MEET THE REAL DOWNTOWNERS.

Our It List of stuff to do, people to know, things to buy, places to go!

Nuns, puppies, art cars & bayou breezes

inside:
HOUSTON'S FILM INDUSTRY FLIES UNDER THE RADAR

The cool issue

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ONE MORE TAKE
HOUSTON’S FILM INDUSTRY IS FINDING ITS WAY

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A New Year

As 2009 draws to a close, we reflect on a year full of tremendous ups and downs. We’re fortunate that downtown has continued to thrive despite the national economy, and for that we can all be truly thankful.

Exciting new openings this holiday season in the Historic District like Byrd’s Market & Café and Hearsay Gastro Lounge, are expanding the foodie options downtown and at Houston Pavilions, development is continuing at a strong pace with the recent openings of Lucky Strike Lanes & Lounge, Ill Forks and Yao Restaurant and Bar.

We’re also extraordinarily lucky that no matter what your financial circumstances may be, it’s always easy to enjoy the very best of downtown.

The annual H-E-B Thanksgiving Day Parade is a free Houston tradition while Discovery Green’s schedule is full of a variety of events – from sophisticated jazz concerts to family-friendly festivals and activities. Spend an afternoon skating on the ice or sip some hot cocoa on the lawn this winter. And don’t forget that downtown’s performing arts organizations have everything from the best seats in the house to super-affordable specials.

We’re excited as we move into the New Year and we hope Downtown will continue to be your go-to resource for dining, news, and events both big and small. Keep your issue handy for whatever leisure activity you might be planning. And remember to keep those comments and suggestions coming our way.

Bob Eury
DOWNTOWN DISTRICT

Andrew Huang
HOUSTON DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE

ON THE COVER
Downtown’s skyline is the star of the show this issue.
It’s the first time we’ve featured our iconic skyline on the cover.
ART

New York-based artist Matthew Geller has brought a unique sensibility to Houston’s newest public piece – Open Channel Flow.

The 60-foot-tall sculpture is a delightfully complex configuration of pipes, valves and elbows that seems to grow out of the Sabine Water Pump Station adjacent to Buffalo Bayou Park. It’s a witty illustration of the city’s 7,000 miles of underground drinking water pipe and Geller hopes that the sculpture will call attention to the city’s water delivery system and how we sometimes take our access to clean water for granted.

Open Channel Flow extends across and over the pump station’s fence into Buffalo Bayou Park like the branch of a large tree. At its end is a 30-foot-high showerhead that hovers above an eight-foot diameter stainless steel drain holding a manual well pump. Push the handle a few times and the reward is a gentle spray of water from the showerhead, offering cooling relief to area joggers, bicyclists and users of Jamail Skate Park nearby. Amber and blue beacons on top of the work’s highest element flash when water courses through the pipes.

It all combines to create an urban earthwork courtesy of the Houston Arts Alliance that is playful, absurd, and as entertaining as it is functional.

THE BIG MOVE

NRG Texas and Reliant Energy have executed a long-term lease at Pavilions Tower – the second largest lease to be completed within the last year in downtown. NRG takes occupancy of the massive space in March 2011.

“Even in the best of economic times, it’s not often that a 240,000-square-foot tenant comes along,” said Geoff Jones, co-developer/principal of Houston Pavilions. “In today’s climate, we feel extremely fortunate to have executed a lease of this size with a tenant like NRG.”

Mid-block between Fannin and San Jacinto, Pavilions Tower is a nine-story, class-A office space sitting atop Houston Pavilions, the first downtown mixed-use development of its kind in 20 years. Easy access to light rail and the retail, dining and entertainment venues of Houston Pavilions (such as House of Blues, XXI Forever, Lucky Strike Lanes & Lounge and Books-A-Million) made for an attractive deal.

“With the signing of the NRG lease, the occupancy of the project has hit roughly 80 percent, a level we hadn’t expected to achieve until 2010,” said Jones. “We went from having a good year to having a great one.”

DISCOVERY GREEN WINS THE GOLD

The certification, which is rare, is the second-highest rating available by the U.S. Green Building Council and places Discovery Green in a category with other environmentally responsible projects around the country.

Key features that helped land the certification include the use of solar panels on building roofs, the use of high-efficiency glass and heating and cooling equipment, the preservation of an allee of 15th century-old oak trees and the basic conversion of the park itself from 12 urban acres of land and asphalt into a lush civic amenity.

With its one-acre lake; children’s playground; interactive water features; multi-use amphitheater stage and sloping lawn; dog runs; public art works; spacious gardens; restaurants and more, Discovery Green has welcomed more than a million visitors since its opening in April 2008.
The firm excels at environmental graphic design and visual communications. Environmental what? When a school, shopping center, residential development or corporate headquarters is built, architects and interior designers go to great lengths planning and perfecting the structures. Landscapers place the plantings. And it’s the environmental graphic designers who add signs and other elements of way-finding – the things that help get people in and out of a venue.

