan hours," staying open later at night to accommodate the post-*iftar* crowds, and I spent a good chunk of the daylight hours sleeping and lazing around my aunt's house feeling moderately guilt-free.

Still, celebrating Ramadan in Iraq posed its own set of challenges and was not always easy. I felt a sense of belonging that came from being in a Muslim country during the holy month, but also a sense of isolation — I was in a foreign place where I barely spoke the language. For once, my hijab allowed me to get lost in a crowd, and yet my otherness would reveal itself in my broken, American-accented Arabic. Baghdad's desert climate reminded me of home, but in reality, I couldn't have been farther from it.

❊ ❊ ❊ ❊ ❊

AS I'VE GOTTEN older, the challenge of fasting has become less about physical hunger and more about a hunger for purpose and belonging in a faith that I grew up immersed in, but which now feels complicated for me in ways I still do not fully understand.

As an adult, maintaining one's faith becomes a conscious decision — a choice that requires labor and patience and a reevaluation of self. Gone are the days of wreaking havoc with my Muslim peers outside of the mosque. At 21, the "*haram,*" or forbidden aspects of this city, encroach on my life more than ever, especially during Ramadan. Standing at parties not being able to partake in any of the snacks and wine gets old quickly. It gets harder to make plans with friends, since most social outings involve a meal, and it feels burdensome making people adjust to my post-sunset dinner time. I might skip an outing or event on the Strip or Downtown because it just feels too in proximity to so-called sin, and I can hear my parents *tsk-tsking* in my head. Ramadan is meant to be a time for community, but apart from the rare occasions when I break my fast with Muslim friends, it can begin to feel isolating.

Throughout the year, I am confronted with the ways I fall short in my faith: in my wavering of trust and certainty, and in the way my religious beliefs or practices sometimes feel at odds with my thoughts and actions and how I carry myself in the world. But at no time am I confronted with the challenges of choosing faith in a world that is often at odds with it as I am during Ramadan.

Faith is always tested by the world; fasting while my life in the secular world continues on as usual will always be difficult — as it's meant to be. Whether it's harder to observe Ramadan in Las Vegas than anywhere else is mainly subjective. Certainly, having a world of sin available within arm's reach can be an added difficulty.

Still, Ramadan offers the opportunity to reflect on myself in an honest light and rediscover that sense of religious purpose, whether it's in solitude or within the community of Las Vegas Muslims that raised me. Amid the chaos and shortcomings that life offers throughout the rest of the year, Ramadan brings with it the air of peace, acceptance, gratitude, and communal wellness.

I didn't know if the golden light that filled my house that morning came from heaven or Las Vegas, but I decided it was holy either way. My dry throat aside, I am grateful for the tranquility and renewed focus Ramadan brings to my life, even if just for a moment while watching the sun rise. ✦

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THE 11 ESSENTIAL LAS VEGAS FILMS

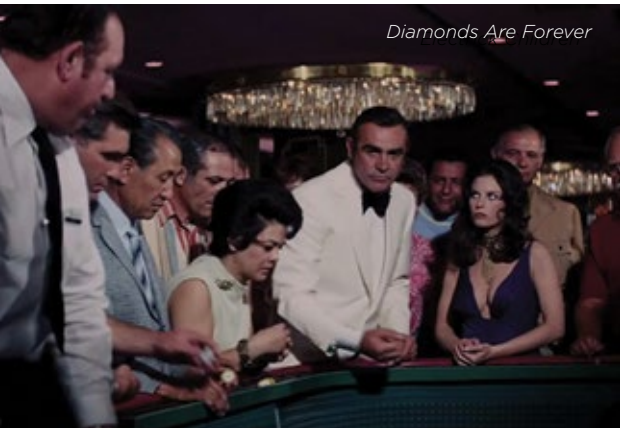
Good, bad, or ugly, they tell essential truths about Vegas

BY ***Josh Bell***

Las Vegas has been appearing in movies since at least the early 1940s, and the town's onscreen image has evolved as the city itself has transformed and expanded. In picking the 10 essential Las Vegas movies, I looked at films primarily set in and/or about Las Vegas, not just movies with one memorable Vegas sequence (which leaves out *Swingers* or the recent *Gloria Bell*). With the Las Vegas Film Festival wrapping up (April 28-May 5, lvff.com), here are iconic Vegas films that, whether great, good, or bad, help paint a vibrant picture of our city on the big screen.

MEET ME IN LAS VEGAS *(1956)*

Cyd Charisse stars as an imperious ballerina performing at the Sands in this charming MGM musical, which combines plenty of Vegas atmosphere with old-fashioned Hollywood song-and-dance numbers. The sleepy plot provides lots of time for musical showcases, including some stunning


Diamonds Are Forever

wfootwork from Charisse, and the movie effectively sells both Vegas glamour (dig those gorgeous outfits) and the Vegas showbiz work ethic.

VIVA LAS VEGAS *(1964)*

The title song of this Elvis Presley musical has had a more lasting impact than the movie it came from, but *Viva Las Vegas* remains a defining onscreen moment for Vegas, establishing so many of the persistent, indelible elements of the city's image. Presley isn't much of an actor, and the story is pretty undercooked, but there's infectious fun in the musical set pieces, and a giddy enthusiasm for everything Vegas that still does wonders for the city.

DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER *(1971)*

Often cited as one of the worst James Bond movies, *Diamonds Are Forever* is not exactly a great showcase for the iconic secret agent. But it *is* a great showcase for Las Vegas, which shines in all its gaudy, neon-drenched 1970s glory. The eight featured Vegas hotels are as much the stars of the movie as Sean Connery, especially the International (now the Westgate), turned into the fictional Whyte House, run by the movie's campy Howard Hughes analogue.

SHOWGIRLS *(1995)*

Is *Showgirls* one of the worst movies ever made? Is it so bad it's good, or is it actually secretly brilliant? Paul Verhoeven's stripper saga is all of those things and more — but the movie is never not entertaining. Joe Eszterhas' screenplay is full of quotably ridiculous dialogue, and the performances are perversely dedicated, especially Elizabeth Berkley in the role that both defined and essentially ended her career. *Showgirls* presents Las Vegas as a corrupt cesspool, but also as a place where people with genuine artistic ambitions come to make it big. In its strange way, it's a tribute to the town's own ruthless ambitions.

CASINO *(1995)*

While it's often overshadowed by director Martin Scorsese's previous collaboration with crime writer Nicholas Pileggi, 1990's *Goodfellas*, *Casino* is every bit the masterful crime epic its predecessor is, another complex examination of loyalty and betrayal among gangsters, in this case the criminal organization that unofficially ran multiple Las Vegas casinos in the 1970s and early '80s. Robert De Niro gives possibly his last great performance as Lefty Rosenthal stand-in Sam "Ace" Rothstein, and Joe Pesci is delightfully unhinged as Rothstein's best friend and worst enemy Nicky Santoro.

FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS *(1998)*

Terry Gilliam's adaptation of Hunter S. Thompson's seminal novel captures the kaleidoscopic nightmare experienced by Thompson stand-in Raoul Duke (Johnny Depp) and his lawyer/accomplice Dr. Gonzo (Benicio del Toro) as they navigate the garish horrors they perceive in the Vegas of 1971. Using Vegas as a stand-in for America's worst excesses may have become a cliché, but *Fear and Loathing* embraces its inherent contradictions, allowing its self-destructive characters to take advantage of depravity while also recoiling from it in horror.

OCEAN'S ELEVEN *(2001)*
OCEAN'S THIRTEEN *(2007)*

The bookends of Steven Soderbergh's *Ocean's* trilogy make Las Vegas look almost impossibly cool, a high-end playground for the crew of suave thieves led by George Clooney's Danny Ocean. Far superior to its Rat Pack source material, Soderbergh's *Ocean's Eleven* is a lively, funny, and massively entertaining heist movie bursting with great performances. *Ocean's Thirteen* is even more of a love letter to Vegas, made when construction on the Strip was booming and new megaresorts seemed to open every other month.

THE HANGOVER *(2009)*

Todd Phillips' raunchy comedy has come to define the hedonistic image of modern Las Vegas as the place where people are free to indulge their darkest desires. The story of three friends trying to piece together their harrowing bachelor party night is still consistently funny, with justifiably star-making performances from Bradley Cooper, Ed Helms, and Zach Galifianakis. The movie portrays Vegas as a dangerous adult playground where anything goes, which is equally enticing and terrifying.

ELECTRICK CHILDREN *(2012)*

Las Vegas native Rebecca Thomas makes the city into an ethereal promised land in this dreamlike fable about a sheltered Utah teenager (Julia Garner) who runs away from a religious compound to seek out the man she believes impregnated her via a holy cassette tape. Garner is fantastic as the open, tender Rachel, who views every new place she visits with wide-eyed wonder. Thomas finds that wonder away from the Strip, in places like Downtown's Artifice and the Alamo, and at the suburban Desert Breeze Skate Park.

DEALER *(2017)*

A team-up of some of the most talented local filmmakers of the last few years, *Dealer* is an omnibus film made by five directors and/or directing teams (Lundon Boyd, Jeremy Cloe, Mike and Jerry Thompson, Ryan and Cody LeBeouf, Adam Zielinski), tied together by Boyd's character, a hapless casino card dealer who's forced into running errands for a mysterious crime boss. Each segment has its own tone, from surreal to sweet to suspenseful, and each highlights a different side of Vegas. ✦

Notable Omissions

VEGAS VACATION (1997) The worst movie in the *Vacation* series (until the 2015 reboot) puts the Griswold family through a series of painful slapstick set pieces, and makes Vegas look ugly and unappealing.

PAY IT FORWARD (2000) Haley Joel Osment plays a beatific little boy who comes up with the spiritual equivalent of a chain letter, and the, heavy-handed movie treats Vegas like the filth he has to wash from everyone's souls.

LAST VEGAS (2013) Old guys! In Las Vegas! At a nightclub?! The mind reels.

PAUL BLART: MALL COP 2 (2015) Oh, come on.

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CLOTHING ALLOWANCES At left are design sketches by costume designer Mariya Radeva-Nedyalkova for *The Elephant Man*; right, the Red Queen from *Alice (in Wonderland)*.

CULTURE

Material Benefits

A brainy play and a playfully surreal ballet underscore the importance of costume design

BY ***Scott Dickensheets***

Onstage, costumes aren't merely clothing, they're *character*. "Putting costumes on actors doesn't just mean putting garments on them," says Mariya Radeva-Nedyalkova, costume designer for theater company A Public Fit. Everything from broad fabric choices to the way a sleeve is cuffed says something about the character: "Everything has meaning." She's talking specifically about A Public Fit's production of *The Elephant Man*, one of two shows this month — the other is Nevada Ballet Theatre's *Alice (in Wonderland)* — that really highlight the creative impact of theatrical costuming.

For Radeva-Nedyalkova, the process begins with her "crucial" emotional and intellectual response to the initial reading of the play — "Often my first response to the script (helps lead) my design approach" — followed by intensive research into every aspect of the character and setting: period details, social climate, politics, the theme of the play.

For *The Elephant Man*, she settled on a color scheme largely comprising shades of gray, to "emphasize the feeling of limitations" experienced by the main character, Joseph Merrick; she also wants it to set off the faces and hands. This will also focus attention on the choice by director Ann-Marie Pereth to have her lead actor play Merrick without facial prosthetics. The Elephant Man's disfigurements will be communicated by expressions, acting style, and body language. This requires an act of imagination on the part of the audience, which Radeva-Nedyalkova's expressionistic approach — painting directly onto the costumes of actors representing the lower classes, while draping the upper classes in detailed, textured fabrics — plays into, as well. And everything has to be easily functional: The production's seven actors play a total of 18 characters, which means a lot of speedy costume changes.

Lest you think all of this was achieved by mostly reusing clothing from A Public Fit's prop closet, think again. "APF is a young company," she says. The prop closet is understuffed. "Maybe less than 5 percent of the costumes and accessories were available in our storage. Everything else was purchased and modified or built from scratch. This is what you learn in theater: The first lesson is being creative."

In the case of Nevada Ballet's *Alice (in Wonderland)*, the costumes came with the show, both of which were rented from Ballet Met in Ohio. And they're sumptuous, detailed, and over the top, as they need to be to convey the necessary surreal atmosphere — particularly when the characters and narrative unfurl in a wordless medium. "You have to have costumes (and makeup) that represent how people perceive certain characters," says Roy Kaiser, the company's artistic director. (For nonnarrative works, designers have more leeway.) He gives an example from *Alice*: the Red Queen. "You don't like this woman. From the moment you see her, you know she's a mean woman." He credits original costume designer Liz Vandal. "From the moment the curtain goes up, (the production) takes us into a different world," and the costumes are integral to that.

Because of the expense of mounting original or reconceived ballets, rentals are not uncommon, and the costumes and props of shows like *The Nutcracker* tend to have a lifespan of a decade or more. Still, NBT does mount productions of its own that require Wardrobe Manager Christopher Larson to get creative. "I'm drawn to spectacle," he says, but admits that some productions require him to "check my costume-extravagance ego at the door." In the end, it's all about serving the visions of the shows' creators. "Costumes (and sets) are the visuals you rely on to tell the story."

Alice in Wonderland, by Nevada Ballet Theatre, May 3-5, $29-$139, The Smith Center, *nevadaballet.org*

The Elephant Man, by A Public Fit, May 3-26, $25-$30, The Usual Place, 100 S. Maryland Parkway, *apublicfit.org*


NBT
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1

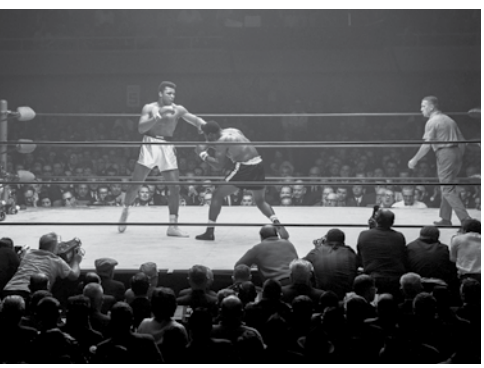
ART

The Vital Center

A new photo exhibit celebrates the Convention Center's glamorous past, even as the facility prepares to leap into the future

The Las Vegas Convention Center, a hulking icon encompassing 3.2 million square feet — the equivalent of 55 football fields — has seen some of the world's most culturally momentous events, including back-to-back performances from The Beatles in 1964. Muhammad Ali beat Floyd Patterson there in 1965 (pictured), and Billy Graham used the venue for evangelical crusades between 1978 and 1980. The famous facility, which turns 60 this year, is celebrating with a photo exhibit running May 1-June 4 at the Clark County Government Center.

"World leaders and a host of U.S. presidents have spoken in its halls," says Las Vegas News Bureau director and show organizer Lisa Jacob. "The exhibit is a timeline of noteworthy events in the history of the Las Vegas Convention Center from 1959 through 2019, illustrating its impact as a gathering place." The center, however, is perhaps best known for hosting mega-conventions like the Consumer Electronics Show and Conexpo-Con/Agg, helping attract 42 million visitors to Southern Nevada in 2018. It's the high-octane fuel powering the valley's tourism engine responsible for 400,000 jobs and $60 billion in annual revenue.



But the Convention Center is also a civic landmark, a visual monolith that shapes and defines the cityscape. "It's arguably one of the most significant structures and destinations in Las Vegas," said Dwayne Eshenbaugh, 2019 president of the Las Vegas chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Indeed, the center is a fascinating microcosm of Las Vegas itself — always evolving, growing, morphing, and reinventing. It's presently undergoing its 14th expansion since 1959, adding 1.4 million square feet, or about the space of the Empire State Building. Convention Center management kicked things off with a national design competition — an audacious move heralding the project's runaway ambitions. The winner, Atlanta-based tvsdesign, in association with Design Las Vegas, beat out some impressive rivals, including starchitect Rafael Viñoly, whose work fills coffee table art books.

