

THE 10 BEST BEACHES YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF PAGE 14

COASTAL LIVING®

**SIMP
OF SUMMER**

June 2009

Circulation: 659,631

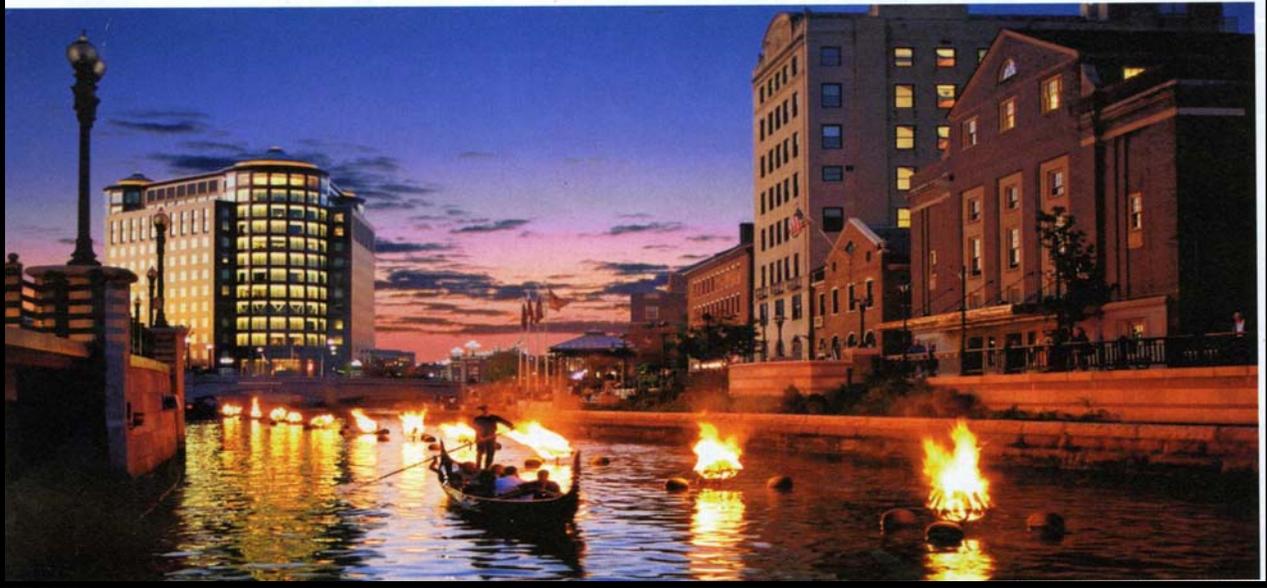
OUR TOP-RATED
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r&r waterfront weekend

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

A local writer gives us an inside tour of the Rhode Island capital's chic restaurants, bustling neighborhoods, and a river on fire

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JUNE 2009
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SANDALS, SUNGLASSES
& BLING FOR THE BEACH



Italian inspiration: The Federal Hill neighborhood is all about greatness—greatness of pasta and of sauce. Venetian-style gondolas offer trips before and during the WaterFire display.

A real city never dies; it reinvents itself. Consider Providence. For years, it was Boston's sooty stepsister. There were costume jewelry and machine tool factories. There was Ivy League Brown, yet also a half-dead city center. Then several food critics began to discover cutting-edge bistros like Walter's and Al Forno. And the city remodeled its riverfront with European quays and arched pedestrian bridges.

The river is the most recent success. Perhaps nothing else better illustrates how the town has risen out of smoke and flames. Sound dramatic? Maybe

so, but Providence is a true port city phoenix. It has gone from being a quick stop on the way to Cape Cod to a renaissance city that burns supernova bright on WaterFire nights. Every year, on select weekend evenings May through October, artists light around 80 bonfires on iron braziers placed on the city's rivers. Space-age music fills the air, and sparks shower the sidewalks.