“We add the final jewelry in layers to big architectural projects, including convention centers, medical centers, residential communities and retail centers,” says Ferdinand Meyer, principal at FMG Design. “We’re currently working on Wells Fargo Tower and recently completed the Georgia Aquarium.”

While many of FMG’s clients are out-of-state, local projects include Uptown Park, Market Street in the Woodlands and the soon-to-open West Ave on Kirby at Westheimer. Residential projects include Aliana, a residential community in Fort Bend County, and Pointe West on Galveston Island.

“Environmental graphics, to break it down, means place making – giving a project an identity, making it special and creating a wow factor,” says Meyer, who runs the company with business partner Mary Grems. “We also create collateral, such as print, web and billboards.”

FMG employs graphic designers, architects and interior designers. Once a new building, hospital or shopping center is conceived and laid out by architects, environmental design firms like FMG develop ways to connect people to the space, to create the character and feeling of the experience.

“We consider the physical conditions of visitors and peoples’ mental states or stress levels as they are finding their way,” says Meyer. “For example, trying to park when you’re going to court or following an ambulance that’s transporting a relative.”

**CREATIVE COLLABORATION**

Meyer and Grems were both drawn to Houston before launching their careers. Baltimore-born Meyer received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Kansas City Art Institute and School of Design. He hitchhiked to Houston in 1981 to see a Cezanne exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
Grems grew up in Chattanooga, Tennessee and earned a Bachelor of Interior Design from Auburn University. She first came to Houston in 1979 to visit her brother who worked for McDonnell Douglas in the Clear Lake area. Less than a year later, she had moved to Houston.

Meyer and Grems first worked together at 3D International during the early 1980s. They brainstormed their business name and logo over drinks at Willie G’s on Post Oak Boulevard back in 1983. Combining their initials, Ferdinand Meyer and Mary Grems teamed up to become FMG. Twenty-six years later, they continue to enjoy working together, something Meyer attributes to their complementary skills and talents.

DEDICATED TO DOWNTOWN

Meyer and Grems agree that being downtown provides easy access to both airports – a must for FMG, considering approximately 75 percent of their business is out-of-state or international. FMG Design has always been located in downtown Houston – even during those tough years in the ‘80s when few companies stayed downtown.

In the early years of the firm, FMG occupied a floor of the Houston House Apartments and later moved to the Beaconsfield apartment building. When they outgrew the historic apartment building they never considered leaving downtown, instead moving into their current location, the Eller Wagon Works building, in 1998. The quirky three-story warehouse building on Crawford was constructed in 1909 for the manufacture of horse-drawn wagons.

The entire FMG staff (numbering about 20) enjoys their arty, eclectic area of downtown, which is dotted with aesthetic elements from the recently completed Cotswold Project, such as sculptures, fountains and plantings along generous sidewalks. FMG’s warehouse location also helps fuel the creative process. Large windows give plenty of “mental space” for creative thinking, while the wide-open quarters accommodate collaboration and the variety of computer equipment their work requires.

Hurricane Ike caused devastating damage to the Wagon Works building, ripping an air conditioning unit from the roof and causing significant water damage. FMG was forced to move out for several months and to work from their homes and later from borrowed office space scattered across the city.

“We had a decision to make after Ike,” says Meyer. “We could have gone someplace else and said, ‘To heck with this place,’ but we liked it downtown so much – this area so much – we came back.”

Meyer and Grems keep their office well-protected. Their security team includes four dogs, including one German shepherd. The diligent canine crew is backed up by two cats and a few fish.

PROUD TO CALL HOUSTON HOME

After years of traveling to many U.S. and international cities, Meyer and Grems have a healthy appreciation of Houston. “Houston is a very sophisticated city,” says Meyer. “I get amused at the people who think that Houston is all concrete. You go up in any skyscraper more than five stories and you’re amazed that you don’t see any roads – it’s all canopy. Houston is a green city. I am amazed that people still don’t know that.”

Meyer also insists the general perception of Houston’s traffic is overblown. “I travel to a lot of cities and the traffic is horrible everywhere from Austin to D.C. to Los Angeles,” says Meyer. “But in Houston, what they’ve done on 59 and 1-10 West in particular, I believe, is a model for urban transportation. It’s just amazing stuff.”

“Environmental graphics, to break it down, means place making – giving a project an identity, making it special and creating a WOW FACTOR…”
The Theater District buzzes with holiday cheer, Broadway classics and new commissions.

