destination

HOUSTON

Long known for its oil and natural gas industries, this diverse city is now defined by a new kind of energy.

Houston is big—after all, it is in Texas. And this city has a Texas-sized appetite for vibrant food, drinks and culture. Within its labyrinth of streets and towering steel buildings, and amid the often-stifling heat and humidity, you’ll find this intricately diverse city has charm, character and a whole lot of soul.

—Jessica Dupuy

see

The Menil Collection, a multibuilding campus with more than 17,000 paintings, prints, drawings, photographs, sculptures and rare books, is the largest private collection of its kind in the country. It includes works of Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. Be sure to walk or jog through Buffalo Bayou Park, with its newly renovated hike and bike trails, and stroll through downtown's beautiful Centennial Gardens at Hermann Park.
In the edgy, trendy Montrose neighborhood, Chris Shepherd's Gulf Coast-centric Underbelly pays homage to the city's diversity with flavors from around the globe. Hugo's offers a taste of authentic Central Mexican fare. Little Pappasito's Cantina on Upper Kirby has classic Tex-Mex covered with its cheesy enchiladas and creamy chili con queso. Enjoy cocktails, wood-fired pizzas and a cacciatore pizza to die for at Cullivare in the historic Heights neighborhood. New to the scene: Underbelly's Shepherd recently opened One Fifth Steak. It's the first offering in a five-year project that seeks to annually rotate culinary focuses through the same historic Montrose building. (Next year, the concept will transition to One Fifth Romance Languages, with a focus on French, Italian and Spanish cuisines.) In the East Downtown area, the team behind Cullivare is developing its own multistage concept in a renovated 15,000-square-foot warehouse. It launches this summer with Vinny's, a wood-fired pizza kitchen that will soon be followed by an American diner-style eatery with an adjacent lounge.

Trinity patrons clamor for cocktails at Montrose-area Anvil Bar & Refuge, led by Houston's cocktail king, Bobby Heugel, whose downtown Pastry War is a mezcaleria with some of the best south-of-the-border spirits you can find (and a damn good frozen margarita, too). For whiskey, the Heights' Eight Row Flint serves a devilish list of cocktails. It sports 120 whiskeys on the menu and eight barrel-aged varieties on tap. Love Sherry and Scotch? Downtown, Public Services Wine & Whisky has a diverse selection of Sherry to go with a lineup of Sherry-barrel-aged whiskies. Wine zealots have hung out at 13 Celsius and Camera, but Master Sommelier David Keck is shaking things up with a hip honky-tonk, Goodnight Charlie's. Dance off those longneck specials to live music or a packed jukebox. The bar also serves Texas beer and wine, tacos and light patio fare.

You'll find plenty of the usual suspects in shopping districts like Highland Village and Rice Village, but for the edgy and unique, look inside the city's Inner Loop (the area in the center of town bordered by Interstate 610). The iconic Kuhl-Lipscomb features a dazzling array of housewares, furniture and home accessories. For a more "indie" feel, look to Space Montrose for gift-worthy letterpress cards, prints by local artists, handmade jewelry and home accessories. In the Heights, Manready Mercantile peddles handmade textiles, leather, wood and natural apothecary goods tailored for the modern man. And for a dizzying selection of unique beers and ciders, don't miss the quirky D&A Beer Mart in Montrose. Even if you don't grab a six-pack, you'll enjoy the quirky product descriptions.