Ultimately, the proposal that prevailed understood elemental truths about the Las Vegas psyche and culture. It aims to create a sensory and immersive environment that captures the imagination with a sense of possibilities. More than just eye-candy, the strongly seductive architectural design makes a bold statement as a self-anointed symbol for Las Vegas excitement and dynamism. The center addition, in fact, resembles a Modernist piece of origami crafted from glass and steel with aggressive cantilevers, a pinched roofline and large transparent entryway expanses that let the desert sunlight filter indoors. It will help anchor a "district" upon completion in 2021, forging a seamless experiential lifestyle link between Strip mega-resorts and the Convention Center. The goal is a simultaneous nod to its "history of unique architecture," says convention center chief Steve Hill, while still forming a "strong identity" that complements its surroundings. ***Tony Illia***

(Dance)

CONTEMPORARY WEST DANCE THEATRE

WEST LAS VEGAS LIBRARY

For its spring concert, this high-caliber troupe will debut two new pieces by its founder, Bernard H. Gaddis: "Finn Air" and "The Art of War." Plus other new works. If you're not familiar with this company, there's no better time to get acquainted. **May 24-25, 7:30p; May 26, 1:30p, free, *lvdance.org***

(Art)

EVENT HORIZON

UNLV LOCATION TBA

This event — weaving live music, visual art, and dance into an immersive audience-participation experience dedicated to ideas about wonder and the unexpected — is a two-hour sneak peek of a longer work coordinated by artist Aundrea Frahm, which will be presented in full this fall. But why wait until then? **May 16-17, 4p, free, limited seating so RSVP to *eventhorizons.lv@gmail.com.***

(Theater)

LEGALLY BLONDE

UNLV'S JUDY BAYLEY THEATRE

Our plucky heroine, West Coast sorority gal Elle Woods, takes on Harvard Law in a whirl of bubbly, expectation-defying smarts, colorful L.A. fashion, murder-trial dramedy, and, of course, music, because this is a musical. A Tony-nominated one, at that. About believing in yourself even when haughty Harvard types don't. **May 3-12, various times, $28, *unlv.edu/calendar***



NEON: KEEM IBARRA/UNSPLASH; MARR: COURTESY GRANDSTAND MEDIA; EVENT HORIZON COURTESY AUNDREA FRAHM; FIGHT: LAS VEGAS NEWS BUREAU

THE Hot Seat



(Music)

JOHNNY MARR

BROOKLYN BOWL

You can go see Johnny Marr because you're nostalgic for the Smiths if you want to, but for his part, he'll be focused on songs from his latest album, *Call the Comet*, which is variously a response to the election of Donald Trump, a gesture of hope for a utopian future, and a celebration of art itself: "I had to do something more esoteric, and bohemian, and artistic," he says. But also with guitars. **May 18, 7:30p, $35-$45, *brooklynbowl.com***



(Lecture)

THE UNTOLD HISTORY OF NEON

NEON MUSEUM

Titled "Hidden in Bright Light," this talk by the Neon Museum's scholar in residence, Dydia DeLyser, delves into the early days of this garish noble gas, and its significance in the American landscape. Perhaps surprisingly, despite neon's centrality to the Las Vegas aesthetic, this city was actually a comparative latecomer to its use. DeLyser is a historical-cultural geographer at California State University, Fullerton. **May 9, 7p, free (but tickets required), *neonmuseum.org***

Vegas Arts Roundtable. Culturally inclined Las Vegans gather to chart an improved future for the city's arts scene. **May 13, 6p, Cockroach Theatre in Art Square, go to Facebook, search Vegas Arts Roundtable**

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LIGHT TRAVEL

JUST UP THE ROAD

Staycation experiences abound in Nevada's fourth-largest city

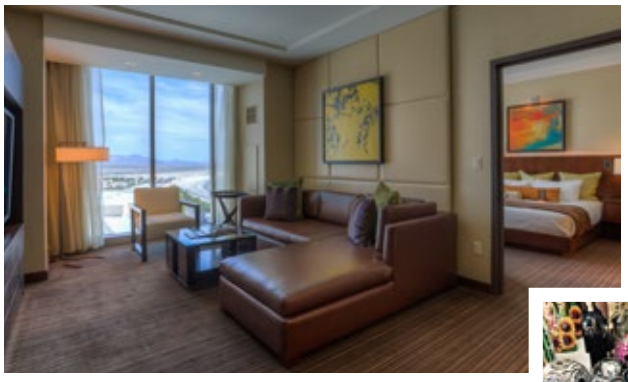
BY ***Greg Thilmont***

May is here, and the balmy Mojave Desert weather is perfect for a weekend staycation in North Las Vegas. Wait, what? That's right, NLV. There's a good chance you think of this city of some 250,000 as a sleepy bedroom community (with a lot of warehouses), but it offers a surprisingly diverse array of experiences. But pulling this off requires you to imagine a weekend that unfolds somewhere south of a splurgy Strip staycation but well north of an ordinary at-home weekend. Being in vacation mode is all the reason you need to visit some local places you've been meaning to but haven't yet. Now's your chance to cascade them into one sweet experience.

STAY

FOR LODGING, ALIANTE **Casino + Hotel + Spa** (7300 Aliante Parkway, 702-692-7777) rises nine stories above the far northerly curve of the 215 Beltway and makes for an attractive, AAA Four Diamond-rated basecamp, whether you're bringing young ones or exploring on your own. The resort's 730-square-foot, smoke-free Ambassador suites feature separate living areas outfitted with clean-lined, contemporary furnishings that convey a Western ambience to match the dramatic views of mountain ranges in the distance. For adults, Re:lax Spa beckons with









THINGS OF THE NORTH Previous page: The pool at Aliante Casino + Hotel + Spa. This page, from upper left: Left of Center Gallery, an Aliante suite, pastry from Jerry's Nugget, ceramic skulls from Broadacres

its menu of treatments, including hot-stone massages and seaweed body wraps. The whole family can converge on the palm-lined pool deck with its sparkling swimming basin, gurgling whirlpool, cabanas, and full-service bar framed above by the hotel's distinctive aquamarine-hued windows.

DO

IN THE MORNING, it's time to head out into North Las Vegas' 101 square miles. After stopping by **Natural Grocers** (6305 Simmons St., 702-395-0642) for organic meats, cheeses, bread, and condiments, head to 170-acre **Craig Ranch Regional Park** (628 W. Craig Road) for a picnic by its glimmering, turtle-filled ponds. Or, if you have little ones, let them roam the lush **Aliante Nature Discovery Park** (2627 Nature Park Drive) and its dinosaur-themed playground. Fossil aficionados will want to gaze out over the badlands of **Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument** (Horse Drive, off North Aliante Parkway); it protects an important paleontological site that's yielded the stony remains of Columbian mammoths, North American camels, and other prehistoric creatures. For two-wheeled jaunts, North Las Vegas has miles upon miles of paved bike paths, including the wending **Lower Las Vegas Wash Trail**. For outdoor wanderings in a wild — albeit man-made — environment, there's nothing quite like the swirling kaleidoscope of **Broadacres Marketplace** (2930 Las Vegas Blvd. N., 702-642-3777) — it's a vast emporium where you can pick out the *lucha libre* mask of your superstar dreams while snacking on a piping-hot quesadilla with a refreshing, icy mango *raspado* on the side. For a more curated gathering of culture, drop in to **Left of Center Gallery** (2207 W. Gowan Road, 702-647-7378), one of the valley's most underappreciated cultural resources.

Feeling more active? Roll for strikes and spares at the vintage **Silver Nugget Casino Bowling Center** (2140 Las Vegas Blvd. N., 702-399-1111) or the immense **Texas Star Lanes** (2101 Texas Star Lane, 702-288-7728); both offer glow-in-the-dark cosmic bowling on Friday and Saturday nights. Skaters can lace up at the **SoBe Ice Arena** (2400 N. Rancho Drive, 702-288-7748). Movie lovers can kick back in cars while watching blockbusters at **West Wind Drive-In** (4150 W. Carey Ave., 702-646-3565). For the cinema of the heavens, science fans can take in mind-expanding, educational presentations like "Journey to a Billion Suns" at the **College of Southern Nevada Planetarium** on Saturdays (3200 E. Cheyenne Ave., 702-651-4000; check ahead to ensure that it's open).

EAT

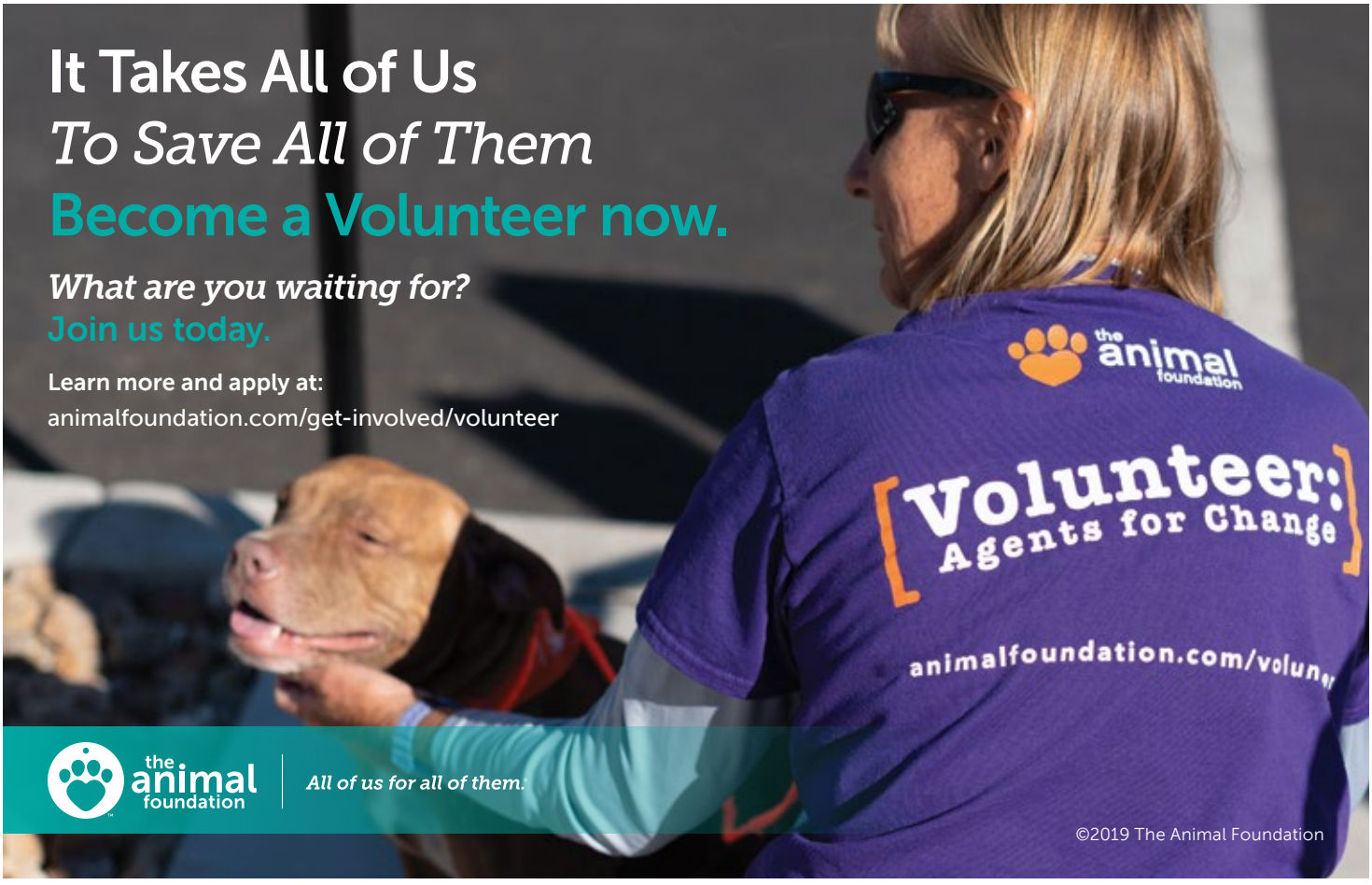
SOME OF THE finest savory pies in the Southwest are baked at **Old School Pizzeria** (2040 E. Craig Road, 702-990-0070), and its sausage-stuffed chicken wings and grilled-rosemary lemonade are must-trys. At vibrant (and frequently loud) **Culichi Town** (2400 N. Rancho Drive, 702-638-5602), feast on zesty, Sinaloa-style sushi and goblet-size cocktails while listening to live mariachi bands. For soul-food sensations, dig into barbecue pork ribs, chicken and waffles, macaroni and cheese, and collard greens at **EllaEm's** (775 W. Craig Road, 702-823-4444). For mom-and-pop Japanese dining, slurp up curry udon noodles topped with pork katsu, shredded cheddar cheese, and corn niblets at quaint **Tokyo Cafe** (2595 E. Craig Road, 702-388-8838). At **Jerry's Famous Coffee Shop** (1821 Las Vegas Blvd. N., 702-399-3000), don't feel guilty if you follow a scratch-made breakfast of eggs Benedict or a Denver omelet with a decadent slice of chocolate fudge cake or a strawberry ring filled with Bavarian cream. Later in the day, chill out with an old-fashioned banana split with cherries and sprinkles at snug **Dylan's Family Ice Cream** (5960 Losee Road, 702-982-6148). Or for an eye-popping experience, stroll past multicolored piñatas as you select south-of-the-border snacks like spicy lollipops and puckery tamarind teaspoons at cheerful **Dulceria la Colmena** (3853 E. Craig Road, 702-644-2388).

There are even more staycation highlights to discover throughout North Las Vegas (the cavalcade of taco trucks on East Lake Mead Boulevard; delicious chicken salads at CNS Barbecue; and plants and mini-planes at Willie McCool Regional Park), and they're all just a short drive away. ✦

LEFT OF CENTER: COURTESY LEFT OF CENTER; ALIANTE: COURTESY ALIANTE; JERRY'S NUGGET: BRENT HOLMES; SKULLS: SCOTT LIEN

SNOW DAZE In a move sure to thrill both avid skiers and global-warming skeptics, California resorts Mammoth Mountain and Squaw Valley — citing big snowfalls — will reportedly stay open into *early July*. Road trip!







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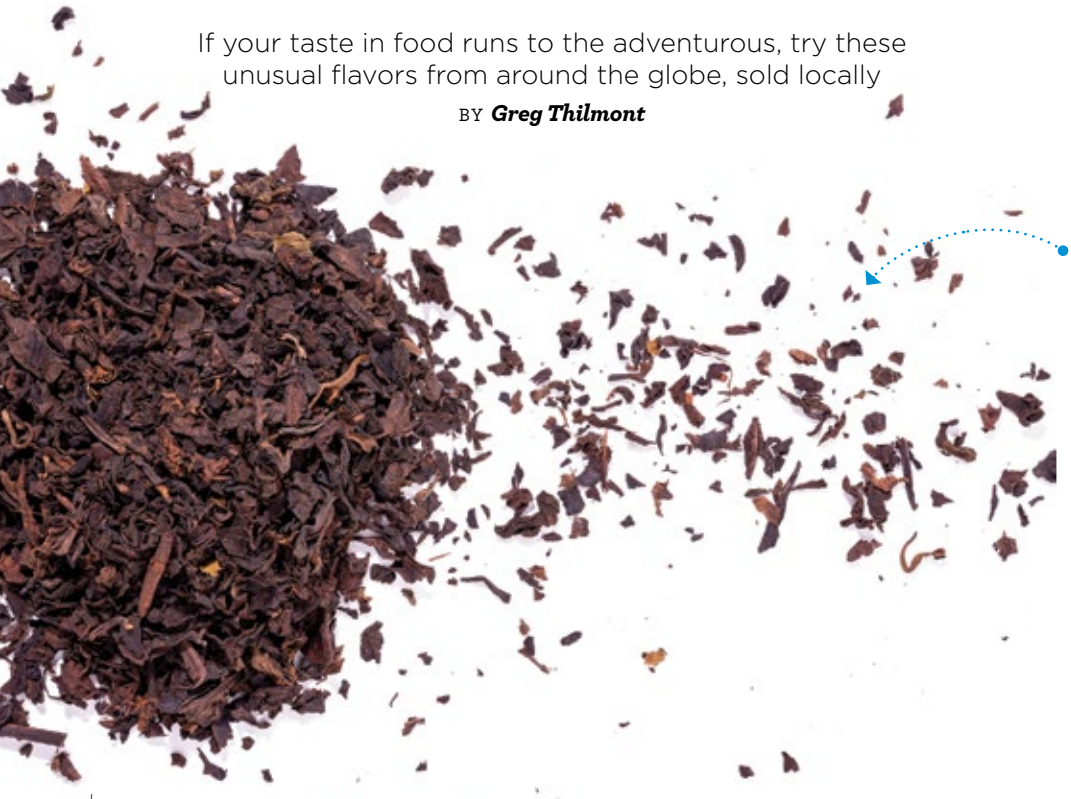
STRANGE TASTES

Champagne Wishes, Corn Smut Dreams

If your taste in food runs to the adventurous, try these unusual flavors from around the globe, sold locally

BY ***Greg Thilmont***



From ancient, earthy traditions like *huitlacoche* to Instagram-worthy trends like purple *ube* ice cream, the Las Vegas Valley offers a cornucopia of niche food and beverages. While some are indisputably delectable, others are what folks politely describe as "acquired tastes." All are interesting, though. Here's a sampling of what's available across town:

UBE, THE PURPLE ONE Ube is a popular ingredient in numerous sweet dishes from India to Taiwan, but it's in the Philippines that it achieves apotheosis in ice cream form. Eye-poppingly lavender-toned scoops are added to halo-halo, the sugary sundaes to end all sundaes. The tropical concoctions feature the yammy frozen treat with a host of toppings like sliced plantains, sweet red beans, jackfruit, coconut jelly, and crisped rice. The best place to try ube halo-halo is at Magnolia Ice Cream & Treats inside Seafood City on Maryland Parkway. (seafoodcity.com)

BASIL-FED SNAILS FROM CENTRAL VALLEY Not all escargot come in cans imported from France. Some snails make a relatively short journey to Las Vegas tables from orchards between Fresno and Bakersfield. There, raised by a mollusk wrangler known as "Mary the Snail Lady," they live out their lives on a diet supplemented by basil leaves. After being dispatched, de-shelled, and pre-cooked, they're bagged in basil-infused water and brought to town by Mikuni Wild Harvest, a gourmet food supplier. The tender, slightly herbal-tasting snails make it onto menus — sometimes doused in white wine and garlic butter — at upscale restaurants like Marché Bacchus in Desert Shores. (*mikuniwildharvest.com*)

SIP ON PU-ERH TEA Visit Tea & Whisk in Henderson to sample a steaming cup of *pu-erh* tea from China's Yunnan Province. This hot beverage starts as hand-picked green tea leaves that are rolled together and allowed to ferment, just like cheese, sauerkraut, or aged sausages. Beneficial microbes oxidize the tea leaves over time, giving them deep, dark, earthy flavor notes that come alive when steeped in hot, pure water. *Pu-erh* tea isn't even in the same galaxy as pale bags of Twinings or Lipton. (10271 S. Eastern Ave. #116, 702-907-6543, *teaandwhisk.com*)

INDIE CHAMPAGNES ARE POPPING An effervescent trend is making its way from France to Southern Nevada: grower-producer Champagnes. Widely known houses like