You sense the new energy elsewhere, too. Out-of-towners crowd the restaurants and cafés along the main thoroughfare of Federal Hill, the city's not-so-Little Italy. Atwells Avenue's center stripes are red, green, and white—colors

Benefit Street (left) has one of the nation's largest concentrations of colonial-era houses. Below: Rhode Island School of Design's new Museum of Art

of Italy's flag. Providence's Italian roots, and the restaurateurs who express it in wood-fired pizza, crusty bread, and delicious, dark espresso, have made this a destination for those who love to eat.

There's more to it, of course. On summer nights, my wife and

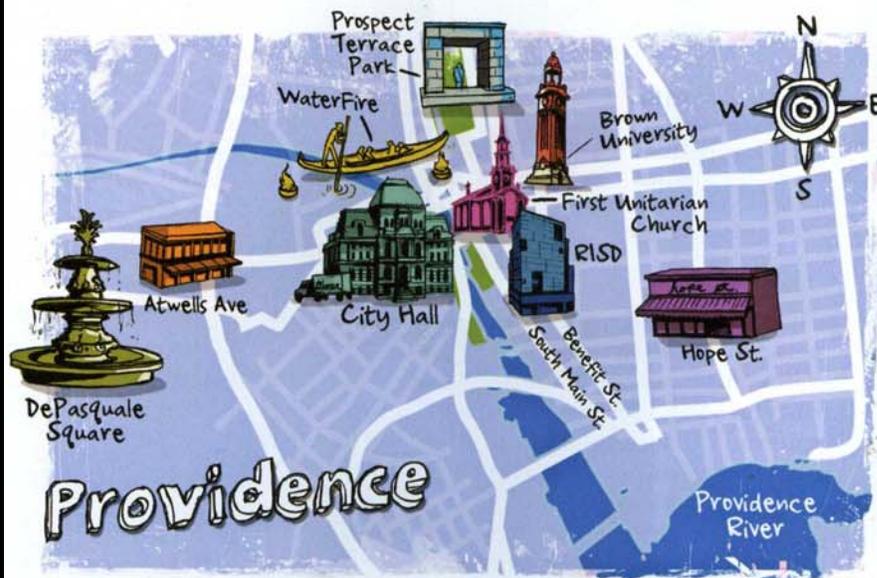
I head to Benefit Street, a few minutes from our house and steps from the gates of Brown. We wander past the Rhode Island School of Design, at the root of much of the town's artsiness thanks to its new Museum of Art and the eclectic canvases and sculptural hair spikes of its students.

Sometimes we stop to watch the city's lights come on from a wall in front of the First Unitarian Church of Providence. (This

state was once largely Baptist turf, but Unitarians got first dibs on this awesome view.) We spy the Industrial Trust tower, supposedly cast as the *Daily Planet* building in the 1950s *Superman* series. Recently, we've noticed that locals are forgetting this story, or just telling it less.

TV superheroes? We'll leave that to cities that want to pound some mass-market drum. We are artistically subtle. We are historic. Our rivers crackle and snap on windy nights. The way we see it, Cape Cod is a peninsula to visit if you accidentally pass us on the highway. Don't let that happen to you. >





THE WEEKEND GUIDE

COFFEE BREAK

Start at **Seven Stars Bakery** for a jolt of java. You'll love the locally roasted coffee, especially Seven Stars' own fair-trade, organic blend. The bakery churns out fresh pastries daily, including croissants that rival those in Paris. Honest. 342 Broadway and 820 Hope Street; sevenstarsbakery.com.

SATURDAY SHOPPING

This is the town to shop eclectic. Skip the mall and try sunny Wickenden Street, where you can glimpse Narragansett Bay and check out an array of locally owned boutiques. For "that's so cool" stuff you never see at gift shops (but wish you did), duck into **The Curatorium**. 197 Wickenden; 401/453-4080 or thecuratorium.com. Tiny **Mignonette** stocks accessories and perfumes from France and Italy. 301 Wickenden; 401/272-4422 or mignonette.net. **Red Bridge Antiques** (416 Wickenden; 401/453-3377) and **Curiosities** (460 Wickenden; 401/421-0023) anchor the upper

end of the street near the new pedestrian bridge to India Point Park with an ever-changing mix of oddball furnishings and collectibles.