**HOLIDAY FAVES**

Houston Theater District brings glee, wonder and merriment to audiences of all ages throughout the holiday season. “Pointe”—ing us in the right direction is the Houston Ballet’s adored Christmas staple, *The Nutcracker*, set in 19th-century Germany, November 27–December 27. It begins at a charming Christmas party where the mysterious Dr. Drosselmeyer gives his niece Clara a magical toy that takes her on an unforgettable journey. Settle in at Jones Hall for a special Christmas concert featuring Garrison Keillor’s unique blend of improvisational storytelling and song—making with the Houston Symphony on December 9. For a poppier sound and a visit from good ol’ Santa Claus, you won’t want to miss *Very Merry Pops* running December 11–13. The show features special guest pop sensation William Joseph, who has played along with Michael Bublé, Josh Groban and Andrea Bocelli. Other cool arrangements arrive by way of Dianne Reeves with Da Camera of Houston for one-night-only, December 4. While jazz diva Dianne Reeves might be best known for the *Good Night, and Good Luck* soundtrack, longtime fans treasure her recording *Christmas Time Is Here*. Serious jazz fans love it too. Reeves also tells us that she never works out her set list in advance, but she notes that “we have some cool arrangements for songs like *Little Drummer Boy* and *I’ll Be Home for Christmas*.” Houston Symphony takes you back in time to the 1700s with Handel’s Messiah and a transcendent experience of text and music December 18–20. Or travel through a transformation experience with the Alley Theatre as Ebenezer Scrooge learns lessons from the spirits of Christmas past, present and future on an intricate London set in the holiday classic *A Christmas Carol – A Ghost Story of Christmas*, November 20–December 27. If you find yourself in a bit of a holiday crunch, “Crumpet the Elf” will leave you laughing the stress away as Alley Theatre company actor Todd Waites reprises his role chronicling David Sedaris’ experience as a worker in Macy’s Santaland display in *The Santaland Diaries*, November 28–December 27. Bowfire pulls at holiday heart strings when they visit Jones Hall with Society for the Performing Arts on December 3. Mixing greatest hits with a holiday twist, you’ll jump right into the festive season surrounded by some of the world’s greatest fiddlers and violinists. They’ll move you seamlessly from jazz to classical to...
bluegrass to Celtic to rock; as well as step dancing like you’ve never seen. A drop of golden sun will warm you up when Theatre Under The Stars transcends last season’s White Christmas by presenting Broadway’s Best Musical Tony Award–winning classic, The Sound of Music, December 8-20. Make sure to spot one Theatre Under The Stars devotee, Misty Robertson, as she spends her holidays in a surprising way this year. Misty Robertson has been a TUTS subscriber since the tender age of 16 and last year she landed a position at TUTS as a PR and marketing associate. Her apartment is wallpapered in Playbills, her favorite actress is Julie Andrews, and her favorite musical is The Sound of Music. Lo and behold – TUTS brings The Sound of Music to the Hobby Center stage and guess who has a part in the show? After much pleading, Misty has been granted the role of “the lady who bows too much” and will blog about her experience on stage every evening. Though she may not have any lines in the show, Misty and her character have at least one real-life common trait – in response to the casting news, she was speechless. Congratulations to Misty! Just another testament that dreams really do come true, especially at the theater.

RISING HIGH >> Come watch the new generation of Broadway’s best battle it out for the role of a lifetime in Broadway’s singular sensation, longest-running American musical A Chorus Line, January 5-17.

Gexa Energy Broadway Across America Houston takes an empty theater and a bare stage and brings together 17 dancers to audition for the chance of a lifetime. Already a star in the dance world and what The New York Times calls, “the most successful and influential choreographer alive, and indisputably the most musical,” Mark Morris has grown through the years into a burgeoning dance institution, the Mark Morris Dance Group. The group has stayed true to its founder’s convictions, especially dancing with live music performed by the group’s ensemble and these SPA performances include music by Samuel Barber, Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, J. S. Bach and Lou Harrison. Bringing another unusual configuration and combination of music by trumpet, guitar, violin, bass and drums is Ben Allison and Man Size Safe. Allison is a “visionary composer and adventurous improviser [who] has emerged as a rising star over the past decade,” (Jazz Times) and has been cited in the “Best Bassist” category of the 2007, 2006 and 2005 Down Beat Readers’ Poll. Allison comes to Houston for a weeklong residency in February leading up to his February 6 concert at Wortham Center with Da Camera of Houston. Tenor Andrew Kennedy (from Houston Grand Opera’s Billy Budd and The Turn of the Screw) and Orion Weiss (former guest soloist of Houston Symphony) have already made big impressions on Houston audiences and both return when Da Camera presents their English chamber music concert, The Spirit of England. Kennedy and Weiss are part of an ensemble that perform works by Benjamin Britten, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Edward Elgar on February 12 at Wortham Center.

