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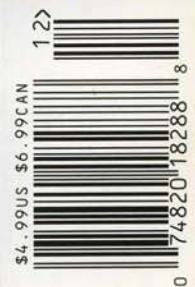
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ON FOOT

Believing in Providence

A buzzing food scene and a new splashy art space have revived visitors' faith in Rhode Island's capital. By CLARE LESCHIN-HOAR

A prosperous New England port town grown gritty in the wake of big industry's decline, Providence had few cheerleaders. But thanks to a downtown revitalization effort launched in the early 1980s, Rhode Island's capital city now has a lot to shout about, most notably a pedestrian-friendly riverfront rescued from under a concrete parking lot. The city's brainy, creative community—fed by the presence of Brown University, the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), and the culinary

campus of Johnson & Wales University—further packs Providence with personality. With vibrant ethnic neighborhoods and brick sidewalks bordered by restored 18th- and 19th-century homes, Providence

is also eminently walkable. (Unless otherwise noted, area code is 401.)

Begin at **1 Prospect Terrace Park** (48 Congdon St.). Stand to the left of the statue of city founder Roger Williams and take in the expansive vista including the Rhode Island State House, the winding Providence River, and the city center district, known locally as Downcity. Heading south on Congdon, take a left onto Meeting Street and follow on to Thayer Street, the hub of College Hill. The annual fall influx of students means youthful shops and ethnic food prevails here. Pick up a cup or

package of fair-trade coffee at **2 Blue State Coffee** (300 Thayer St.; 383-8393), where ten percent of each sale goes to a progressive cause such as global warming or illiteracy prevention.

Turn west onto Waterman Street into the heart of the Ivy League **3 Brown University**. State-ly red brick and stone buildings, wrought-iron gates, and grassy quads give this city campus a distinct feeling of community. Throughout the fall, Wriston Quad hosts a local farmers market on Wednesday afternoons as part of Brown's pioneering commitment to support local growers, who also supply some food for the school's dining services. A quick left onto Prospect Street will bring you to the **4 John Hay Library** (20 Prospect St.; 863-

3723). Hay was Abraham Lincoln's private secretary during the Civil War. Students traditionally rub the nose of the John Hay statue for good luck on exams.

Continuing on Waterman, enter the **5 RISD campus**. Founded in 1877, this private college is a beehive of design and art students. A left on North Main Street will bring you to the RISD Museum's brand-new addition, the **6 Chase Center** (20 N. Main St.), which celebrated its grand opening in September. The 43,000-square-foot, glass and brick building was designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect José Rafael Moneo. For the inaugural exhibit, a massive installation of some 22,000 handblown glass shapes by RISD alumnus Dale Chihuly fills the Center's largest gallery. The Center is also the new home for **risdworks**. Part art gallery, part gift



Providence picks: Prospect Terrace Park (top), American cheese at Farmstead Downcity (above), artful goods at risdworks (opposite).



shop, the store sells RISD alumni-produced items.

Reversing direction, proceed to the corner of Main and Thomas for America's first **7 First Baptist Church** (75 N. Main St.; 454-3418), founded by Roger Williams in 1638. A National Historic Landmark, the church remains in use today.

Just across Thomas Street stands another National Historic Landmark, the **8 Fleur-de-Lys Studios** (7 Thomas St., 331-1114). This whimsical, half-timbered building has been used continuously as a studio for working artists since being built by artist Sydney Burleigh in 1885. The mustard-yellow facade is embellished with portraits, birds, and various animals. The studios are not open to the public.

Heading west one block, Thomas Street becomes Steeple Street. **9 New Rivers** restaurant (7 Steeple St.; 751-0350) puts local ingredients to creative use, including Macomber turnips, foraged mushrooms, and wild-caught clams and oysters from nearby Narragansett Bay. A left onto Canal Street brings you to **10 Waterplace**



Park, near where the Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket Rivers converge to become the Providence River. Head back here on specific Saturday nights for the hugely popular WaterFire, a multisensory art installation featuring 100 bonfires on the three rivers and set to an ethereal world-music soundtrack.

Continue south along the river, and cross over the brick bridge marked College Street. Proceed to Westminster Street and the Downcity area. Pick up a visitor's pass at the entrance to the **11 Fleet Library at RISD** (15 Westminster St., 709-5900) and wander through the barrel-vaulted,

Renaissance-style former banking hall. One contemporary addition is a seating terrace for lectures and library events laser-carved with the names of influential painters, art historians, and designers.

At the intersection of Westminster and Weybosset, notice the glaring figure keeping watch from one of the city's oldest skyscrapers, the **12 Turk's Head building**.

Along Westminster, an ever-increasing clutch of chic boutiques and fine food spots are popping up. **13**

Farmstead Downcity (223 Westminster St.; 274-7177) devotes itself to American cheese, including Rhode Island's first artisan cheese: Divine Providence, crafted by Louella Hill and her recently launched Narragansett Creamery. At the takeout window, you can order a gourmet sandwich with a side helping of owner Matt Jennings's housemade pickles. The shop also carries Garrison Chocolates, created by local chocolatier Andrew Shotts. Pairing your fromage-to-go with the right varietal is a breeze at **14 ENO Fine Wines** (225 Westminster St.; 521-2000), next door.