CATCH THE SUNSET

Find your way to **Prospect Terrace** park at dusk for a view of twinkling high-rises and beyond. Then turn to the stone statue of Roger Williams and congratulate him on the city that he founded.

COCKTAIL HOUR

The very small **Tini Bar & Grill** has a miniature ("tiny") theme, plus superbly mixed cocktails. Operated by the owners of the famous Al Forno restaurant, it's located smack downtown, across from the Trinity Repertory Company. Try a signature Tini martini and nibble on Tini bar snacks. 200 Washington Street; 401/383-2400.

NIGHT OUT

You can't talk about eating out in Providence without giving **Al Forno** at least a passing mention. Critic

Patricia Wells once dubbed it "the No. 1 casual restaurant in the world" in *The International Herald Tribune* for its creative Italian and Mediterranean dishes, though it's not really a local favorite. 577 South Main Street; 401/273-9760 or alforno.com.

A more reasonably priced and consistent bet is **Rue De L'Espoir**, which has become a neighborhood landmark in the Fox Point area near Brown thanks to its superb American bistro-style cooking jazzed up with Continental and Asian riffs. 99 Hope Street; 401/751-8890 or therue.com.

New on the block is **Café Noir**, which delivers excellent casual French fare. The atmosphere is full of vintage Parisian references without taking the "you're in France" thing too seriously. 125 North Main Street; 401/272-2116 or cafenoirri.com.

If you're up late in downtown Providence and hungry, head for City Hall. No, the mayor's office doesn't serve >



Nicks on Broadway

snacks. But right next to it on Fulton Street is a local tradition, **Haven Brothers Diner**, a mobile, metal-clad eatery that parks there nightly and serves up greasy but tasty burgers and other fare until 5 a.m. Historians say that an 1872 Providence lunch wagon was the country's first real diner, and the tradition lives on here at Haven Brothers; 401/861-7777. Among other local diners that are worth a taste is **The Seaplane Diner** in the city's port area. If you catch it on the right day, its menu includes clam cakes, chowder, and Italian-style snail salad. 307 Allens Avenue; 401/941-9547. And for an upscale twist on a midcentury diner, head to **Nicks on Broadway**. 500 Broadway; 401/421-0286 or nicksonbroadway.com.

WHERE TO STAY

Recently opened, the **Renaissance Providence Hotel** was the result of a massive restoration project—one of the state's biggest ever—which set the hotel in the shell of a 1929 Masonic temple, across from the Rhode Island State House.

5 Avenue of the Arts; 800/468-3571 or marriott.com. Once a rectory, **The Old Court Bed and Breakfast** is a charming, Victorian-themed small hotel in an especially historic segment of College Hill. 144 Benefit Street; 401/751-2002 or oldcourt.com.

SUNDAY BRUNCH

Ultra-creative **Julian's** serves interesting and sometimes spicy takes

on the usual egg dishes. How about naan breakfast pizza? 318 Broadway; 401/861-1770 or juliansprovidence.com.

CULTURE FIX

The Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design, also known as the **RISD Museum**, caused architectural conservatives to gnash their teeth last year by opening its contemporary, José Rafael Moneo-designed Chace Center in town. 224 Benefit Street; 401/454-6500 or risdmuseum.org. It allowed for an expanded **risd|works** shop in the lobby—one of the coolest places around to buy artistic novelties. Open Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. 20 North Main Street; 401/277-4949 or risdworks.com.

ON THE CALENDAR

Find the **WaterFire** schedule at waterfire.org. For more information visit the Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau site at goprovidence.com. 🍷