With more than 1,200 performances under his belt when he played Billy Joel in the hit Broadway musical, Movin’ Out, Michael Cavanaugh sings Billy Joel and more to the delight of audiences around the world and with the Houston Symphony, February 26-28. You’ll hear him perform Billy Joel favorites including Uptown Girl and Piano Man, as well as the music of Jerry Lee Lewis, Elton John and The Who.
CELEBRATIONS >> And just when you thought you couldn’t celebrate any more – you don’t want to miss Houston Ballet’s 40th anniversary with one-performance-only (December 4) of Jubilee! You’re invited to glimpse the brilliance the ballet company has brought Houston and audiences all over the world. Look back at the inspired career of Barbara Bears, retiring after two decades as a company star. In honor of her final performance, Bears will dance the poetic and beloved showpiece, The Dying Swan. Look to the future with a brand new full-company piece choreographed by artistic director Stanton Welch especially for the Jubilee, set to the music of Rimsky-Korsakov’s Capriccio Espagnol. The evening also will feature an encore performance of William Forsythe’s The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude as well as excerpts from Welch’s Maninyas and Tu Tu. Celebrate 2010 in a whole new way with Ars Lyrica’s elegant New Year’s Eve celebration onstage at Hobby Center’s Zilkha Hall, December 31. Rising stars soprano Ava Pine and mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton join the ensemble for the American premiere of J. A. Hasse’s Neapolitan masterpiece Marc’Antonio e Cleopatra. A festive gala follows, with champagne, delectable hors d’oeuvres and fabulous prizes at their annual silent auction. Houston Symphony rolls out the red carpet for the Red Carpet Oscar Party, February 5-7. You’ll recall your favorite Oscar-winning blockbusters with music from classics such as Lawrence of Arabia, Exodus, Ben Hur, Titanic and 2010 Oscar hopefuls.

AUDIENCE FAVORITES >> We can already hear the excitement rumbling. STOMP makes a triumphant return to Houston with Society for the Performing Arts, February 12-14. The return of the percussive hit also brings some new surprises, with some sections of the show now updated and restructured, the addition of two new full-scale routines, and the use of props like tractor tire inner tubes and paint cans. From its beginnings as a street performance in the UK, STOMP has grown into an international sensation over the past 14 years, having performed in more than 350 cities in 36 countries worldwide. After last year’s Theatre Under The Stars hit Les Miserables, the heat is on in Miss Saigon. The same marvelous composers modernize Madame Butterfly’s cherished war/love story. The soaring songs are sure to thrill audiences who will relish this epic and daring pop opera, February 9-21. The well-loved and successful music group Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons will give you Oh, What a Night, live with the Houston Symphony as well as Sherry, Big Girls Don’t Cry, and Walk Like a Man for one-night-only, February 25.

JOURNEYS TO THE PAST >> Stanton Welch and Houston Ballet take us to the royal India of the past with a spectacular new production of one of the great classical works of the 19th-century repertoire, La Bayadère, opening at Wortham Center February 25–March 7. The production
District and the artists’ agents around the world, it is much like putting together a puzzle. Since we present multi-disciplined artists, I must be aware of the different series packages we offer our patrons and schedule events in a way that we do not have performances from the same arts genre back-to-back. Then, the programming itself! I must constantly stay as current as possible regarding what artists we have presented in the past are doing as well as those who are new to the scene and are up-and-coming.

**When not running SPA, what do you like to do in your free time?**

I am an avid walker and live in the Bay Area. I spend most of my time outdoors with my family and our dog, Boudreaux. Does this sounds too cliché? Maybe, but when you spend so much time, especially weekends, away from home, that part of my life becomes even more important.

**What is your view of the Houston cultural life?** So often it is wrongly assumed that Houston couldn’t possibly be an amazing arts town, yet organizations like SPA have proven that wrong.

Houston’s cultural life is truly amazing! The transition over the past 10 years speaks volumes. I like to look at it from our artists’ perspective – most are impressed by the number of theaters in such a close proximity and they love taking advantage of seeing local productions while in Houston. SPA audiences represent the diversity of Houston, and our programming draws from the many different cultures that make up this great city.

**Tell us about some of your favorite downtown Houston hot spots or places that make you glad to live in Houston?**

I did not mention earlier that my second favorite thing, in addition to spending time with my family, is to eat. On any day or night the choices abound for any type of food. Some of my favorite places include Treebeards, Perbacco and Hunan. I must not leave out The Grove. It is so wonderful to have such a beautiful restaurant in the middle of skyscrapers downtown! Because we spend so much time between Jones Hall and the Wortham Theater Center, the Lancaster Bistro is also a wonderful place to go for a nice dinner or just a great glass of wine.

