

TRAVEL

36 Hours in Houston

36 Hours

By DENNY LEE MAY 6, 2010

A SNARL of superhighways and skyscrapers, Houston is easily dismissed as a corporate campus — home to Fortune 500 giants like Halliburton and Waste Management and a company formerly known as Enron (currently known as Enron Creditors Recovery Corporation). And the view from an airplane isn't exactly inviting: a flat and featureless plain of generic towers sprawling into the horizon. But in recent years, this Texas megalopolis has been inching back to its urban core. Cool art galleries have sprung up in once blighted neighborhoods. Midcentury modern buildings have been saved and restored. And former factories have been turned into buzzing restaurants and bars. Yes, oil money still reigns supreme, but it now competes with culture.

Friday

5:30 p.m.

1) PARK IT DOWNTOWN

Houston may be a sea of office towers, but this subtropical city is also

8
ARTICLES
REMAINING

Stay informed & entertained.

[SUBSCRIBE NOW](#)

heart of the city's still sleepy downtown. Opened in 2008, the park serves as a true public space; elderly couples stroll around the artificial lake as toddlers roll down grassy knolls. For sunset cocktails, follow the area's young professionals to the Grove (1611 Lamar Street; 713-337-7321; thegrovehouston.com), a modern restaurant inside the park, which offers treehouse-like views of the skyline.

8 p.m.

2) GULF OF TEX-MEX

The city's young chefs are working overtime to step out of the shadow of Texas barbecue. Among the most feted these days is Bryan Caswell, the chef and owner of Reef (2600 Travis Street; 713-526-8282; reefhouston.com), a seafood restaurant with a Southern twist. Housed in a former car dealership with soaring windows and ceilings, the restaurant creates a dramatic space for winning dishes like roasted grouper with corn pudding and grilled peach (\$25). On a recent evening the dining room was humming with an eclectic crowd that included men in white suits eating ceviche, couples on dates and well-dressed families celebrating birthdays.

10 p.m.

3) SLICE OF AUSTIN

Sports bars and mega-clubs fuel much of the city's night life, but a clutch of down-to-earth bars can be found along the tree-lined streets of Montrose. Poison Girl (1641 Westheimer Road; 713-527-9929; myspace.com/poisongirlbar) has pinball machines, a long shelf of whiskeys and a dirt-packed backyard jammed with 20-somethings in vintage Wranglers and Keds. Down the street is Anvil Bar and Refuge (1424 Westheimer Road; 713-523-1622; anvilhouston.com), which styles itself as a classic cocktail bar, though it can feel like a meat market on weekends. A handful of gay bars are also nearby, including the oldie but still rowdy 611 Hyde Park Pub (611 Hyde Park Boulevard; 713-526-7070).

Saturday

11 a.m.

8
ARTICLES
REMAINING

Stay informed & entertained.

SUBSCRIBE NOW

With all those petrodollars sloshing around, it's no surprise that contemporary art has an eager benefactor in Houston. The grande dame is still the **Menil Collection** (1515 Sul Ross Street; 713-525-9400; menil.org), opened in 1987 to house the collection of Dominique de Menil, an heiress to an oil-equipment fortune. Blue-chip galleries include the Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery (4520 Blossom Street; 713-863-7097; dbhbg.com) and the Sicardi Gallery (2246 Richmond Avenue; 713-529-1313; www.sicardi.com). Scrappy artists, meanwhile, have carved out studios in downtown warehouses. Some of their work can be seen at the Station Museum (1502 Alabama Street; 713-529-6900; stationmuseum.com), which showcases emerging artists inside a big metal shed.

1:30 p.m.

5) GLOBAL GRILLS

While the city's sizable Vietnamese community is now scattered, traces of Little Saigon still remain in Midtown, a mixed-use neighborhood dotted with banh mi joints. A retro-favorite is Cali Sandwich (3030 Travis Street; 713-520-0710), a ho-hum cafeteria with 1970s-style vertical blinds and prices to match: the freshly made sandwiches, including the barbecue pork, are \$2.31. If you're hankering for genuine Texas BBQ, drive north to Pizzitola's Bar-B-Cue (1703 Shepherd Drive; 713-227-2283; pizzitolas.com). It may not be as packed as Goode's barbecue empire, but Pizzitola's is the real deal, judging by the wood pits that have been charring ribs out back for 70-plus years.

3 p.m.