PHOTOGRAPHY ***Sabin Orr***

Moët & Chandon, Veuve Clicquot, and Tattinger produce fine products, indeed, but they collectively cork bottles at a vast, industrial scale with not much variety in flavors between labels. Many wine connoisseurs are turning to small estates like Goutorbe and Chartogne-Taillet to fill their flute glasses. These leaner operations make Champagnes with more individualized and interesting taste and bouquet profiles — and some say higher quality — than available from the big brands on the block. Visit Henderson's Valley Cheese & Wine to learn more about grower-producers and their sparkling small-batch wares. (1570 W. Horizon Ridge Parkway, #140, 702-341-8191, *valleycheeseandwine.com*)

FUNKY CITRUS FROM THE DOWNTOWN FARMERS MARKET Upgrade your home cooking and drink mixing from prosaic yellow lemons with a panoply of adventurous citrus from the Intuitive Forager's Downtown Farmers Market. The selection changes weekly, but be on the lookout for uncommon varieties like Cara Cara oranges with pinkish, berry-flavored pulp and calamansi limes with sweet rinds and tart interiors. If you're lucky, you might be able to score a carton of finger limes. Originally from Australia, the bush tucker is now grown in the Golden State — squeeze them to extrude juice-filled vesicles. They're called citrus caviar and make for a fantastic garnish. (300 N. Casino Center, Fridays, 9a-2p, facebook.com/IntuitiveForagerFarmersMarkets)





SNACK ON RATTLESNAKE SAUSAGE Are you a culinary daredevil? Evel Pie in the Fremont East Entertainment District serves up slices of Snake River Special pizza, a cheesy creation topped with rattlesnake sausage. Cold-blooded denizens of the underbrush are united with savory herbs and spices and are baked atop a zesty pie that pays tribute to Evel Knievel's attempt to rocket over an Idaho canyon back in the '70s. And nope, rattlesnake sausage doesn't taste like chicken. (508 Fremont St., 702-840-6460, *evelpie.com*)

RABBIT CACCIATORE AT PIZZERIA MONZÚ The delicately flavored game animal is uncommon on restaurant menus, so Pizzeria Monzú is a the place to enjoy a classic hunter's repast full of sweet heirloom tomatoes in a tangy sauce. Rabbits have little bones, so there's more work in store for diners than with most meats, but every scrumptious bite is worth the effort. Call at least 48 hours in advance; the cacciatore is an off-menu special. (6020 W. Flamingo Road #10, 702-749-5959, *monzulv.com*)

GET TINGLY WITH SICHUAN PEPPERCORNS When paging through menus at Sichuan-focused eateries such as Chengdu Taste in Chinatown, you might be perplexed by the evocative and slightly mysterious description of "numb-taste" accompanying dishes like wontons in pepper sauce. It doesn't refer to scorchingly hot chilis, but rather the seed husks of the prickly ash tree, which contain one of the coolest sounding organic chemistry terms in the world: hydroxy-alpha-sanshool. The compound makes nerve receptors in the lips and mouth feel numb, and intensifies the sensation of heat from actual chili peppers, which are abundant in Sichuan cuisine. Find dried Sichuan peppercorns at Ranch 99 Markets to rev up your home cooking. (*99ranch.com*)

BIG-FLAVORED GINS ON THE RISE Go beyond old-school juniper berries with a new breed of artfully flavored gins. Scotland's Botanist brand features embossed, clear bottles filled with the essence of Hebridean meadows. Italy punches hard with Moletto (made with Mediterranean tomatoes) and Malfy con Limone (infused with sushiney citrus). Germany joins in with lingonberry-spiked Monkey 47 distilled in the historic Black Forest. Peruse more notable gins at Total Wine & More. (*totalwine.com*)

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NIBBLE ON A5 WAGYU BEEF For many gourmands, hard-to-find A5 Wagyu beef from Japan is the quintessence of steak. The cattle are raised in strictly natural settings, making for luxurious beef. Richly marbled A5 slices have a supple mouth-feel and are imbued with head-spinning umami flavor notes. The meat comes with a significant price, of course, but a little goes a long way; knifing into a gigantic A5 tomahawk ribeye would be excess. Try a 4-ounce serving at Forte European Tapas Bar & Bistro, where they serve A5 steak and eggs with a caviar garnish. (Call 24 hours in advance.) (4180 S. Rainbow Blvd. #806, 702-220-3876, *barforte.com*)

GET GOING WITH BULLETPROOF COFFEE Bulletproof coffee is fresh-brewed java blended with a heaping pat of creamy butter and a healthy drizzle of MCT coconut oil. A favorite of the athletic keto crowd, it's said to provide physical energy and mental alertness while helping your body burn fat. Sip on your first Bulletproof coffee at the Valley's two Makers & Finders, where they use creamy, upscale Kerrygold Irish butter. (*makerslv.com*)

MIKE'S HOT HONEY Help save the bees with a bottle of Mike's Hot Honey from Murray's Cheese shops inside select Smith's groceries around town. Made in Brooklyn, the condiment brings together sweet New York State wildflower nectar and capsaicin-packed chili peppers. Try it on waffles, with cheese and charcuterie plates, on slow-smoked barbecue ribs, and, of course, pizza. (*mikeshothoney.com*)

GET IN THE HOJA SANTA SPIRIT One of the most enigmatic ingredients found in the Las Vegas Valley is hoja santa, a heart-shaped Central American herb that tastes like a blend of black pepper, anise, nutmeg, mint, tarragon, and even eucalyptus. It's also called the root beer plant, one of many nicknames for the "sacred leaf." It's versatile, and goes well with egg dishes, goat cheese, chicken, fish, and tamales; it can even elevate margaritas. Use the leaves sparingly, as they're pungent and not to everyone's liking. Look for packages of fresh hoja santa in local Latin supermarkets like Cardenas and La Bonita. (*cardenasmarkets.com, bonitamarkets.com*) ✦

REVIEW

DISASSEMBLY REQUIRED

The sophisticated Scandinavian treats at Saga are a delight to behold — and to eat

BY ***Greg Thilmont***

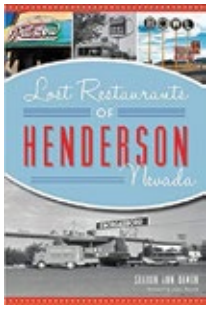




If you enjoy snacking at IKEA after perusing ready-to-assemble furniture sets, think of Saga Pastry + Sandwich as a culinary cousin specializing in elevated Scandinavian cuisine. Located on the corner of a Trader Joe's strip mall, the sunshine-filled local restaurant specializes in open-faced sandwiches, a style of dining popular in Northern Europe.

Saga's menu isn't extensive, but the eatery delivers value with gourmet ingredients, including Arctic cold-water prawns, smoked salmon, and rosemary-roasted ham. These high-quality proteins are piled high on planks of fresh bread — your choice of white or 7-grain — along with toppings like hard-boiled eggs, Jarlsberg cheese, Roma tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, cream cheese, lemon wedges, and mayonnaise. The prawns are particularly exceptional. Caught in the cold, clean, deep waters of the North Atlantic near Iceland, they have a fresh, briny flavor reminiscent of langoustines and feature a pleasing, snappy texture that's noticeably different than what's found in warm-water shrimp. The succulent salmon is fished off the windswept, rugged Faroe Islands north of Scotland and smoke-cured in England.

Can't decide on which open-faced selection to order? The Smorgasbord is loaded with all three proteins and their fixings. It's easily one of the most extraordinary



YOU HAD TO BE (AND EAT) THERE

Hard to imagine a book with a smaller potential audience than this one: ***Lost Restaurants of Henderson, Nevada*** (American Palate, $21.99). But if you're among those who recall the Swanky Club, author Sharon Damon, who's been "eating (her) way through Henderson for more than 12 years," name-checks plenty of memory-tickling joints: Nick's Supper Club! Pac-Out! Sure, she skips the late Cuzlo's Pizza — oh, that *mostaccioli!* — but it's still a fun read ... for the right crowd.

Scott Dickensheets

EAT THIS NOW: **WARM CARROT CAKE**

FAVORITE BISTRO

You wouldn't be wrong to go for dazzle. Instagram begs for glowing ice sculptures filled with exotic sorbets and Boomerang videos of Cointreau tickling Baked Alaska with cerulean flames. Delicious as they are, these theatrical desserts at Favorite Bistro must bow to a humble classic. Executive Pastry Chef Claude Escamilla and his team deconstructed and reimagined what Americans best recognize as a dense brick of sweetness lost in cream-cheese frosting. "Everything together, you feel it is a carrot cake but with a little twist," Escamilla says. ¶ The cream cheese is on the bottom here, transformed into a velvety sauce with milk, coconut, pineapple, and a hint of sugar. Resting in it is a round of transcendently light sponge, the earthy carrot and warm spices infused with a syrup of lemon, orange, and vanilla. Matching the cake in shape and thickness is a crown of gossamer meringue, just barely toasted to deepen the flavors of honey and orange blossom. ¶ Picture biting into a perfect cloud caught in the desert's watercolor sunset and you'll have some idea of how this cake hits. Little twist, indeed. ***Linq Promenade, 702-844-4700, caesars.com*** Erin Ryan



sandwiches in the valley.

Scandinavian cuisine is very dessert-friendly, and Saga offers a lovely collection of treats. Nordic waffles are a favorite, especially with cloudberry jam. The amber-colored fruit is harvested in boreal forests and has a flavor profile that brings together raspberries and red currants, with a hint of apricot and apple perfumes. Or go for a folded Swedish crêpe with fresh strawberries, fragrant slices of *gjetost* (boiled-down, caramelized goat's milk known by some as "ski cheese") or chocolatey Nutella.

Saga's pastries and cakes are gorgeous. Norway's entry, the *verdens beste* (or "world's best"), brings together sponge cake and vanilla crème with meringue and toasted almonds for a nutty garnish. Sweden's elegant Princess cake is sponge cake with raspberries in a pretty green drape of marzipan. Denmark's *kartoffell* translates as "potato," and is a crisp puff of pâte à choux filled with vanilla crème and topped with a big dollop of whipped cream and a dusting of cocoa powder. Other baked items include *semla*, sweet rolls with cardamom, simple sugar, marzipan, and whipped cream. They're all handcrafted by Chef Flemming's Bake Shop on Henderson's historic Water Street, making for a confectionary connection more than 5,000 miles from the Baltic Sea. For beverage choices at Saga, the lingonberry drink is a sweet-tart classic with fruit-punch appeal. If you're in the mood for a coffee-based brew, get ready for an epic cup, as Saga uses dark-fired, highly caffeinated beans from Upstate New York's Death Wish roasters. Even a sip is sure to open Odin's eye from the deepest sleep. ✦

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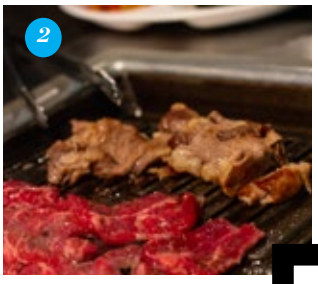

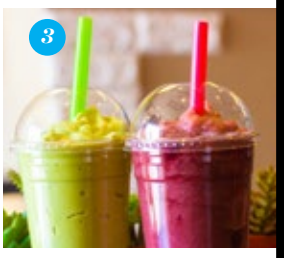



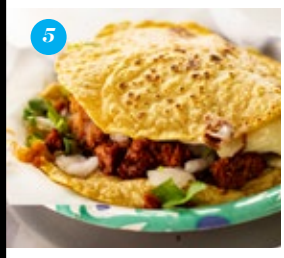

Street Foodie

THE FLAVOR OF THE STRIP

You can eat from the street without leaving the Boulevard

PHOTOS & STORY BY
Brent Holmes

MASALA (1)

A forkful of spice you can have any time — Masala is the city's only 24-hour Indian restaurant. Is it also the very best? No. But it *is* pretty good and offers diverse regional flavors from across the subcontinent. Street Foodie ducks in to satisfy that 2 a.m. craving for chicken curry or when he wants to wake up with chat and a mango *lassi* — it's all on the menu almost all the time.
3041 Las Vegas Blvd. S #5, 702-916-0603

KIMCHI (2)

To try all-you-can eat Korean barbecue is to receive the gift of Flavor, and the sizzling ranges at Kimchi are the gifts that keep on giving. Plates of beef, pork, and chicken with all the marinades. Also, let me direct your palate to the banchan salad bar for a pick 'n' mix of sides, from kimchi to fish cake, a veritable rainbow of complementary flavors.
3049 Las Vegas Blvd. S. #27, 702-894-9944

BUZZD (3)

This boba spot a stone's throw from Encore offers classic flavors. Rainbow jelly, popping pearls, or industry-standard tapioca balls can be paired with flavors ranging from blueberry to avocado. Why is it called Buzzd? Although Street Foodie, of course, has no firsthand experience of this, you can get any boba spiked with a variety of spirits. A refreshing way to get your drink on when you tire of craft cocktails.
3061 Las Vegas Blvd. S. #1A, 702-736-7777

THE PEPPERMILL (4)

On some level, Street Foodie believes that the Peppermill is the axis mundi of all dinner experiences — the cosmic center. The essence of late-night, old-school Vegas dining. If you've never been, or haven't in a while, make your pilgrimage now to this sacred culinary space and marinate in its gaudy glory. I recommend the chicken-fried steak or the Greek omelet; make sure you accompany it with the lemon muffin.
2985 Las Vegas Blvd. S., peppermilllasvegas.com

TACOS EL GORDO (5)

Waiting in line for street food is something Los Angelenos should suffer, not the proud residents of Southern Nevada. Except at Tacos El Gordo, the closest Las Vegas comes to a perfect taco. If you are at the back of a long line, waiting for an *adobada mula*, know that you are engaged in a noble pursuit. You can get the standard beef, chicken, and pork; if you're feeling mildly adventurous, try the *lengua* (beef tongue); if you're feeling bold, go for the *tripa* — Street Foodie promises the offal ain't awful.
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PROFILE

THE REAL DEAL

Wisecracking philanthropist Bob Ellis and wife Sandy open their hearts for Nevada's underserved kids and schools

BY ***John M. Glionna***



Bob Ellis is on his cellphone again, this time making a midday call to the principal of the Henderson elementary school that bears his name.

"Did I wake you up there, principal?" he asks.

He wants to make an appointment for the following morning.

"What time is your AA meeting?" he asks.

But Principal Shauna Hall is onto this man and his routine.

"No, Bob," she shoots back. "I went before I came to work at 6 a.m."

"And you went for drinks right afterward?" Ellis says. Then he lets loose with a deep laugh, a "Ha!" loud enough that he glances around the restaurant where he's having lunch in a nanosecond of self-consciousness.

For Ellis, it's just a bit of fun with an authority figure, a good-natured razzing from a 76-year-old man who was, at best, a C-student all those years ago. He's a local boy made good who dropped out of college after just one semester, who made his fortune in the family trucking business after admitting that he had a drinking problem. He quit that day. Yeah, Bob Ellis, the smiling prankster everyone calls "Bobby," likes to have his laughs.

For her part, Hall also relishes the regular banter with a benefactor who is quick to assist the 600 students at Robert and Sandy Ellis Elementary School, located in the master-planned Inspirada community.

When it comes to supporting public education — whether it's downtrodden older schools, underprivileged students, or even this expansive new school — the Henderson couple is among the most generous philanthropic duos in the state. In the past 15 years, they have donated millions to more than two dozen schools, mostly in Clark and Lincoln counties. Each December, they sponsor assemblies at which they distribute shoes, socks, and toys to thousands of students who would otherwise not receive anything for the holiday season.

"Until you get into this, you really don't know what it's like," Sandy says. "Kids send us cards and letters expressing their appreciation. They come up to us to say how thrilled they are." The couple's donations, she said, have also revealed the poverty that exists across Nevada. "A 9-year-old boy said, 'Mrs. Ellis, thank you. You have no idea how much I needed these new shoes. Mine were torn and dirty. And I love the color black.'"

If Bobby wasn't so busy delivering his one-liners, it might be enough to make him cry. There's just no stiffness to the guy, not an ounce of pomp and circumstance. Everyone who knows him —students, teachers, school administrators, mayors, governors, senators — agrees on this: Bobby Ellis is the joker in the deck, the liveliest of wires, the kid at heart, a self-made businessman who does serious things but who never takes himself seriously.

"People never know whether I'm telling the truth," he says. "Back when I was a kid, my great-grandmother used to say, 'Bobby, why are you always lying?' And I'd say, 'I'm not lying. I'm just stretching the truth, grandma.'" He lets out another "Ha!"

Neither Bob nor Sandy come from monied roots — his father started out trucking hay, Sandy was raised by a single mother — but once they married, they made a pledge that if they ever did come into sizable wealth, they would give something back to the community.