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**Tell us how you became executive director of Society for the Performing Arts?**

I was thrilled to be asked to consider the position by the board of directors and executive committee in the fall of 2007. I was ready to take on the challenge and accepted. I knew that following a legacy left by Toby Mattox would be no easy task as he had been with SPA for more than 25 years. Fortunately, from my background in operations and programming, multi-tasking and flexibility skills were absolutely necessary. I also believe that overseeing the education department for so many years enhanced my consideration as the next executive director. I thrive on the fact that because of the nature of presenting multi-disciplinary artists, producing and marketing is different for each event. No two days are alike, and because of that, I am continually challenged within the organization.

**What makes SPA the treasure it is for the Houston arts patron is the amazing diversity of performances and artists that you bring to the stage. How do you even begin to put a season together?**

That is the part of the job I love most, but can be the most difficult. Programming in multiple performance halls, mostly Jones Hall and the Cullen Theater at the Wortham Center, can be very challenging. Between working with other arts organizations in the Theater...
Formed on the expressed wish of HM Queen Victoria to commemorate the bravery of the many Irish regiments who had fought in the South African campaigns, the band quickly gained a reputation for excellence and in 1905 was invited to make what turned out to be the first of many tours of Canada. They’ve toured extensively, visiting Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Hong Kong and many other countries. On February 23, they will make their debut appearance in Houston with SPA. Aside from touring, these 49 musicians play for the mounting of the Queen’s Guard at Buckingham Palace and for state ceremonial occasions and public duties. In addition, the Irish Guard musicians are trained to give support to the Army Medical Services in the event of mobilization.

PREMIERES >>The Houston Symphony commissioned celebrated producer/director Duncan Copp to assemble state-of-the-art, high-definition images from NASA’s exploration of the solar system to accompany Holst’s exciting cosmic score, along with commentary by the world’s leading planetary scientists. Be present January 21, 23 or 24 for this special world premiere event that travels to Carnegie Hall afterward. Another world premiere comes by way of musical when composer Frank Wildhorn (Jekyll and Hyde) returns to the Alley with Wonderland. This delightful new musical updates Alice’s adventures through an amazing pop score. Alley audiences will be among the first to see this new production featuring strange-yet-familiar places, fantastic characters and astonishing visions, January 19–February 14.

OTHER THEATER DISTRICT VISITORS >> Mrs. Mannerly will expect you to mind your Ps & Qs at Alley Theatre, February 3–28. Playwright Jeffrey Hatcher conjures up the world of a 7-year-old studying manners from the title character, who is a demanding teacher and has never had a student achieve a perfect score in 36 years of teaching etiquette. After discovering secrets from her past, young Jeffrey is determined to be the first to succeed. This comic tale reveals truths about the face we present and the real selves who lie inside. Another tale for audiences of all ages comes in a dazzling form. Cirque Dreams’ Illumination takes you on a journey with city dwellers who reinvent everyday objects, balance beyond belief, delicately dangle from wires, leap tall buildings and redefine the risks of flight in an array of astounding occurrences that transform the ordinary into extraordinary. Join this group of nighttime dreams. Imagination has infinite possibilities with Gexa Broadway Across America Houston, February 23–March 7.

Houston’s performing arts organizations travel through time, place and space this winter season and ignite the Houston Theater District with passionate, strong and vibrant performances. For more details on how to be a part of it all visit houstontheaterdistrict.org. We will see you at the shows!
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LIGHTS  CAMERA  
But Not Enough  
ACTION
Our surprisingly healthy film culture unfortunately flies under the radar

BY DAVID THEIS

Houston prides itself on culture. Our performing arts are plentiful and nationally respected. Our coffee houses are filled with poets frowning at their laptops, and big names in literature pay regular visits. And as for the visual arts, you could wear yourself out trying to keep up with the gallery and museum openings.

But what about film? It’s probably the most popular and mainstream art form of them all. Far more people have an opinion on Heath Ledger’s supporting role as The Joker than on Robert Rauschenberg’s career of producing two-dimensional collages or on Orhan Pamuk’s evocation of the Turkish hinterlands in *Snow*. But does the ubiquity of film translate into an awareness of Houston as a city with a film culture?
In purely business terms, having films made in Houston is a winner in ways both obvious and subtle. Having a major production filmed here can inject $15–$20 million directly into the local economy.

You might be wondering what a film culture is, and how you know if your city has one. Rick Ferguson, executive director of the Houston Film Commission, which is charged with bringing out-of-town film, video and commercial productions to Houston, says that cities with a film culture are seen as being “vested in film – both as an art form and a business.”