6) POTTERY TO PINBALL

Malls rule in Houston — the biggest, the Galleria, offers 2.4 million square feet of global brand names. Off-brand shopping requires a bit more driving. For one-of-the-kind home furnishings, head to Found (2422 Bartlett Street No. 5; 713-522-9191; foundforthehome.com), which takes old industrial objects like hay feeders and turns them into architectural objets. Sloan/Hall (2620 Westheimer Road; 713-942-0202; sloanhall.com) carries an odd array of art books, bath products and pottery —

8

ARTICLES
REMAINING

Stay informed & entertained.

SUBSCRIBE NOW

Flashback Funtiques (1627 Westheimer Road; 713-522-7900; flashbackfuntiques.net) is a trove of Lone Star Americana, like old pinball machines and gas pumps.

7:30 p.m.

7) SOUTHWESTERN REDUX

Robert Del Grande is considered culinary royalty here, credited with pioneering Southwestern cuisine in the 1980s. So when his restaurant of 29 years, Café Annie, closed last year, there was a collective grumble. The hunger was soon sated: he opened RDG + Bar Annie (1800 Post Oak Boulevard; 713-840-1111; rdgbarannie.com), a multiplex of a restaurant with bars, lounges and dining rooms that attracts a glamorous crowd that seems to favor short party dresses, shiny handbags and aggressive amounts of gold. The menu is similarly bold and brash, with dishes like lobster meatballs with a rémoulade sauce (\$16) and grilled rib-eye steak with a smoked Cheddar sauce (\$40).

10 p.m.

8) TWO DIVES

A party corridor has formed along Washington Avenue. A favorite among nearby bobos is Max's Wine Dive (4720 Washington Avenue; 713-880-8737; maxswinedive.com), with its long, inexpensive wine list. Seeking a wackier cast of characters? Night owls find the unmarked door that leads to Marfreless (2006 Peden Street; 713-528-0083; marfrelessbar.com), a dingy watering hole with faded carpeting and dark corners popular with canoodling couples.

Sunday

10 a.m.

9) BOTTOMLESS MIMOSAS

A cafe tucked inside a nursery may sound precious, but so what? Tiny Boxwood's (3614 West Alabama Street; 713-622-4224; tinyboxwoods.com) does a

8

ARTICLES
REMAINING

Stay informed & entertained.

SUBSCRIBE NOW

crowd that mingles easily around a communal table. Chalkboard specials include leafy salads (\$10 to \$14) and a delicious breakfast pizza made with pancetta, goat cheese and an egg, baked sunny side up in a wood oven (\$13). Pick up a cactus on the way out.

Noon

10) MODERNIST DRIVE-BY

Despite Houston's lack of zoning (or maybe because of it), the city has a remarkable collection of midcentury modern homes and office towers — some well maintained, others verging on collapse. Landmarks include the gridlike campus for the University of St. Thomas, designed by Philip Johnson. But many more are unknown, like the eerily abandoned Central Square building in downtown (2100 Travis Street) or the brawny Willowick tower, now condos, in River Oaks (2200 Willowick Road). Piece together your own architectural tour with Houston Mod (houstonmod.org), a preservation group that maintains a resourceful Web site with Google maps and photos.

2 p.m.

11) GLASS HOUSES

The skyline goes up, up, up every year. But notable architecture also takes place near the ground. The campus at Rice University — a neo-Byzantine maze of rose-hued brick and cloisters — got a new glass heart in 2008, when the Brochstein Pavilion (rice.edu/brochstein) opened near the central quad. A Kubrick-esque box with floor-to-ceiling windows, the pavilion houses a cafe and media lounge, and has a fine-mesh trellis that extends like a mathematical plane in space. The structure is only one story, but it feels much taller — proof that not everything in Houston has to be big.

IF YOU GO

Continental, JetBlue, Delta and others fly nonstop between New York City and Houston. A recent Web search found round-trip fares on JetBlue from \$345 this

8

ARTICLES
REMAINING

Stay informed & entertained.

SUBSCRIBE NOW

Hotel Zaza Houston (5701 Main Street; 713-526-1991; hotelzazahouston.com) opened in 2007 with 315 rooms, offering playful design and polished service in the lively Museum District; from \$179.

Opened last August, the **Aloft Houston by the Galleria** (5415 Westheimer Road; 713-622-7010; aloft-houston.com) has 152 rooms in the Uptown district and includes a pool, gym and free Wi-Fi. Rooms from \$99 weekends, and from \$199 during the week; discounts are available online.

A version of this article appears in print on May 9, 2010, on Page TR12 of the New York edition with the headline: 36 Hours: Houston.

© 2019 The New York Times Company

8
ARTICLES
REMAINING

Stay informed & entertained.

SUBSCRIBE NOW