"Bobby is the genuine article, the real deal," says former Nevada governor and U.S. Senator Richard Bryan. "He's the epitome of the good citizen, someone who benefitted from hard work and who is at a place in his

PHOTOGRAPHY ***Aaron Mayes***



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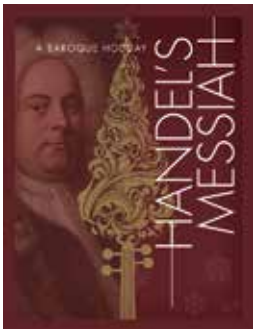

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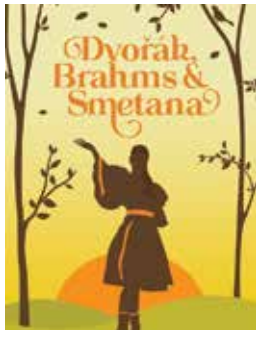

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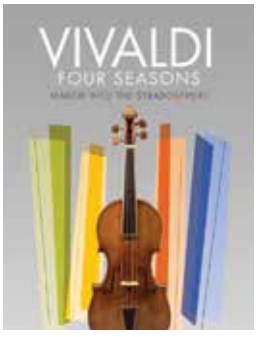

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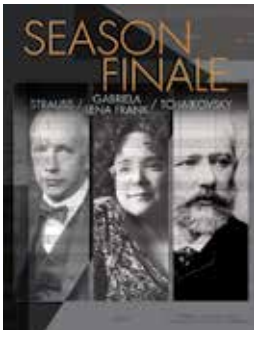

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life to pay something back. My dad had a name for it, 'paying your civic rent,' and Bobby has paid his civic rent."

Ellis is a compact 5-foot-9 with glasses and carries a thick wallet, stuffed with too many credit cards, which he keeps wrapped in a yellow elastic band. He's always *on*, but Shauna Hall no longer blushes at his material. "I come to expect it now," she says. "He may have missed his calling as a standup comedian. But he also has the biggest heart in the world."

Last May, for the school's opening-day ceremony, Hall limited Ellis and his wife to 20 guests for the event. When the couple arrived, they were stunned to find that school officials had organized 400 friends and acquaintances.

"I couldn't believe it," Ellis recalls. "I looked at that principal and I told her, 'I've been set up.'"

* * * * *

BOBBY ELLIS GREW up in West Covina, California, when the place still crawled with farmers who paid his father to haul their hay to market. He was the middle child of three. (Both his siblings are gone now, as are his parents.) In the early days, his mother called their house "the chicken coop" because they lived next to the real clucking thing. "I'm not complaining about my childhood," Ellis says. "I had food and a roof over my head. We were a close-knit family."

Yet there were hard times. One year, unable to afford a Christmas tree, his mother came home with a tumbleweed that she spray-painted silver and adorned with strings of popcorn. Ellis had to reuse his older brother's high-school yearbook for keepsake signatures; there wasn't money for a new one. When farmers began hauling hay by rail, Ellis's father, Belvin, quit the trucking business and moved to Henderson, where he bought a wrecking yard. For his graduation from Rancho High School in 1960, Ellis' parents bought him the left front-fender and half a grille for a wrecked 1957 Buick two-door he'd bought for $500. "I was happy," he says.

He was working in his father's wrecking yard when he met Sandy. It was at a bar where Sandy's mom, Nita, worked as a cocktail waitress. Bobby was ordering drinks with a fake ID when Sandy came in to deliver something.

"Who is that?" Ellis asked.

"That's my daughter," Nita said.

The couple married a year later. Struggling, they borrowed the $100 down payment for their first house in Henderson, which cost $14,955. They've been together for 53 years.

Years down the road, Ellis bought out the auto auction company his father had co-founded, along with another business called Snap Towing. He also bought land around the old wrecking yard. But real success didn't come until Ellis quit drinking in 1987, at age 44.

"I found out that I wasn't an alcoholic; I was a drunk. You know what the difference is? Drunks don't go to AA meetings." He was buying Black Velvet whisky a case at a time, and that didn't include the Bud Light chasers. But he and Sandy somehow managed: He never got mean, he says now, and always came home in time for dinner.

Nonetheless, on a fishing trip, his partners intervened. *You need to take a look at yourself, Ellis*, they told him. *You're drinking way too much*.

So he quit, just like that. "Alcohol was interfering with a lot of things I didn't realize," he says now.

By 2005, Ellis was beginning to wind down from his exhausting business treadmill, slowly giving up the reins to his son, Don. (He completed the handoff in 2015.) Meanwhile, he was organizing "Deli Days," regular get-togethers at Jason's Deli in Henderson, attended by political movers-and-shakers from across Clark County.

He was primed to take the next step in his life, to make good on the pledge he and Sandy made years earlier.

One day, he got a call from a friend about a woman who wanted a donation for Whitney Elementary School. Ellis recalls the conversation: "You've got to help me here, Ellis," the friend said. "I can't get rid of this lady. But you better let me handle her — she'll tear you up. She doesn't take no for an answer."

Intrigued, Ellis invited Ileana Drobkin to his office, where she asked him to underwrite the purchase of sweatshirts for the school's 800 students, some of whose drug-addled parents would sell their clothing, leaving the kids to show up on winter days in shirtsleeves. Ellis liked her spunk. She left with a check for $5,000.

The next year, he gave $10,000, then $25,000, then $50,000.

Eventually, the pair began to work together to identify other high-risk schools, developing a set of decision-making criteria to function in a philanthropic world where the need is limitless.

"When we interview principals, I want a match," Ellis said, "I want the principal to be happy with us, and I want to be happy with the school. Then we both can smile."

Ellis also began staging the December assemblies where chosen schools are given shoes, socks, and toys. Drobkin, whom Ellis calls "the den mother," coordinates with a shoe retailer to visit the schools and measure the students' feet. Then Drobkin and Sandy Ellis pick out age-appropriate gifts, which often include laptops, remote-controlled cars, even drones.

"I'd like to keep some of those toys," says Ellis. "Man, they're cool."

The gift distribution is a mammoth undertaking. If you think buying for five kids each Christmas is hard, try 5,500. The team begins planning in March for the December onslaught. Within an age group, each gift must be exactly the same so no child feels slighted. Drobkin never buys dolls, because she wouldn't dream of giving an ivory-faced figure to a black or Latino child. And if they come up short on numbers, even by a toy or two, they know some student is going to go without a gift, an outcome Drobkin and her teams find unthinkable.

At first, Ellis wanted his contributions to remain anonymous. He'd have Drobkin drop off the donation checks, and for the first few years rarely attended the assemblies at which students received gifts. He isn't shy, it's just that the funny man worried he might cry.

"At one school, the kids were so poor they were stealing ketchup from the cafeteria to take home to make soup," he said. "Well, I cry over cartoons, and I knew that if I went to a lot of these schools, I'd see the heartache."

Eventually, he began to attend the events, and even take the stage. "I saw kids receiving toys and saw the smiles on their faces," he says. "And I said, 'I'm going to go up there." Now, Decembers are a madcap rush between assemblies, but Ellis loves the action.

At many of his chosen schools, 100 percent of students qualify for free school lunches. He gives to schools with autism classes, as well as a global community high school, where many students are new to the country; he sponsors soccer teams, as well as cross-country and weightlifting.

He provided for an underprivileged father and two sons in Las Vegas, helping them recover from a 2012 attack by a claw-hammer-wielding intruder who killed the mother and daughter. He gave money to an impoverished Native American high school near the Oregon border so its football coach could buy new equipment. He also donated shoes and socks for the entire student body. He and Drobkin teamed up to purchase a car, clothes, and a laptop for the three sons, aged 11, 19 and 21, of Ella Clyde, a single mother in Caliente who is suffering from cancer.

When her youngest son, Adam, received

a new jacket Drobkin had bought, "he was overwhelmed; that jacket was the most wonderful thing he'd ever seen," she recalled. "He kept saying, 'Is it really mine? It's all for me? It's really brand new?'"

Clyde says she was overwhelmed by Ellis' generosity. "What kind of person gives a family hundreds of dollars for groceries? Who buys my boy a new car so he can get places, or a Kindle, or bicycle, or pays for one of them to go to school," she asks, her voice breaking. "And he's not high-and-mighty about it. He doesn't do it for the attention. We're poor; that's what we are. I could have never done this for my kids."

A few years ago, Drobkin floated the idea of petitioning the Clark County School District to name a school after the couple. That effort failed, and Ellis didn't think he wanted to try again. That's when Richard Bryan stepped up. He appeared before the selection committee and explained that, sure, Ellis isn't a political figure, you never see his name on the society page, he's not a professor, and he's never served on any school board.

"But I said there ought to be a category for a couple that has devoted millions of dollars to help disadvantaged students and supports the schools they attend," he says.

The official name-dedication ceremony is scheduled for this month.

❊ ❊ ❊ ❊ ❊

THE BENEFACTOR WEARS cowboy boots and a starched western shirt as he walks the hallways at Robert and Sandy Ellis Elementary School. His access here is pretty much carte blanche. He even has his own parking spot. "Right this moment," he deadpans, "they're probably towing my car away."

He often stops by to strategize, drop off a check, or just look around. It's never planned. "I want to catch one of the teachers doing something wrong, so I can write them up," he jokes.

Touring the grounds, Ellis says things like "Beautiful!" and "Amazing!" He passes a bulletin board bearing the 12-rule "Ellis Code of Excellence," which includes "Use Manners at All Times" and "Say 'Yes, Ma'am,' 'No, Sir' or use proper name."

"Oh, my gosh," he says.

In the expansive computer room, he learns how students clamor for such modern after-school activities as the robotics club. He asks about technical training. For Ellis, it's as much about developing a work ethic as getting a formal education. "We used to call it woodshop or home-ec," he tells Principal Hall. "Did you know that the trucking industry is short 50,000 long-distance drivers? There's no shame in that kind of work."

In a first-grade class, where students are learning the fundamentals of soccer, Hall introduces the school's namesake. "You all know Mr. Ellis!" she tells two dozen students.

"Noooooooo!" they say in unison.

Hall blushes but Ellis beams: It's like one of his own comeback lines. "I love it," he says.

Hall suspects that Ellis would have preferred that his name was bestowed on a more underprivileged school, so she coordinated an event to pay forward her school's good fortune. And she did it Bobby Ellis-style.

School parents raised money to buy shoes and socks for 450 underprivileged students at Kit Carson Elementary School. When the drive came up short of its $4,200 goal, Hall paid the remaining $55 out of her own pocket. Now Carson has been added to the December assembly schedule.

"It came from their example," she says of Bobby and Sandy. "We wanted to follow their lead." ✦

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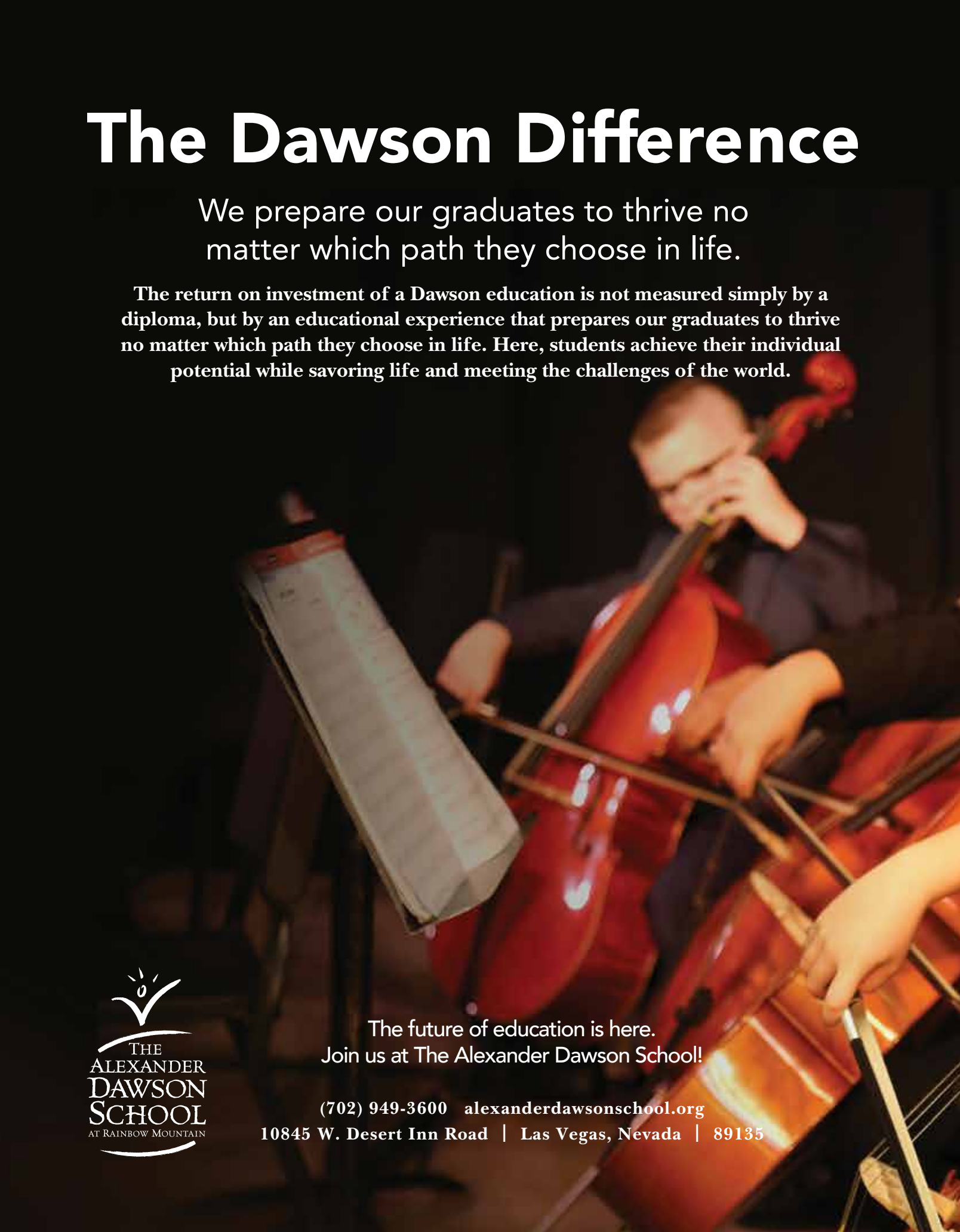

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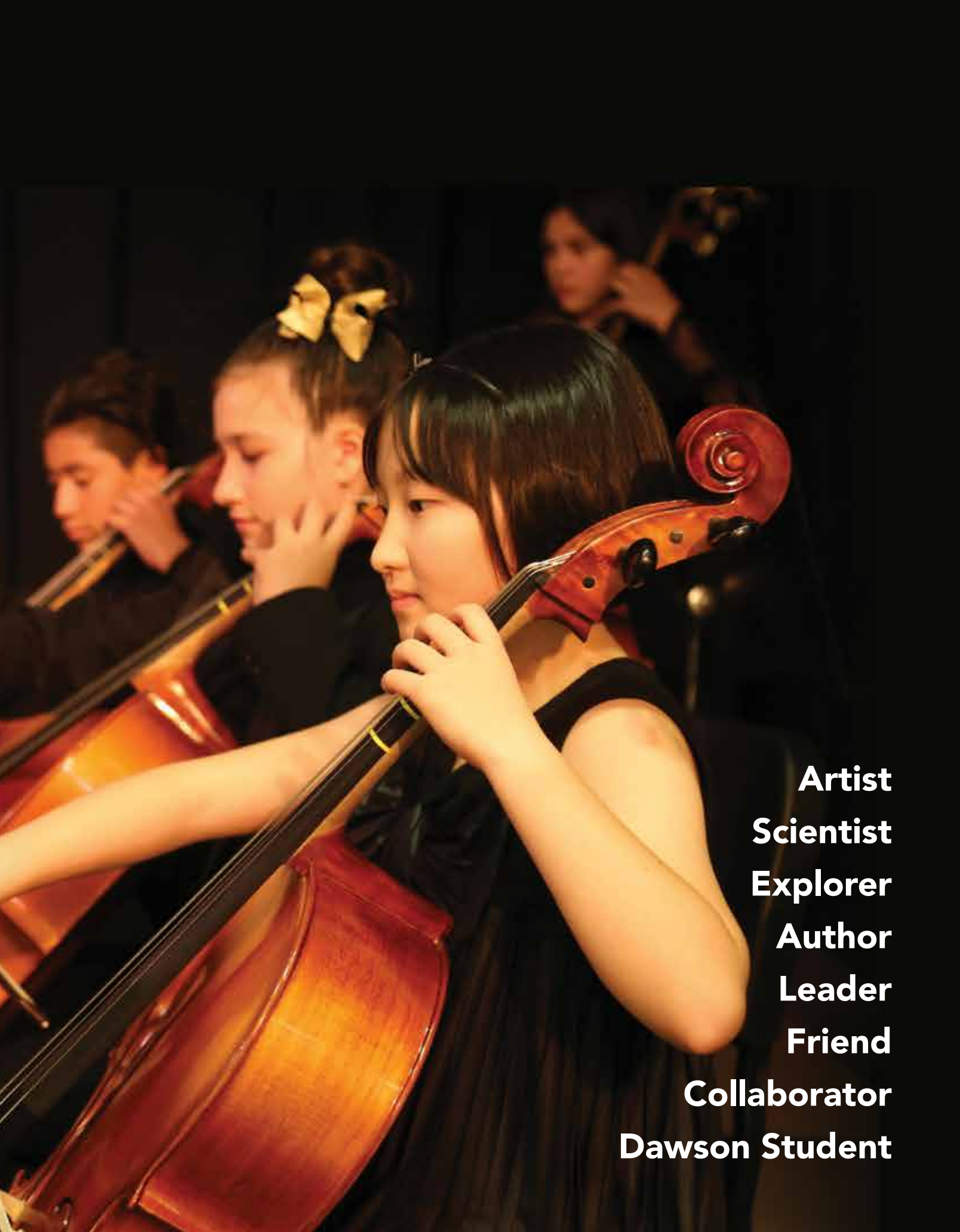
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HISTORY

THE WOMAN WHO ASKED FOR TOO MUCH

Virginia Hill's savvy and sophistication made her more than a pretty mob moll

BY ***Lissa Townsend Rodgers***

Whenever the name "Virginia Hill" surfaces, it's always quickly followed those of Bugsy Siegel and the Flamingo. It's ironic that a woman who maintained her independence in the male-dominated world of the Mafia is known as a "girlfriend of." It's even more ironic that she's best-remembered in a town she hated by a casino that wasn't actually named after her.