On the art form front, this means that film (or “movies” for that matter) is widely seen as being of more intrinsic value than the popcorn that goes with it – despite the fact that the celluloid and the snack cost almost the same to consume. A city with a film culture would be receptive to foreign and art house movies; it would likely have a high-profile film festival, and the local media would feel compelled to review and report on a wide variety of films. All this would add up to a large-ish community of people who appreciate film in its full range, from The Hangover to The Hurt Locker.
Finally, a city with a film culture would not just consume movies but would be a supportive home to filmmakers.

Of course if you’re the practical sort, you might wonder what any of this has to do with the price of West Texas Intermediate Crude.

But in purely business terms, having films made in Houston is a winner in ways both obvious and subtle. Having a major production filmed here can inject $15-$20 million directly into the local economy. Beyond that, a city gets an unquantifiable image boost when a film is shot there, especially in the increasingly rare cases where the city is accurately identified. (Houston has doubled as Detroit, Washington, D.C., Miami and Atlanta.)

What’s the connection between all these undoubted economic benefits and having a film-savvy populace? Aren’t out-of-town filmmakers just looking for the best deal?

The answer is yes and no, according to Ferguson. The film industry is as relentlessly profit driven as any other. This worked to Houston’s (and Texas’) detriment until recently. After years of regularly hosting Hollywood filmmakers, the city and state began losing business in the 1990s, first to Toronto and then to countries all across the globe, from Hungary to Iceland, because these locales began offering substantial economic incentives to film there.

“You could’ve saved 30 percent of your budget if you filmed in Toronto,” Ferguson says.

Only in the last two years has Texas gotten into the incentives game. Film companies can now get back up to 17.25 percent of their total budget for work done in Texas, or they can get a grant to pay wages for Texas-based workers.

But this level of incentive only puts Texas back into the game. Few filmmakers will come to Houston only for the incentive, according to Ferguson. Filmmakers also need to know that they’ll find capable crews and hospitable hosts. Houston scores well on both counts (though there has been some erosion among the local crews, says Ferguson, as workers have followed the incentives to places like New Orleans).

But while filmmakers are drawn by the financial considerations, which many locales are eager to extend, “they also want to come where there is support and recognition of film, including on the exhibition end.” And Houston, according to Ferguson, “doesn’t have a strong reputation,” compared to Austin or New Orleans.

Things are far from bleak. In 2008, two high-profile films were shot in Houston – Terrance Malick’s Tree of Life (starring Sean Penn) and Mao’s Last Dancer, based on the memoirs of former Houston Ballet dancer Li Cunxin.

Beyond these coups, Ferguson says Houston does have the elements of a strong film culture. “We just need to expand on what we have. [That would] help the city in the long run.”

A visitor to the Town & Country branch of Houston Community College’s Northwest Campus could be forgiven for not realizing she’s on the grounds of a thriving film school. But that’s exactly what faculty member Richard Harrington, himself a veteran filmmaker, has created with help from fellow full-time faculty member Richard Boyd and adjuncts such as longtime Houston film writer Joe Leydon, who teaches film history.

“Our program teaches all aspects of filmmaking,” says an obviously proud and even delighted Harrington. “It’s like taking the last two years of UT film school.”

Students begin by collaborating on a full-length movie, which they write, act in, film and edit. The school provides all the equipment they’ll need. By the end of the 71-credit-hour program, graduates are ready to go to work in a thriving business. “There are so many jobs in the industry, especially if you look beyond features,” Harrington says.

The program, which has grown from 12 students in 2000 to more than 500 today, attracts all kinds of people. Student ages range from the early 20s to 69. They’re businessmen, doctors, lawyers – you name it. Harrington recalls one lawyer who “got so busy making films [professionally] that he may not be able to finish his certificate.”

Some graduates go to Hollywood. Others stay here. Harrington has an alumnus working on the Conan O’Brien Show and another who works for director Quentin Tarantino.

Harrington is having a great time. “I started this [teaching] when I was 66. I’m going to do it until I drop.”
Ferguson points to elements of film culture that you would expect to find in a big city. The film festival Worldfest–Houston will stage its 43rd edition in 2010. And the excellent film series at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston represents film programming at its varied best.

Houston is home to two college-level filmmaking programs. Since 1969, the Rice Media Center has offered one of the strongest film screening programs in town and has offered filmmaking classes since the 1970s.

Filmmakers such as Kyle Henry (Room, which screened at Cannes), Chris Eska (the very well-reviewed August Evening) and Greg Carter took filmmaking classes over the years. And since 2006, Rice also has offered a filmmaking degree.