Virginia was a backwoods waif who became a gossip-column celebrity, and the only woman who sat at the table with the Mafia, moving between the Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles outfits for nearly two decades. She transported stolen property, fixed racetrack odds, negotiated deals, laundered money, paid bribes — all under the guise of a "Georgia oil heiress" or "Manhattan glamour girl," as *The New York Journal-American* variously called her. Her life was a mix of glamourous spotlights and violent backrooms. She could disarm hair-trigger muscle without raising a hand, and get more information from a man with a word and a wink than brass-knuckled goons could beat out of him. Cold-blooded mob murderers feared her sharp tongue. Yet she was also known for her kindness: "She was likable, friendly, sympathetic and genuinely big-hearted. No appeal for help ever went unanswered," Lee Mortimer wrote in *Chicago Confidential*. Virginia remained untouchable — until the fallout from her 1951 testimony before the Kefauver Committee made her the most glamorous figure to ever appear on a "Wanted" poster.

FIGHTING BACK

SHE WAS BORN in August 1916 in Bessemer, a busted-out Alabama boomtown. Virginia was the seventh of 10 children in the kind of white trash family that peaks at Faulkner and taps out at Jerry Springer. She was a timid, ginger-haired child who'd scrounge pennies to buy other children candy. Her father, Mack Hill, was an alcoholic ex-horse trader who took out his disappointments on the members of his family — except one. One night, Mack staggered home, drunk, slurring insults and shaking fists. When he advanced on his 8-year-old daughter, Virginia grabbed a skillet full of bacon grease off of the stove and slammed it into her father's chest. He fell to the floor, howling in pain, and the little girl learned something that would serve her well in years to come: Scratch a bully and you'll find a coward. And whatever happens to you when you fight back cannot be worse than what happens to you if you don't.

COLD CASE A cool, calm Virginia Hill testifies at the Kevaufer organized crime hearings in New York in February 1951.

If that was the day Virginia Hill left childhood behind, it took a few more years for her exterior to catch up. She blossomed into a leggy redheaded beauty and quit her small town shortly thereafter — it was said she married a much older man who died or divorced or just left. It is the first time Virginia disappears and reappears from her own life story, but it won't be the last.

She resurfaces in Chicago in the summer of 1933, just in time for the World's Fair. The "Century of Progress" was a 17-month celebration of a prosperous, harmonious world ... a world in which the Reichstag fire had just burned out Germany's last resistance to Hitler and one out of four Americans was unemployed. Millions came to wonder at a seven-story Chinese temple, cheer the Major League Baseball's first All-Star game, and ogle burlesque dancer Sally Rand.

Virginia found a gig waitressing at one of the Fair's Italian restaurants, the kind of place where mobsters enjoyed a plate of gnocchi and a glass of red before shaking

VIRGINIA HILL: EVERETT COLLECTION INC./ ALAMY STOCK PHOTO


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down souvenir stands and counting the take at the whorehouses. Some made plays for the curvaceous doll with the drawl, but Virginia gave all of them the brush-off. Except one. Joey Epstein wasn't your typical mobster, a mild-mannered accountant in a world of flamboyant thugs. He tipped Virginia extravagantly, wisecracked with her, and began escorting her to mob parties, where she arrived on his arm but always worked the room. As he introduced her around, he discerned that Virginia could be useful: Sexy, smart, streetwise, she was motivated by money, but it didn't blind her. She liked the fellas, but she wouldn't make a sap of herself.

The two weren't a couple. Actually, there had been talk that Epstein was gay, but the presence of his buxom, bawdy companion silenced it. The pair were friends and business partners: Epstein mentored her in a manner that was equal parts *Goodfellas* and *My Fair Lady*. She set aside the tacky finery of a hick-town teen for cashmere sweaters, tailored suits, and pearls by day, flamboyant couturier evening gowns by night. "There was nothing sleazy or poor-white about Virginia Hill. Somewhere along the line, her money and some mysterious inner instinct had combined to give her impeccable taste," according to columnist Carl King.

But the taste for finer things didn't stop there. Virginia's homes were furnished with fine antiques, bone china, fine crystal. She sought to improve herself with gourmet cooking classes, French lessons, a leather-bound library full of Shakespeare and Thackeray. The latter's *Vanity Fair* was her favorite book; how could she not identify with its heroine, Becky Sharp, another redhead from humble means who sought to rise in society by any means necessary?

Virtually every week, Virginia lounged in deluxe round-trip accommodations on the Twentieth Century Limited express train, luggage bulging with diamonds and furs that might have been bought at a Manhattan boutique — or stolen from a Chicago matron. Fittingly for a "bag woman," Virginia was known for enormous purses, crammed with matchbooks from Ciro's and the Copa, platinum lighters and gold compacts, poems, phone numbers — and, of course, wads of hundreds, perhaps a thick envelope destined for a Florida senator, California union organizer, or Guadalajara businessman.

Her luggage bulged with diamonds and furs that might have been bought at a Manhattan boutique — or stolen from a Chicago matron.

THE PARTNERSHIP

IN 1937, ONE of those trips from the Windy City to the Empire State lasted much longer than a weekend. The Chicago mob had formed a tentative partnership with the mafiosi of New York, and wanted to be sure their new associates were keeping up their end of the bargain. Thus Virginia Hill moved her sables and cash into a hotel suite, and set her sights on NYC don Joe Adonis, who fell fast and hard. It never occurred to him that such a catch might come, well, with a catch: Virginia reported his every word and action back to the boys in Chicago.

She and Adonis tore up the town, the Chicago mob was happy, the dough was rolling in — and then, in a bar in Brooklyn, she met Ben Siegel. Tall, blue-eyed, a fan of daily workouts and custom tailoring, Siegel was unlike the swarthy, pasta-plump mobsters and gray-haired sugar daddies Virginia was used to cozying up to. The chemistry was instant, and the two went home together that night, Joey A or no Joey A.

And, abruptly as she had arrived, Virginia left New York. She spent some time down south, bought her mother a house, packed her younger brother Chick into her Cadillac and headed west. In summer 1938, Virginia hit Hollywood, moving in on her third mob outfit as she quietly befriended Los Angeles vice king Jack Dragna. More publicly, she took up with actors Errol Flynn and George Raft, as well as drummer Gene Krupa and budding movie mogul Carl Laemmle Jr. Her gowns were by designers-to-the-stars like Howard Greer and Irene; she got her hair done at Perc Westmore's salon, where Carole Lombard and Lauren Bacall got their tresses tended to and where she dazzled the staff with $50 tips. At parties, she joked with Groucho Marx, clinked glasses with Ava Gardner. *Modern Screen* gushed, "Her parties are reminiscent of something that went out with the Romans. ... One evening she rented the Mocambo and its entire staff for a shindig. Conservative estimates say that little social cost her well over $3,000."

Virginia also began spending a lot of time in Mexico. She seemed another gringa on a spree, partying at the racetracks and nightclubs. But Virginia's pursuit of pleasure hid business: to facilitate the Mafia's control over the flow of narcotics from Mexico. She became a star of Mexico City's high society, but was also seen in the back of local cantinas, huddled in conversation with mysterious men.

A FLAMINGO IS BORN

IT WAS AROUND this time that Virginia acquired her nickname, "Flamingo" — some said for her long legs, others for her reddish hair, others for the reddish tint her skin took on after she'd downed too many cocktails. The mob kept her crisscrossing the map, although she stopped back in Alabama long enough to marry and annul a local football hero. In Hollywood, Virginia Hill and Ben Siegel crossed paths once more ... and this time they stayed crossed. The pair were matched in many ways, an odd couple in others. He went to bed early, she partied all night. He was a teetotaler, she could down a dozen drinks in an evening. But both shared hot tempers, high sex drives, and a taste for life's finer things.

In 1940, Virginia signed a contract with Universal Pictures, and brother Chick tagged along to her acting classes. She screen tested for *Ball of Fire*. It's not hard to imagine her in the B-girl lineup behind Barbara Stanwyck — and IMDB credits her with an "uncredited" role as a hat-check girl in *Manpower*, starring her old friend George Raft. But Virginia soon lost interest. Chick said his sister "just chickened out. ... She knew neither of us had any real talent and it was too much work."

Over the next few years, Virginia and Ben maintained their affair despite other involvements, sparking fights and reconciliations that seemed like passion. Siegel juggled his wife and actresses Wendy Barrie and Marie McDonald; Virginia had another fling with Joe Adonis, then dallied with a dancer named Miguelito Valdes, spontaneously marrying him to avoid hassle at the border. She headed back to New York for another money-laundering opportunity as a partner in the Hurricane Club. The jazz spot's logo featured a voluptuous redhead, naked save for an artfully placed palm frond, and its tropical-themed room was the site of many a legendary Duke Ellington gig.

Conversely, Ben Siegel's new project didn't make money. Instead, he seemed to be pouring it into a bottomless hole in the desert. It wouldn't be the first casino in Las Vegas or Siegel's first casino in Las Vegas. Hell, it wasn't even his idea. The Flamingo originated with Billy Wilkerson, founder of *The Hollywood Reporter* and owner of Ciro's, among other hot spots, who wanted to bring the glamour of Hollywood and Monte Carlo

to Vegas. The New York mob bailed him out of some financial trouble, and soon Wilkerson was out and their boy Ben Siegel was in.

Siegel didn't see the Flamingo as just another betting wire or nightclub to oversee. He made it a personal project, involving himself in every detail from the imported palm trees by the pool to the handmade leather trash cans in the rooms. He spent money like it wasn't real — $115,000 to enlarge a boiler room, a million to redo the guest-room plumbing. Ben hoped his luxury casino would entice gamers to part with their money but, in truth, no one gambled more on the Flamingo (or lost bigger) than the man who built it.

The idea of a glitzy casino named after her (intentionally or not) initially piqued Virginia's interest, but Las Vegas left much to be desired. She was allergic to cactus, and it seemed as if she got sunburn as soon as she stepped outside. Her "Baby Blue Eyes" was more interested in playing mogul than lover, and so Virginia sat in the darkened lounge or his bulletproof suite, drinking Stinger after Stinger, turning up the radio to drown out the hammers and drills. Their relationship was already troubled, but the Flamingo accelerated its downhill slide.

Slipping out of a bad situation was likely one of the reasons Virginia began making trips to Europe — "to buy wine for the Flamingo," as she used to claim. But she also made stops in Switzerland, home of the anonymous bank account. It was assumed she was running errands for Joe Epstein as usual, but there is also speculation that she may have been on a similar mission for Siegel, suitcases filled with cash skimmed from construction funds and decorating budgets.

The Flamingo was nowhere near ready for its December 1946 opening — but that didn't stop Bugsy. He planned a glitzy launch weekend. Jimmy Durante was hired to headline, the staff was dressed in white ties and tails, and a new runway was built to accommodate the movie stars flying in on private planes.

It didn't go as planned. Studio heads told their actors to steer clear of the resort; those who were willing to defy Goldwyn or Mayer were kept in California by torrential rains. Virginia drifted though the casino in a flamboyant pink-and-orange gown that cost $3,000, but she didn't really mingle — Ben was the one enthusiastically greeting every B-list actor and local politico who turned up. In the meantime, slick players and tricky dealers took the Flamingo for hundreds of thousands of dollars and, by Monday, the showroom and casino were empty. Siegel's Taj Mahal had turned into a total joke. He closed for two months and staged another re-opening in the spring, but the property still struggled.

GONE GIRL

AND SUDDENLY ... Virginia was gone. Maybe she got an official warning as a valuable employee, or perhaps it was a quiet tip from Ep or Joey A. to an old friend. Maybe her instincts told her to clear out. But she put an ocean between herself and Ben Siegel and, on June 20, 1947, she proved wise to have done so. Bugsy Siegel was shot to death in Los Angeles, sprawled on a chintz sofa in Virginia's living room.

She got the news while holed up at the Ritz with the heir to a French champagne fortune. Asked about her former paramour, she swung between tears and tough talk: "Yes, I loved him. But he wasn't in love with me or any woman. All he cared about was that goddamn Flamingo." Virginia attempted suicide in Paris and Monaco before returning to the United



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States in August 1947, declaring to the press that, "I can take care of myself. I've been doing it for 30 years and I can keep on."

As the '40s turned into the '50s, Virginia toured the resorts of the Southwest and eventually wound up in Sun Valley, where she hooked up with ski instructor Hans Hauser in 1950. The pair met in February, married in March and became parents in November. Four months after son Peter was born, Virginia was summoned to appear on the hottest TV show in America: The Kefauver hearings on organized crime.

If the flashbulbs of café society had seemed impertinent, they had nothing on the paparazzi awaiting her as her taxi pulled up to the courthouse in lower Manhattan. "The fabulous sweetheart of the slain Bugsy Siegel," as the newsreels called her, wore a silver fox stole and a defiant smirk. Taciturn Frank Costello, vicious Lucky Luciano, sly Meyer Lansky — those were Mafia masterminds. But this sassy redheaded dish? The Committee was just pumping her for pillow talk, as she gave evasive denials to questions like, "Have you ever known anybody in the narcotics traffic in Mexico?" Virginia played the "dumb doll," telling Kefauver, "I don't care anything about business in the first place. I don't understand it."

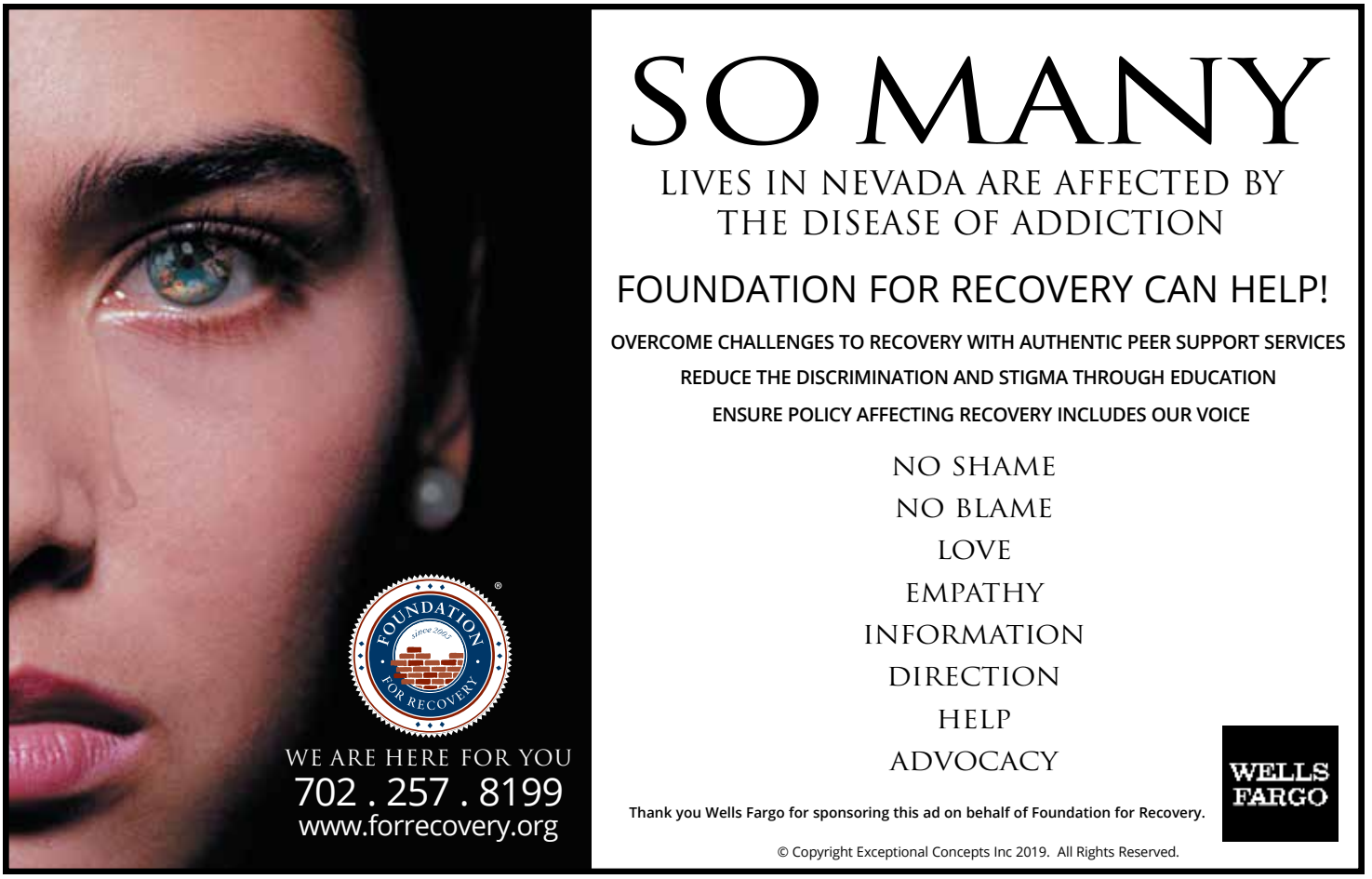
When she sashayed out of the courtroom, Virginia thought she had handled the senators with the same skill she had managed the mob. But rather than avoiding disaster, she had walked right into it. The government began deportation proceedings against Hans. Then the IRS slapped Virginia with a bill for $130,000 in back taxes and seized her home, leaving her standing on the porch, peering into her own windows. The government put everything from kitchen utensils to diamond bracelets on the auction block, but Virginia was long gone, apparently slipping across the southern border under the protection of a friend with a diplomatic passport.

Throughout the 1950s, the family wandered the globe from Hong Kong to Paris, traveling in a pair of Mercedes-Benzes, staying in the finest hotels, where increasing amounts of liquor helped Virginia ignore the disdainful stares and whispers about "Frau Gangster." Her money machine continued pumping out $100 bills by the stack. She still made regular trips to Switzerland. Was she making withdrawals from an old Siegel account? Was the mob still paying her? Was it for her services —or her silence?

But as the '50s turned into the '60s, finances took a turn for the uncertain. Hans drifted away to teach skiing on some other slope, Virginia lived in a small hotel, where her teenage son worked as a waiter. She put out some feelers about whether the U.S. government would let her come back, but the judge who was negotiating the deal died suddenly. Vague items appeared in magazines about her publishing a memoir. She reached out to old associates and made mention of needing money, of a diary.

On an early spring day in 1966, she suddenly headed to Naples to meet the now-exiled Joe Adonis. Several days later, she was found in the woods near Salzburg, dead from an overdose. "I can't understand why my mother died so suddenly and under mysterious circumstances," her son told UPI.

Dangerous men gave Virginia Hill secrets to keep, and she built a life on those secrets. She, of all people, knew that surrendering those secrets could mean surrendering her life. But Virginia Hill had always pushed her luck — right up to its limit. Perhaps it wasn't hard to understand that one day, that luck would run out. ✦

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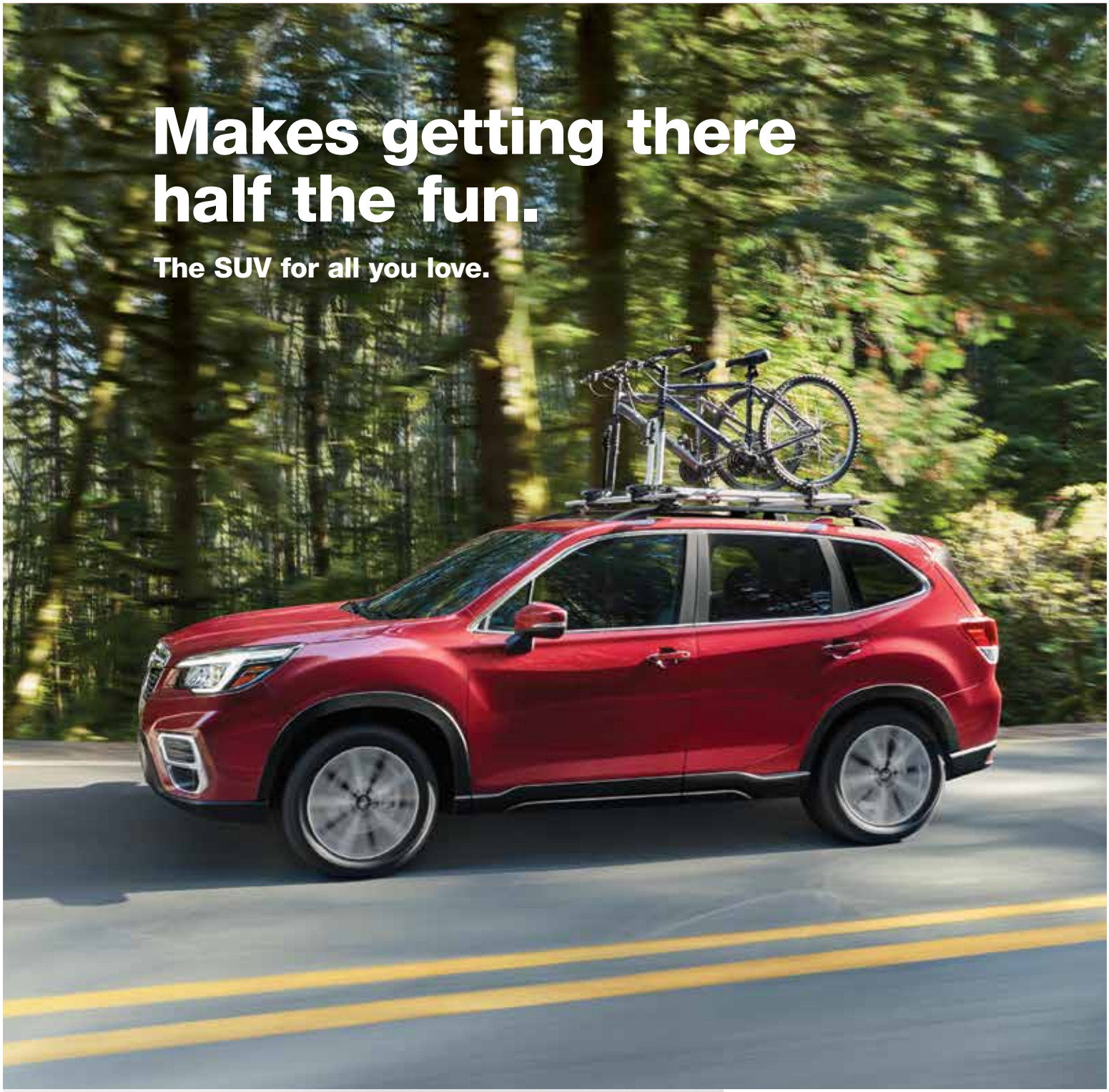

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*

{AMAZING}

ARIZONA

Its natural splendor is as beautiful as ever. But there's so much more to discover in the Grand Canyon State, from luxury spas to world-class dining



FLAGSTAFF

NEXT DOOR, BUT WORLDS AWAY

Once a sleepy railroad town, Flagstaff is all grown up

By Greg Thilmont



Long before you reach historic Flagstaff on undulating Interstate 40, the gorgeous San Francisco Peaks pierce the skies far in the distance. Rising more than 12,000 feet above the picturesque Colorado Plateau, the volcanic spires and their shining snowfields make for a sublime welcome sign. An easy four-hour drive from Las Vegas, the small city of 70,000 abounds with vacation attractions and activities in a wondrously green, ponderosa pine-filled landscape.

LIVING IN THE PAST

But the drive is part of the destination. Flagstaff began in the 1880s as a railroad town, and decades later it became an important automobile rest stop along Route 66. After arriving, stretch your legs and learn about the city's motorized heritage at the handsome **Visitor Center** (One E. Route 66, 928-213-2951). The restored Tudor Revival-style Santa Fe Railway depot offers a mother lode of brochures, maps, and all kinds of touristic tchotchkes. While you're there, boxcars might rumble along iron tracks, or vintage Ford Model Ts might cruise down the highway just outside its red brick walls. Now those are authentic atmospherics.

Outdoor ambirnce is a few steps in any direction. Just a block from the Visitor Center, **Heritage Square** (on Aspen Street between Leroux and San Francisco streets) is the al fresco heart of Flagstaff. Lined with even more lovely red-bricked architecture from the city's early days, it's the place to stroll about and embrace summer's warmth (but always have a rain jacket handy in this unpredictable mountain environment). All season long, the plaza is home for live musical performances, art demonstrations, and even free movies in the evening.

Night time is also the right time to look to the stars for after-dark entertainment. How's this for scientific bragging rights: Pluto (the once and former planet) was discovered from Flagstaff's famed **Lowell Observatory** (lowell.edu). Celebrating its 125th anniversary this year, the science center is perched on a bluff overlooking Downtown. It features the informative Rotunda Museum and the movie set-like 24-inch Clark Refractor, which was built in 1896 and keeps on working. There's more modern technology in stock, too, including the new Giovale Open Deck Observatory, which is set to open this summer with six powerful telescopes for visitors to peer through into the vastness of the universe. As a celestial bonus, Flagstaff became the world's first International Dark Sky Place in 2001 to

Bottom, Heritage Square, Lowell Observatory; top, FLG X; Mother Road Brewing Company, Sunset Crater











preserve its inky, star-filled vista above.

Closer to terra firma, there's plenty of local history to learn about. The beautiful and informative **Museum of Northern Arizona** (musnaz.org) is one of Flagstaff's cultural gems. Housed in an impressive 1930s edifice built with local lava rocks, it features a stunning and thought-provoking collection of works representing regional native cultures, including the Zuni, Acoma, Southern Paiute, Hopi, Havasupai, Hualapai, and Navajo. There are also lots of natural history on display, and current exhibits range from the DesertArt LAB ecological installation to *Ant Empire: Strength in Community*, a fun look at Arizona's big-bellied honeypot ants.

FUEL UP FOR FUN

With all those soaring and swaying ponderosa pines about, Flagstaff is ideal for outdoor adventures like **FLG X** (flagstaffextreme.com), an extreme zip line and obstacle-course destination. Fly on wires 80 feet above the forest floor, and test your athletic skills on a suspended web of rope swings, scrambling walls, hanging nets, wobbly bridges, and more. Vacations aren't just for relaxing, right?

After such a calorie burn, luckily Flagstaff has a lively food and drink scene to match its amazing natural surroundings. In the morning, get caffeinated for all-day adventures at **Matador Coffee Roasting Company** (matadorcoffee.com), or fill up on inventive breakfast dishes at the **Toasted Owl** (thetoastedowl.com). For weekend lunches and daily dinners, the **McMillan Bar & Kitchen** is key (mcmillan.us; it has a great game room on the side, to boot). Twirl into plates of fettuccine at **La Vetta** (lavettaitaliano.com), a modern Italian eatery. **Mother Road Brewing Company** (motherroadbeer.com) puts tasty suds on the map, and the tradition of clinking glasses at the **Hotel Monte Vista Cocktail Lounge** (hotelmontevista.com) is as timeless as its glowing neon sign.

The souvenirs on offer go well beyond snow globes and fridge magnets. Like any great vacation destination, Downtown Flagstaff abounds with local shopping spots, including **Puchteca Indian Goods** (928-774-2414), a purveyor of Native American arts and crafts. For your home, pick up a locally poured soy candle scented with natural botanicals at **Salt + Peak Boutique** (saltandpeakboutique.com). Peruse regional writers at **Bright Side Bookshop** (brightsidebookshop.com). And, if you need some bomb hiking gear, head to **Babbitt's Backcountry** Outfitters (babbittsbackcountry.com).

It's unlikely you'll run out of things to do. But just in case: Flagstaff makes a perfect basecamp for exploring Northern Arizona's significant natural and cultural beauty. Head east of town on Route 66 to lush **Walnut Canyon National Monument**. The rugged ravine is filled with cliff dwellings left behind more than 700 years ago by the vanished Sinagua culture; they can be viewed from two hiking paths, the Rim Trail and the Island Trail. Then, head northeast on Highway 89 to gaze at the geological splendor of **Sunset Crater National Monument**, which features dramatic cinder cones and rugged lava flows that shine like fire in the lambent sunbeams of dawn and evening. Before returning to Flagstaff, take the Loop Road to the astounding **Wupatki National Monument**, an immense swath of abandoned stone villages built by the Ancestral Puebloans roughly 1,000 years ago. With rich history, fine food, and heart-thumping adventure, Flagstaff is a nearby getaway that feels worlds away.

HERITAGE SQUARE AND LOWELL OBSERVATORY: SHUTTERSTOCK; FLG X: MICHELLE KOECHLE (MK STUDIOS); BAR: COURTESY OF MOTHER ROAD BREWING COMPANY; SUNSET CRATER: COURTESY OF NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

SIDE TRIP!

BETWEEN FLAGSTAFF AND SEDONA

Take a scenic detour off Interstate 17 by exiting onto AZ 89A, toward Sedona.

OAK CREEK CANYON
This gorgeous gash in the landscape has a spectacular feature: you can drive through it! The forested canyon floor ranges from a mile wide at the top end to 2.5 miles at the mouth, and up to 2,000 feet deep from the creek to the tops of the highest sheer red cliffs. A wonderful road built in 1929, it runs the entire 13-mile length of the canyon.

WEST FORK TRAIL
As you make your way south, keep a sharp eye out on your right for the Call of the Canyon picnic area. The parking lot is the trailhead for the beautiful West Fork Trail, a 6-mile round-trip that requires about three hours and is considered one of the finest day hikes in Arizona.

SLIDE ROCK STATE PARK
Three-and-a-half miles later, you'll come to Slide Rock, a popular creek-side swimming hole with a natural water slide. Depending on the season, per-car admission ranges from $10-$30.

Richard Quinn

SEDONA

TWO TALES OF ONE CITY

Whatever the season, Sedona rewards those who love the great outdoors — and the cozy indoors

By Matt Jacob



The first time someone mentioned Sedona as a getaway destination, my immediate reaction was, "Get away from *what*, exactly?" Sedona and the Las Vegas Valley have enough in common to be cousins: Both are in the desert. Both rely heavily on tourist dollars. Both have similar climates (we're a little hotter in the summer; they're a little colder in the winter). And both are known for picturesque backdrops of natural splendor, highlighted by stunning red-rock buttes and canyons that outdoor enthusiasts enjoy year-round (we have Red Rock National Conservation Area; they have Red Rock State Park).

"Why drive 4½ hours to visit Las Vegas Jr.," I thought, "when I could be standing in the Pacific Ocean in less time?"

But as the years passed and many others raved about their Sedona sojourns, I figured the least I should do was make the 280-mile trek to see what the hype was all about. And so I did. Twice. In the span of nine months. Those two visits — the first an anniversary trip with my wife in late spring, the second a couples retreat in the dead of winter — revealed two truths: 1) My skepticism of Sedona as a unique getaway spot was wholly misguided, and 2) To appreciate this part of the upper Sonoran Desert in full requires trips at different seasonal extremes.

Top, Hilton Sedona Resort Bell Rock; opposite page, Pink Jeep Tours' ancient ruins tour; omelet at the Coffee Pot; the Hudson; Bell Rock trail

SPRINGING INTO ACTION

THE FIRST THING THAT MAKES Sedona an ideal getaway is the ease of the trip itself: After heading south on the numerically confusing Interstate 515/U.S. 95 (which turns into the new Interstate 11, which turns into U.S. 93), the only thing standing between you and your destination is a left turn on Interstate 40 in Kingman and a right turn on Interstate 17 in Flagstaff, exiting at Arizona State Route 89A in Sedona.

At this time of year, much of the journey lacks topographic variety — it's only slightly less sleep-inducing than the I-15 jaunt to Southern California. That changes, however, as your elevation climb reaches nearly 7,000 feet outside of Flagstaff and hundreds of pine trees begin to dot the horizon like a massive Bob Ross painting come to life.

During the 2,500-foot elevation drop into Sedona, the pine trees fade in your rearview mirror as brilliant orange-and-red sandstone bluffs and steep canyon walls appear on your right. These formations not only surround this 107-year-old city, but they appear to hover over it. (At certain points along Route 89A, the jagged mountain faces almost seem within reach.)

Entering Sedona from the south, one of the first hotels you encounter is the **Hilton Sedona** at Bell Rock (hiltonsedonaresort.com), so named because of its close proximity to the Bell Rock mountain and hiking trail. The sprawling property features 221 rooms and suites (the latter include a separate sitting room with fireplace) and an array of fun indoor and outdoor activities. For instance, a family room-like setting adjacent to the hotel's long rectangular lobby bar invites guests to relax on comfy couches and chairs, or play a game of shuffleboard or Scrabble on a giant magnetic wall board. Or you can step outside on the large patio and lounge by one of several fire pits, play a game of foosball, ping-pong, or cornhole, or swim in one of two pools.

While you could easily while away an entire weekend without leaving the hotel's grounds (there's also a spa, as well as the adjacent Sedona Golf Resort that winds around the red rocks), Sedona in late spring is all about exploring the natural surroundings. Translation: Unpack your hiking shoes and tackle nearby **Bell Rock's** 3.5-mile hiking trail that loops the base of the butte. Or head some four miles northeast to **Broken Arrow**, where a 3.6-mile round-trip trail gives walkers/hikers an up-close look at the spectacular red-rock cliffs and canyons of Munds Mountain Wilderness.

Bell Rock and Broken Arrow are among dozens of formations that

HILTON SEDONA COURTESY HILTON SEDONA; BELL ROCK: SHUTTERSTOCK; RUINS COURTESY OF PINK JEEP TOURS; OMLET COURTESY OF COFFEE POT; THE HUDSON COURTESY OF THE HUDSON



are easily accessible via trails that cover the spectrum of difficulty levels (though most — like Bell Rock and Broken Arrow — fall into the "easy-to-moderate" category). One thing to remember when hiking these trails during the warmer months: While Sedona's temperatures from late spring through early fall run five to 15 degrees cooler than Las Vegas, this is still the desert, so the ideal time for hiking is early morning and pre-sundown. And not just for safety reasons, but because the angle at which the sun strikes the buttes at both ends of the day yields fantastic (and Insta-worthy) backdrops.

The good news is there's much to do in and around Sedona during those off hours. Consider starting the day with breakfast at the **Coffee Pot** (coffeepotsedona.com), which lies in the shadows of the Coffee Pot rock formation. The old-fashioned, family-owned diner has been a favorite of locals and tourists for nearly three decades, with a menu highlighted by 101 (not a typo!) omelet creations. (Omelet #101? A peanut butter/jelly/banana version concocted in honor of you-know-who.)

A short drive from the Coffee Pot is Sedona's "Main Street." Known to locals as **Upper Sedona** (sedonamainstreet.com), this walkable outdoor district on both sides of State Route 89A has it all: a variety of shops, restaurants/cafés, galleries, museums, historical landmarks, sculptures, and multiple patios/courtyards from which you can enjoy a cup of gelato or some freshly popped popcorn while taking in a panoramic view of another striking (and selfie-friendly) sandstone butte that hugs the east side of the district.