Beyond these perhaps standard elements, Houston has the makings of a film culture that is unique to the city and that is, in fact, closely linked to Houston’s identity. Let’s start with the new, recently concluded film festival, Cinema Arts Festival Houston. When Mayor Bill White began pushing for a new film festival here, it’s unlikely that he had such a unique event in mind. In fact, the nature of Cinema Arts Festival’s identity was laboriously hammered out during meetings of members of the Houston film community, who decided the festival should reflect Houston’s identity, rather than try to compete with Cannes.

Inspired by Houston’s strong reputation in the visual arts, they conceived a festival that would blend cinema and art. That is, it would show films either about artists or films that stand on their own as visual art. And they would take the festival outdoors and into the city itself. In the process, the festival attracted the presence of the brilliant actress and filmmaker Tilda Swinton, who is herself a striking visual presence. And the Oscar–winning Swinton (Best Supporting Actress for Michael Clayton) didn’t just fly in for a quick “howdy;’ she participated in four different events.

Houston is also home to the nationally recognized, but still locally beneath-the-radar Aurora Picture Show, which, in a phrase that has a real Houston tang, bills its micro and independent film screening program as “avant garde cinema for the people.”

Staying under-the-radar, the Houston Community College Northwest Campus filmmaking program may not have the prestige of Rice, but it’s absolutely booming, having grown from 12 students in 2000 to over 500 today.

And the Southwest Alternate Media Project is “one of the oldest non-profit media organizations in the U.S.,” according to SWAMP executive director Mary Lampe. The organization has quietly been training Houstonians to make films that focus on their own communities since the 1970s, and has recently undertaken collaboration with the most prominent film school in Mexico, the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City.

Beyond the film schools, there is a handful of filmmakers in town whose methods range from independent to downright guerrilla. But while these film culture elements not only exist but thrive here Houston is lacking in one key component – media coverage.

Since the wave of layoffs and early retirements began at the Houston Chronicle, there hasn’t been a single full-time, professional film writer in Houston. The Chronicle’s staff critic, Amy Biancolli, lives in Albany, New York. And these days many of the their reviews come from the San Francisco Chronicle, also a member of the Hearst chain, while the Houston Press’ reviews are generated in New York and elsewhere.

In terms of getting films reviewed, this lack of writers may only matter to the Houston Proud cinephile. (How many of us are there? Can we have a show of hands?) But in terms of coverage of the local film scene, it’s obviously a drawback. Notice that I referred to many institutions and programs as “flying beneath the radar.” In terms of Houston film, however, it might be more accurate to say that there is no radar.

But that doesn’t mean that there aren’t many Houstonians who want to write about film. Around the time that the last professional film writers exited the Chronicle, the Houston Film Critics Society was formed. President Nick Nicholson, who writes for the Fort Bend Star, acknowledges the society’s lack of clout when he says, “Our members have offered to review film on television and radio for free out of love for the movies, but the stations have turned them down.” But he’s also passionate about the group’s desire to “chip away” at local media indifference.

“We’re in that process,” Nicholson says. The Society will present its 2009 awards, which include virtually all of the non-technical Academy Award categories, on December 19 at the MFAH.

So can Houston develop a real film culture when even its film critics operate under the radar? That is a challenge for local film lovers and for the local film community. But movie love is a powerful thing, not to be taken lightly.

When asked about the challenges of reaching the public and also those presented by the DVD and new-media culture, Marian Lantz, director of the MFAH film program, remains optimistic. “I’m encouraged every time I leave the museum and see little groups out in the parking lot talking about the movie they’ve just seen. People just love going to the movies.”
You’re not going to find a filmmaker more committed to putting Houston on the cinematic map than Tom Vaughn. He grew up here and unabashedly loves the city. After a well-reviewed but not very remunerative stint as a local playwright, Vaughn got a completely unexpected call from CAA. Based on reviews they had read of his work, the high-powered agency wanted him to move to Los Angeles and become a screenwriter, under their aegis.

He accepted their invitation, but took the idea of Houston with him. “All my scripts are set in Houston,” he says. But when they’re shot they go overseas, and they lose the Houston connection.”

Vaughn got fed up with living in L.A. and with the way he lost control of his stories. But instead of following the usual path of the screenwriter and simply complaining all the way to the bank, Vaughn made a dramatic change. In the early 2000s he moved back to Houston and with two partners attempted to start his own film production company – ROI Films. ROI stands for return on investment, and he tried to sell the company to local investors on the basis that savvy filmmaking is actually a pretty good way to make money.

“You have to do commercial genres with stars; otherwise you’re really taking risks. But if you know what you’re doing and keep your budget low, then in three years you can get a 20 percent return. It’s a better investment than the market, in my personal opinion,” says Vaughn.