"Main Street" is also where you'll find multiple tour companies (the most popular being Pink Jeep Tours) ready to take you on off-road and guided-hike adventures deep into northern Arizona's Verde Valley. Tours generally range from two hours to all day and explore everything from national forests to ancient ruins. Or perhaps your idea of "adventure" involves chasing spirits. About a 40-minute drive southwest of Sedona is Jerome (jerome.az.gov), a onetime copper-mining boomtown that's now known for being the "largest ghost town in America." The quaint city (pop. 455) packs a lot into a 550-acre footprint, from dozens of restaurants and shops (including the world's largest kaleidoscope store) to the Mine Museum and the Jerome Winery.

Back in Sedona, dinner options abound, but given the temperate evening weather that's common in late spring, now is the time to dine al fresco. Two of the better options are **Creekside American Bistro** (creeksidesedona.com), where a patio overlooks the trickling Oak Creek, and **The Hudson** (thehudsonsedona.com), which sits atop a hillside. Both provide stunning red-rock views, perfect for pre-dinner handcrafted cocktails and inspired twists on American cuisine.

As dusk gives way to darkness, gaze upward at the stars that illuminate the desert sky on clear nights. While this celestial show is on display year-round, it's most enjoyable from late May through September when no jacket is required. Come winter? Prepare to bundle up.









JUST CHILLIN' OUT

EXCEPT FOR TAKING a dip in the pool, all the outdoor activities that lure tourists to Sedona in the warmer months — hiking, biking, sightseeing, golfing, off-road adventuring, shopping, and dining — can be enjoyed even when winter rolls around. You just need to layer up, particularly after sundown, when temperatures from December through February can dip below freezing.

This explains why fireplaces are common in Sedona's finer resort properties, from the Hilton Sedona at Bell Rock to **L'Auberge de Sedona** (lauberge.com). Situated on the banks of the flowing Oak Creek and in the shadows of the majestic red rocks, L'Auberge is where nature, luxury, and romance intersect in

BETWEEN SEDONA AND PRESCOTT

RED ROCK CROSSING

On AZ 89A, just beyond the southern edge of Sedona, you'll see signs for Red Rock State Park. Make a left onto Red Rock Loop Road; just off that beautiful road, you'll find Red Rock Crossing. The Crescent Moon Picnic Area is a green and tranquil spot with several nice walking trails and a swimming hole called Red Rock Crossing. Your kids will have a ball splashing in Oak Creek while you enjoy the picture-postcard view of Courthouse Rock in the background.

TUZIGOOT

Stick with AZ 89A, south through the town of Clarkdale, where you can check out Tuzigoot National Monument, an interesting pueblo ruin atop a hill just above the town. The pueblo was built by the Sinagua people, who thrived in this arid region for nearly 10 centuries. Tuzigoot, built in AD 1125, was a communal home, occupied by a clan of peaceful Sinagua farmers for close to 300 years.

JEROME

Beyond Clarkdale, AZ 89A climbs a series of switchbacks to Jerome. This mostly abandoned mining town is perched high on the side of Mingus Mountain. In the early 1900s, as many as 15,000 people lived and worked in Jerome, once known as the "Wickedest Town in the West."

Richard Quinn

a resort that features 62 cottages (many of which include wood-burning fireplaces), 21 lodge-style guest rooms, a nature spa, and three restaurants.

Wherever you choose to stay, spending a winter weekend in northern Arizona is still mostly about outdoor exploration. While Sedona does get an occasional dusting of snow that adds another layer of beauty to its sandstone bluffs and canyon walls, most of the white powder (and the fun that it brings) lands in Flagstaff, where snow falls at an average of just over 100 inches annually. If you happen to be a winter-sports enthusiast, consider a trip up to the **Arizona Snowbowl** (snowbowl.ski), an alpine ski resort on the San Francisco Peaks a few miles north of Flagstaff.

Prefer a little more warmth? Drive a half-hour west to Clarkdale and hop aboard a fully restored vintage train that gives passengers close-up views of the area's natural habitat during a four-hour, 20-mile journey along the Verde Canyon Railroad. Another option for warmth: the **Verde Valley Wine Trail** (vvwinetrail.com), which encompasses 23 wineries spread across four northern Arizona regions: Sedona, Page Springs, Cottonwood, and Jerome/Clarkdale. The most walkable "trail" is Cottonwood, which sits between Sedona and Jerome, and features six tasting rooms clustered within one-tenth of a mile.

Winter is the ideal time for cozying up to fine dining, and Sedona is home to a range of such restaurants across a variety of cuisine types. That includes **Mariposa Latin Inspired Grill** (mariposasedona.com), which serves South American dishes in a dining room where floor-to-ceiling windows provide every table with a panoramic view of the red rocks. Less than two miles away, **Elote Cafe** (elotecafe.com) consistently draws large crowds with a menu that blends southern Mexico with the American southwest (not to mention top-shelf tequila and mescal).

In a more carnivorous mood? Try **Steakhouse 89** (steakhouse89.com), where cuts of beef are as flavorful as they are tender — so tender that they're brought to the table sans steak knife. If you ask for that usually vital tool, the waitstaff will insist that a butter knife will suffice. You'll be skeptical — until you make that first cut.

It's the same lesson I learned with Sedona: Sometimes, you *can* believe the hype.

ROOM COURTESY OF L'AUBERGE DE SEDONA; LAMB COURTESY OF ELOTE CAFE; SKIERS COURTESY OF THE ARIZONA SNOWBOWL







Clockwise from top right: A room at L'Auberge de Sedona, Elote Cafe's lamb adobo; skiing at the Arizona Snowbowl



PRESCOTT

FROM WHISKEY TO WATER SPORTS

Where desert meets forest, Prescott is North Central Arizona's sleeper destination

By Erin Ryan

Flagstaff and Sedona are the reigning escapes for Las Vegans and Phoenicians hunting cooler weather and quainter culture. But there's a high-desert gem tucked into a national forest that is missed by the interstates, keeping it much lower-key: Prescott. It's both a college town and a retirement haven, full of frontier history and hipster-friendly development. And anyone who loves playing outside will find it rich with rugged adventures.

LIVING HISTORY

IN 1900, A FIRE DEMOLISHED an entire city block in Prescott. It was rebuilt with an absurd number of saloons, about 40 at the high point, and **Whiskey Row** remains a nightlife hub. The oldest frontier bar in Arizona, **The Palace** (whiskeyrowpalace.com) served Doc Holliday and the Earps at a 24-foot oak bar famously pulled into the street during the blaze so folks could keep drinking. Belly up to that bar today, then hop the Row's other drinkeries, eateries, and curiosities for a buffet of Southwest goods and hospitality. Because souvenir photos in Old West getups are better post-whiskey.

To complete the look, there's plenty of vibrantly refurbished history throughout the town. The Hassayampa Inn is a shining example. Restored to its 1927 glory, the **Hassayampa Inn** (hassayampainn.com) is a functioning museum. Built for max glamour to attract traffic from Route 66, the specimen of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture is rich with period details — hand-painted wood ceilings, embossed copper paneling, Art Deco flourishes, a McPhail piano and rare Otis elevator said to have ferried the horse of Hollywood's first cowboy Tom Mix. The historic inn's name is Apache for "the river that loses itself and then reappears," and it's easy to lose yourself in this atmospheric feast.





Top, Hassayampa Inn; bottom, The Palace bar and Whiskey Row

HOTEL COURTESY OF HASSAYAMPA INN; BAR COURTESY OF THE PALACE; WHISKEY ROW COURTESY OF VISIT PRESCOTT - OFFICE OF TOURISM



OUTDOORS

PRESCOTT IS SO FLUSH WITH trails that Trailforks' map paints the city's perimeter like an elegant circulatory system of black, blue, and green squiggles. Terrain ranges from dirt roads through desert scrub to singletrack under giant pines, but the minimal effort-maximal payoff nexus has got to be the **Peavine Trail.** The former Santa Fe Railway line (part of the national Rails-to-Trails project) offers six miles of easy hiking, biking, or horseback riding along Watson Lake and the billion-year-old rocks of Granite Dells. It's all blue sky, red earth, sculpted boulders and wildlife, from desert cottontails to golden *linanthus* blossoms. That's quite the package for a $3 parking fee.

Top, biker on the Peavine Trail; below, Page Springs Cellars

Looking for something literally cooler? For water sports and shoreline lounging, try Prescott's collection of beautiful lakes. Willow and Watson are large and close to downtown, while Goldwater and Lynx crank the scenic firepower. Don't have time for an epic lake crawl? Bet on **Lynx Lake**. Backdropped by the

CULINARY AND CULTURE

WHEN IT COMES TO FOOD and drink, Prescott certainly has its share of artisanal this and hipster that, but the cafés and restaurants go above and beyond. For instance, the **Raven Café (ravencafe.com)** isn't just about great coffee and craft beer, local art and music, cauliflower tacos and roasted chile bread pudding. Raven does public service, too, whether that means being the first 3-star Certified Green Restaurant in the county or advising tourists how to pronounce the city's name on a sandwich board: "It's Prescott, like brisket." Tucked into the historic downtown area, the café hosts trivia on Mondays and movie nights on Tuesdays, and offers half-price rosé each Wednesday "because vodka all day is a horrible idea." It's a perfect base for game-planning your trip or just soaking in authentic #preskitt vibes.

But further on lies an entire region of adult liquid refreshment. From the Courthouse Plaza in the heart of Prescott, it's only a 40-mile drive to the Verde Valley, an Arizona wine region on the rise. Volcanic leftovers and river drainage mean super-soil that's comparable to what you'll find in France's Southern Rhône goldmine. But the desert conditions push the vines harder, resulting in intensely flavored grapes. More than 100 varietals grow in a tight chunk of map, so ambitious tasters can hit many worthy dots in one afternoon. On a bend near the confluence of Oak Creek and the Verde River, **Alcantara Vineyards** (alcantara-vineyard.com) is a family operation making award-winning reds and whites in a picturesque setting full of rescued pets. Follow the creek north and you'll find **Page Springs Cellars** (pagespringscellars.com), where you can enjoy yoga or a massage and a game of bocce along with sips of its latest sustainably



Bradshaw Mountains on Forest Service land, it's less crowded and brings the amenities. While swimming isn't on the menu, you can rent boats, fish, picnic, even pan for gold along a creek. And the **Lynx Lake Café** (lynxlakestore.com) serves up German-American tastiness four days a week (country-fried schnitzel is a thing, but don't miss the ricotta-buttermilk Lake Cakes with lemon and blueberry).

There are other ways to indulge the senses as well. Locals will tell you Prescott has more than four seasons thanks to September's "second spring," when grasslands and riverbanks pop with native plants. You might see masses of goldeneye and cosmos, or sweet little clusters of prairie zinnia, mariposa lily, and columbine. "It's way different than a spring bloom but pretty entrancing," says Jeff Schalau, director of University of Arizona's Cooperative Extension in Yavapai County. Schalau explains that the phenomenon is driven by a long monsoon season, and the heavier the rain the better the color (the Extension's database lists month-specific wildflowers with photos and botany details, if you want to log sightings). With average daytime temps in the 80s, September is an extra-lovely time to visit.

PEAVINE TRAIL COURTESY OF VISIT PRESCOTT – OFFICE OF TOURISM; PAGE SPRINGS: COURTESY PAGE SPRINGS; ARCOSANTI: COURTESY ARCOSANTI



ARCOSANTI: CITY OF POSSIBILITIES





Built along a jumbled, rocky canyon in the scrubby high desert between Flagstaff and Phoenix, the experimental town of Arcosanti is a place of pilgrimage for people who love architecture and design. Located at the end of a gravel road off I-17, the organically growing settlement is the brainchild of the late Paolo Soleri, an Italian-American architect and founder of Arcology, a school of thought that seeks to unite the disciplines of architecture with ecology. The goal? To find efficient alternatives to urban sprawl with an eye to city planning that reduces the consumption of materials and energy while increasing quality of life. Admirable ideals, to be sure.

Arcosanti was founded in 1970 with a forecast of eventually housing thousands, and it has grown into a mind-bending mix of form and function — a mash-up of Euclidean geometry, de-constructed Palladian formalism, and organic futurism. Notable structures include the open-ended Romanesque half-dome of the Ceramics Apse and the soaring Vaults. Altogether, it looks a bit like a sci-fi Italian hilltop town, fitting to its visionary founder. And then there are the bells. Abstract bronze and ceramic wind chimes are a specialty of Soleri's successors, and they spin and chime throughout the development.

Nearly five decades after Arcosanti was begun, it currently houses some 60 people (though the original vision is still in play). But a few hundred additional people reside their every year, often staying for six-week, hands-on workshops that let them join in the ongoing construction. Shovels and wheelbarrows are educational supplies in these residencies as much as pen and paper.

Can't stay that long? There are also lodging options for a night or two, ranging from shared dormitories to private rooms. Arcosanti offers daily one-hour tours, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., with a break for noontime lunch. Longer, more in-depth guided experiences are available by reservation, as well. There's also a sunny, high-ceilinged cafe offering veggie-forward buffet meals and a gift shop. Frequent musical events are held at Arcosanti, including the immersive FORM festival this month with eclectic headliners like Florence + The Machine, Bonobo, and Khruangbin.

This is all interesting enough, of course, but there are a couple of caveats to consider before visiting Arcosanti. First, its terrain is not the best for people with mobility issues, and families might find that it's not the best destination for fussy young ones. Second, there's a social-political issue: In 2017, at the beginning of the #metoo movement, Soleri's daughter Daniela made a claim that he sexually assaulted her in her youth. The foundation that oversees Arcosanti acknowledged her claim, as well as the fact that her father was a visionary and difficult leader who strayed into abusive narcissism like so many other leaders of movements. Nonetheless, he's six years gone, and Arcosanti still grows.

If you don't have time to visit Arcosanti proper, its mother site, Cosanti, is open daily in Scottsdale and offers scads of bells and jewelry for collectors. In addition, the Soleri Bridge and Plaza is the architectural centerpiece of the bustling Western city's vibrant urban core. It's great for "Wish You Were Here" photos and selfies. ***(arcosanti.org)*** **Greg Thilmont**

PHOENIX

BRIGHT AND BLAZING PHOENIX

This desert metropolis can make you dizzy with options. Here's our must-do list

By Greg Thilmont

The Valley of the Sun is a vacation wonderland. It's also huge! Filled with palm tree-lined resorts and charming boutique hotels, Phoenix and its surrounding cities make for one of the most fantastic travel destinations in the U.S. We could go on for pages about the top amenities and hot spots in this metro area of some 5 million residents. Instead, let's hit the best of the best — my latest favorites in the area's culture and cuisine.



SAMPLE, SAVOR, REPEAT

FOR GASTRONOMES, PHOENIX IS a woefully underrated destination, and not just for its restaurants. As much of a cultural experience as it is a foodie mecca, the charming **wv**(queencreekolivemill.com) makes for quintessential agri-tourism. Take a tour to learn how olive oil is pressed and bottled, then order lunch from a menu filled with charcuterie, cheeses, salads, panini, pizzas, and gelati. The grassy, shaded backyard is made for family picnics. There's also an impressive gourmet retail shop. Be sure to plan for a full day, though, as it's a 50-minute drive from central Phoenix to the mill.

For heartier fare with flavor to spare, fuel up in the morning for Sonoran Desert adventures at the high-energy **Hash Kitchen** (hashkitchen.com), a local family of daytime eateries. Eggs are the specialty, from scrambles and Benedicts to frittatas, and feature ingredients like chipotle-braised chicken breast, house-smoked salmon, herb-whipped goat cheese, caramelized onions, and fresh broccolini. The extensive bloody mary bar is a head-turner, too.

Arizona benefits from a great deal of cultural influence from Mexico, and that naturally makes for top-notch quesadillas, burritos, enchiladas, and more. For a modern take on all things tortilla, take a table at the hopping **Blanco Tacos & Tequila** (blancotacostequila.com) in the fashionable Biltmore neighborhood. Savory upscale fillings include braised short rib, chipotle shrimp, and grilled mahi-mahi.

It isn't just the food that's spicy. No doubt about it, it gets blazing hot in Phoenix and Scottsdale — even in May. Take refuge from the radiant Sonoran Desert in tropical-island style at the two **Hula's Modern Tikis** (hulasmoderntiki.com). Inside the attractive and sociable lounges that blend mid-century modernism with tiki culture, you can chill out with a potent Mai Tai, Zombie, or shared Scorpion Bowl.

If you're more of a worshipper of the grape, you're in a bunch of luck. Arizona has a burgeoning wine industry, with grapevines now filling farmland and orchards in numerous parts of the Copper State. So sip on some rocking varietals at the new **Merkin Vineyards Wine Bar** in Old Town Scottsdale (merkinvineyards.org). It's owned by musician and wine baron Maynard James Keenan, who fronts the renowned band Tool — a perfect example of the Phoenix area's multi-sensory appeal. Cheers!





Left, Hula's in Scottsdale; top: art installation at First Friday; the Musical Instrument Museum



CULTURE AND CURIOSITIES

LOCATED IN THE HEART OF Downtown Phoenix, the **Arizona Science Center** (azscience.org) is a must-visit space for lifelong learners of all ages. This summer, get face-to-face with ancient cultures with the excellent Mummies of the World exhibit, which features preserved folks from Ancient Egypt, Europe, South America, and beyond. Maybe the timelessness of music is more your tune. If you love good sounds, take in the audio-visual extravaganza that is the super-cool **Musical Instrument Museum** — or MIM, as the cool kids of Arizona say (mim.org). The collection is diverse and even a bit kooky, from the world's largest playable sousaphone to some of Tito Puente's cowbells and Johnny Cash's guitars.

Phoenix offers plenty to feast on for the eyes as well. Situated in one of Phoenix's oldest neighborhoods, the funky and energetic **Roosevelt Row Arts District** (rooseveltrow.org) has grown recently into a string of independent galleries and local eateries just north of Downtown's gleaming skyscrapers. With shady streets, it's an ideal avenue for strolling on feet or exploring with bike shares or electric scooters. Even better, it's on the Valley Metro Train route for easy access.

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The Guide

ART

THROUGH MAY 5

National Geographic Presents Earth Explorers

Six themed and immersive environments teach numerous ways that technology and ingenuity help make and document explorers' discoveries. **9A–5P, free with paid admission or membership. Origen Museum at Springs Preserve, *springspreserve.org***

THROUGH MAY 10

MFA Midway — Peter Mengert

Mengert is a current MFA student in UNLV's world-renowned arts program. **Free. Grant Hall Gallery at UNLV, *unlv.edu***

THROUGH AUG. 3

Sorry for the Mess

Artists Justin Favela and Ramiro Gomez come together for the first time in an exhibition of artwork about labor, childhood memories, and life in Las Vegas. **Free. Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art, *unlv.edu***

MAY 3–MAY 31

BFA in Studio Art Exhibition Opening

The opening and exhibit are open to the public. **Free. Donna Beam Gallery at UNLV, *unlv.edu***

MUSIC

MAY 5

Don Ho Polynesian Revue featuring Dean Perry

Legendary singer Ho became synonymous with aloha style. Hear all the hits of Ho and other popular breezy island songs as Hawaiian-born entertainer Dean Perry honors them. **2P, free. Main Theater at Clark County Library, *lvccld.org***

MAY 5

UNLV Chamber Orchestra

The orchestra will perform various works. **7:30P, free. Lee and Thomas Beam Music Center at UNLV, *unlv.edu***

MAY 7–8

UNLV Choral Ensembles: 30th Annual Elementary Choral Music Festival

This annual event features outstanding elementary school choirs from around the valley. **9:45A, free. Artemus W. Ham Concert Hall at UNLV, *unlv.edu***

MAY 8

Jazz Vocal Ensemble and Jazzmin'

Enjoy the talented musicians from UNLV's Jazz Studies program. **7P, free. Main Theater at Clark County Library, *lvccld.org***

MAY 8

Apocalyptica Plays Metallica by Four Cellos Tour

In celebration of their 20th anniversary, the group tours behind their new live album featuring the legendary metal band's hits. **7:30P, $35–$50. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center, *thesmithcenter.com***

MAY 9–10

Grace Kelly: Grace's Joy Party

The jazz prodigy has performed at Carnegie Hall and in the house band for The Late Show with Stephen Colbert. **7P, $39–$59. Myron's Cabaret Jazz at The Smith Center, *the smithcenter.com***

MAY 11

Liberace Lives!

Two of Las Vegas' greatest contemporary pianists and Liberace's musical successors, Philip Fortenberry and Spencer Baker, celebrate his work. **3p, free. Performing Arts Center at Windmill Library, *lvccld.org***

MAY 11

Brews & Blues Festival

Enjoy a sampling of fine beers and enjoy the music of the Shari Puorto Band, Shanda & The Howlers, and the Chris Tofield Band. 21+ only. **4P, $35–$75, Designated drivers, $15. Discounts available for Springs Preserve members based on membership level. Springs Preserve, *springspreserve.org***

MAY 11

Las Vegas Philharmonic Season Finale — Ode to Joy

The orchestra will be presenting Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E Minor and Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D Minor. **7:30P; pre-concert conversation, 6:30P, $30–$109. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center, *thesmithcenter.com***

MAY 12

Mother's Day Spring Concert with the Las Vegas Classical Guitar Ensemble

Featuring a selection of spring-themed music from the Renaissance through the 21st century. **2P, free. Main Theater at Clark County Library, *lvccld.org***

MAY 16

Shapiro Project: International Jazz Day Celebration & "Planet X" Release Party

The Las Vegas quartet will be playing contemporary jazz fusion. **7P, Free with reservation. Myron's Cabaret Jazz at The Smith Center, *the smithcenter.com***

MAY 17

The Jazz Eclectic Concert Series Vol. 6

This entry in the series is headlined by acclaimed pianist, composer, and producer Billy Childs. **7P, $29–$39. Myron's Cabaret Jazz at The Smith Center, *the smithcenter.com***

MAY 18

Melissa Manchester

The singer-songwriter performs her hits as well as songs from her new album, The Fellas. **6P and 8:30P, $39–$59. Myron's Cabaret Jazz at The Smith Center, *thesmithcenter.com***

MAY 18

Johnny Mathis: The Voice of Romance Tour

The iconic vocalist performs hits and standards spanning a six-decade career. **7:30P, $33–$175. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center, *thesmithcenter.com***

MAY 18–19

Opera in Bed

A fanciful concert of opera selections that take place in the bedroom. Includes highlights from Othello, Passion, La Traviata, and many more. **Sat 8P; Sun 2P, $20. Cockroach Theatre, *cockroachtheatre.com***

MAY 24

Desert Chorale: Annual Memorial Day Concert

Enjoy a rousing concert by the 60-voice, non-profit, community chorus with members from all walks of life all over the Vegas Valley. **7:30P, free. Artemus W. Ham Concert Hall at UNLV, *unlv.edu***

MAY 25

The Greatest R&B Songs Ever Written Starring Lannie Counts

A tribute to the music of Stevie Wonder, Bobby Womack, Peabo Bryson, and many more. **7P, $20. Starbright Theatre at Sun City Summerlin, *scsai.com***

MAY 31–JUNE 1

Steve Tyrell

The popular vocalist is touring behind his new release, A Song for You and the expanded re-release of his 2008 album Back to Bacharach. **7P, $39–$59. Myron's Cabaret Jazz at The Smith Center, *thesmithcenter.com***

JUNE 2

Uli Geissendoerfer Presents The Jazz Club

This installment in the series features Toscha Comeaux, Gary Fowler, Charles McNeal, Julian Tanaka, Angelo Stokes and Jeff Davis. **3P, $25–$45. Myron's Cabaret Jazz at The Smith Center, *thesmithcenter.com***

JUNE 7–8

Herb Alpert & Lani Hall

The legendary trumpet player and his award-winning vocalist wife present an evening of their greatest hits. **7P, $45–$69. Myron's Cabaret Jazz at The Smith Center, *thesmithcenter.com***

THEATER & COMEDY

THROUGH MAY 5

Our Town

Thornton Wilder's classic is performed in an immersive setting. **Thu–Sat 7:30P; Sun 4:30P, $35–$45. Majestic Repertory Theatre, *majesticrepertory.com***

MAY 3–12

Legally Blonde

Based on the blockbuster movie, this fabulously fun musical adaptation follows the adventures of west coast sorority girl, Elle Woods. **Fri–Sat**



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7:30P; Sun 2P, $28. Judy Bayley Theatre at UNLV, *unlv.edu*

MAY 3–19

A Doll's House, Part 2

An intriguing take on the climax of Ibsen's classic play, the story picks up after Nora's abrupt departure. Why has she returned? **Thu–Sat 8P; Sat 2P; Sun 2P, $22–$25. Las Vegas Little Theatre *lvlt.org***

MAY 17

Comedy Sportz Improv Comedy Show

Enoy the internationally-acclaimed and hilarious improvisational comedy group featuring two teams of professionals who compete for laughs, points, and audience support. **6P, free. Jewel Box Theater at Clark County Library, *lvccld.org***

MAY 17

Spring Mariachi Extravaganza End of Year Concert

This concert features the best and the brightest student mariachi ensembles from the Clark County School District's middle and high schools. **7P, free. Main Theater at Clark County Library, *lvccld.org***

MAY 18

Comedy so Good You'll Cry MAYDAY

The Las Vegas Improvisational Players is a family-friendly show with musical and short-form improv all made up by suggestions from you, the audience. **7P, $10; $5 kids/military. Show Creators Studio, 4455 W. Sunset Road, *lvimprov.com***

MAY 19

Othello

The Bard at the Bar series returns with a special abridged edition of the classic Shakespeare tragedy. **7P, $10. Velveteen Rabbit, 1218 S. Main St., *velveteenrabbitlv.com***

MAY 23–JUNE 16

The Legend of Georgia McBride

A new comedy about Elvis, drag queens, and finding your own voice. **Thu–Sat 8P; Sun 5P, $15–$25. Majestic repertory Theatre, *majestic repertory.com***

JUNE 4–9

Fiddler on the Roof

The timeless story of Tevye the Milkman, his family, and his friends as they live, love, and weather life's changes. **Tue–Sun 7:30P; Sat–Sun 2P, $29–$137. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center, *thesmithcenter.com***

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DANCE

MAY 3–5

Alice (in Wonderland): Nevada Ballet Theatre

This journey through Lewis Carroll's classic incorporates dance styles classic and modern. **Fri–Sat 7:30P; Sat–Sun 2P, $29–$139. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center, *thesmithcenter.com***

MAY 11–19

Hollywood Lights

A tap tribute to many of the greatest hits of the silver screen. **Sat 7P; Sun 2P, $15. Starbright Theatre at Sun City Summerlin, *scsai.com***

MAY 14

Academy of Nevada Ballet Theatre: An Evening of Dance

Pre-professional dance program students perform routines from many different styles. **6P, $22–$59. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center,** ***thesmithcenter.com***

MAY 17

Academy of Nevada Ballet Theatre: A Night at the Ballet

The students will be performing excerpts from Copelia, Don Quixote, and The Sleeping Beauty. Includes guest appearances from NBT company dancers. **7P, $22–$59. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center,** ***thesmithcenter.com***

MAY 25

Every Beat of My Heart

Bunker Dance Center, ranging in age from 3-18 years, performs a wide variety of dances spanning many genres. **9A, 12:30P, and 4P, $15. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center,** ***thesmithcenter.com***

MAY 31

Derek Hough: Live!

The multi-year winner of Dancing With The Stars is on his first solo tour. **7:30, $39.50–$99.50; VIP packages available. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center,** ***the smithcenter.com***

▼

FAMILY & FESTIVALS

MAY 3

First Friday

Join in the Las Vegas community event that brings together local artists, actors, vendors, food trucks, and bars in a festival-like atmosphere. **5–11P, free. 1025 S. First St.,** ***fffIv.org***

MAY 12

2019 Nevada High School Musical Theater Awards

A celebration of youth theater from across the state. **2P, $10. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center,** ***thesmithcenter.com***

MAY 18

Ice Cream Festival

Enjoy all-you-can-eat ice cream of all kinds! Includes live entertainment, face painting, storytelling, superhero training, carnival games, crafts, an ice-cream-eating contest, and more. **10A–4P, $10 adults, $8 children 3–17, Free for 2 and under. Discounts available for Springs Preserve members based on membership level. Springs Preserve,** ***springspreserve.org***

MAY 26–SEP 3

Dinosaurs Unearthed

This event features life-size, life-like animatronic dinosaurs, full-scale skeletons, and fossils from around the world. **9A-5P, Free with Springs Preserve membership or with paid admission. Springs Preserve,** ***springspreserve.org***

JUNE 2

Kidz Bop

An interactive experience for the whole family, featuring some of today's biggest hits sung by kids for kids. **4P, $29.95–$59.95. Reynolds Hall at The Smith Center,** ***the smithcenter.com***



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END NOTE

RANDOM ACCESS MEMORY

Droll, odd, poignant, and awkward moments from the many Mays of Las Vegas history

BY ***Chip Mosher***

MAY 1, 1997: Following Ellen DeGeneres' announcement on her sitcom, *Ellen*, that she is a lesbian, local media report on "the many coming-out parties around the Vegas valley."

MAY 2, 1997: Fifty-one "Jesus Crusaders," with Christ Is the Answer Crusade, are arrested as they parade down Casino Center carrying a 10-foot-high wooden cross without a permit.

MAY 3, 1929: The first nonstop airplane flight from Reno to Las Vegas is made in two hours and 45 minutes.

MAY 4, 1973: After losing her Procter & Gamble Ivory Snow contract to appear on its soap box as a wholesome young mother hugging a happy baby, model-turned-porn-star Marilyn Chambers, 21, says in the news, "I think it's prudish on their part to overreact like that." Her first adult film, *Behind the Green Door*, in which she performs sex acts with four men while hanging from a trapeze, is currently playing Downtown at the 4-Star Theater.

MAY 5, 1900: The population of Las Vegas is estimated at 30, give or take a soul or two.

MAY 6, 2004: Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kansas, announces on its website that it plans to picket "the sodomite whorehouse masquerading as the Las Vegas Academy for producing *The Laramie Project*," a play about the beating death of gay Wyoming college student Matthew Shepard.

MAY 7, 1997: Beleaguered UNLV President Carol Harter has released her own evaluation of herself, which reports she is doing a great job.

MAY 8, 1975: Porn star Marilyn Chambers is starring in the comedy *The Mind with a Dirty Man* at the Union Plaza Hotel.

MAY 9, 1940: Representing the State of Confusion and running on the Surprise Party ticket, comedienne Gracie Allen is the first presidential candidate to visit our town this election year.

MAY 10, 1997: Ten days after Ellen DeGeneres comes out publicly on her show, more than 10,000 people, a record crowd, attend the 14th annual Lesbian and Gay Pride Festival at Sunset Park.

MAY 11, 1979: Our flummoxed mayor hastily proposes a new city ordinance to shut down a theatrical play, *The Sex Surrogate*, at the Jolly Trolley Casino on the Strip. This one-woman show features a nude Marilyn Chambers, 27, onstage dispensing graphic sexual advice to audience members.

MAY 12, 2009: Presumably some locals are still mourning the death, a month prior, of former Vegas resident Marilyn Chambers, 56, who passed away in Santa Clarita, California. Her epitaph could have read: She definitely did it her way.

MAY 13, 1935: 180,000 black bass are shipped from Utah to stock the new lake formed by Boulder Dam.

MAY 14, 1998: At 82, consummate Vegas entertainer Frank Sinatra, who also did it his way, dies in Los Angeles.

MAY 15, 1954: On our city's 49th birthday, "actor and would-be gender changeling," John "Bunny" Breckenridge, 50, who is planning an upcoming sex-change operation in Denmark, arrives here "in a Cadillac convertible that matches the gray in his snappy sports jacket."

MAY 16, 1967: Students at Culley Elementary School have successfully launched a live mouse (a "mousetronaut") in the nose cone of a small rocket.

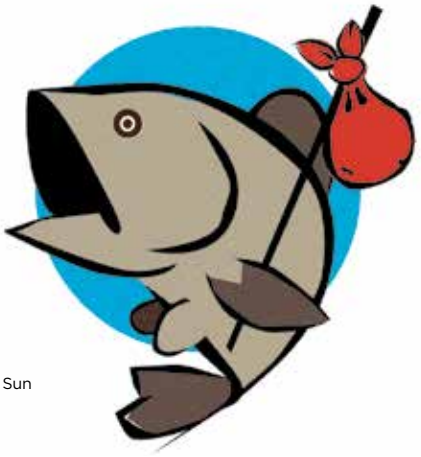
MAY 17, 1967: Two Marines, Cpl. Robert Green and Pfc. George Montgomery, have been killed this month in Vietnam, bringing the total to 11 local young men killed there this year.

MAY 18, 1922: District Attorney Harley Harmon says he has the names of Ku Klux Klan members residing in Southern Nevada.

MAY 19, 1988: Accused of bilking more than $1 million from followers in a scam using "biblical scriptures," Dove Ministries Pastor Duke DuVall is indicted by a grand jury.

MAY 20, 1930: With federal funds for Boulder Dam headed our way, area citizens create a vigilance committee to deal with the predictable influx of "fly-by-nights, ex-jailbirds, and real-estate schemers."

MAY 21, 1949: The Roxie Club on Boulder Highway, "that little retreat in the cottonwoods where unattached males make nightly trips to visit the hostesses. or waitresses. or whatever they are called," is being shut down.



MAY 22, 1929: A teacher-pupil romance a year ago results in marriage when Raby Newton, "a teacher who has the affections of the young people of Las Vegas High School," marries his former student, Margaret Moffat.

MAY 23, 1947: *Suddenly It's Spring*, starring Paulette Goddard, is at the El Portal Theater on Fremont Street.

MAY 24, 1928: Twenty-four seniors, a record number, graduate from Las Vegas High.

MAY 25, 1906: A newspaper ad promises to "sweeten and cleanse your system effectually, when bilious or constipated, with Syrup of Figs."

MAY 26, 1976: Ronald Reagan, at the Sahara Hotel, says, "Americans are hungry for a spiritual revival. If we get Washington out of the classroom, we might get God back in."

MAY 27, 1917: Sheriff Sam Gay arrests Rodric Loring on "the charge of insanity for having queer hallucinations about German flying machines coming after him."

MAY 28, 1958: Billed as "the Anatomic Bomb," burlesque stripper Lili St. Cyr is appearing at the El Rancho Vegas.

MAY 29, 1941: "Sneaking ghouls too depraved to be described enter Woodlawn Cemetery and destroy the Memorial Day floral decorations on graves of veterans, overturning headstones, and tearing American flags into unsightly rags."

MAY 30, 1930: The Athletic Club sponsors a Memorial Day baseball game "that the colored boys win against the white team, 4-1."

MAY 31, 1994: Two pairs of "urbanized" peregrine falcons live here, one pair on a ledge at the Aladdin Hotel, the other atop the Las Vegas Hilton.

Sources: Las Vegas Age; Las Vegas Morning Tribune; Las Vegas Review-Journal; Las Vegas Sun

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