Financial success, he says, is entirely based on “decisions you make before you ever start shooting. You have to [sell the] overseas rights upfront. It’s huge. It’s your safety net.”

Vaughn learned the hard way about sinking your money into a dream. He lost all the money he’d made screenwriting trying to get ROI off the ground. But he was trying to line up local investments just after Enron and 9/11, and that proved “a tough nut to crack,” as Rick Ferguson of the Houston Film Commission muses.

But Vaughn didn’t give up. He’s started a more modest company, UV Films, and is looking for investors in a production fund, rather than a bricks-and-mortar company. The money he raises – if he can find Houston investors ready for a little excitement – will go strictly into film production, rather than into a company.

But if Vaughn sounds more like a bean counter than a filmmaker, you’re getting the wrong impression. He’s a clear-eyed romantic who hopes to make genre films (mostly thrillers and mysteries) that also serve as love letters to Houston. That’s what New York gets out of its film industry, Vaughn says, and Houston needs the same. “It’s important to set films here, to let people know who we are.” He shakes his head at the memory of a producer, “a very educated woman,” who didn’t want to shoot a film in Houston “because she wanted something ‘a little less rural.’”

Vaughn will soon direct his first film, a “micro-budget” thriller (one with a less than $500,000 budget). He hopes to follow that up with a $3 million film based on the Thin Man series.

Vaughn swears he’s in for the long haul. “I’ll spend the rest of my professional life trying to build an industry here.”

Vaughn is not alone. A number of genre filmmakers, including Wayne Slaton and Stacy Davidson have made “great looking” (in Vaughn’s words) horror films, shooting on weekends. Kerry Beyer has taken his earnings from a successful fashion photography career and shot a self-financed $500,000 horror film, Spirit Camp, which he plans to release on DVD.

The most prolific filmmaker in town is probably the Rice-educated Greg Carter, who has been making roughly a film a year since 1998. Most of his films, which deal with inner-city life, cost $500,000 or less and go more or less straight to DVD, but he anticipates having his first $3 million budget soon. He describes all his films as having a “Houston swagger.”

What does Houston need to become more of filmmaking mecca? According to Carter, state law needs to be changed so that “banks can make loans on intellectual property. They can do that in California, but not here.”
Marian Luntz, film and video curator at the MFAH, thinks a lot about the intersection between film and community these days. Twenty years ago, her job was pretty straightforward; she programmed films that the local film-loving community wanted to see. She was a member of that community herself, so it was easy to know what they wanted: the European masters, mainly, a handful of Asians, mostly Japanese, some classic Hollywood.

Then came video and the DVD, and film lovers could see *Wild Strawberries* or *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* anytime they wanted. And local media stopped covering her offerings in depth. Luntz’s programming is now “relegated,” in her words, to paragraph-length “picks” in the *Chronicle’s* and *Houston Press’* listings.

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The same applies to Charles Dove of the Rice Media Center.

Luntz and Dove both had to find new ways of programming and new ways of reaching an audience. To some extent, they each hit on similar solutions. They both began programming with ethnic and gender-based communities, rather than cinephiles, in mind. Both institutions program festivals from various Asian countries. Iranian film was the first such foray for each – a happy choice, as it turns out, as by the early ’90s Iranian film had achieved international cachet.

Now the MFAH’s annual Latin American film festival is a big hit, and the Rice Media Center had great attendance for a recent showing of new films from Spain, even though there are relatively few Spaniards living in Houston. “What matters is that it’s in Spanish,” Dove says.

But they have to work hard to find these audiences, whose members sometimes have to be coaxed into the university or the museum. “Getting names for e-lists is crucial,” Luntz says. “You need to do guerrilla marketing.”

Dove says that the screenings are often more social than cinematic affairs. “[The audience member] sees people they haven’t seen in a while. They’ll wave at each other across the room. A lot of times you get the feeling that the film is just an excuse to get together.”

Dove hopes that in time these new audience members will come to enjoy the films for their own sakes and branch out into the films of other communities. For now, like Luntz, he works at combining the best of both worlds; ethnic films of high artistic merit.

For all their similarities, the two film programs do diverge, however. The MFAH still has an audience for repertory films (the classics of Hollywood and the world), though Luntz says, “I never call them that anymore. Nobody knows what that means.” The Rice Media Center has turned to an altogether new audience – activists who meet to watch and discuss films, mostly documentaries, which deal with political issues.

Both are thinking outside the box to keep film programming fresh, interesting and appealing to audiences.
Finding an audience

my HOUSTON

Houston is special because it is the perfect mixture of different cultures, the arts, big city influence, neighborhood intimacy, good old-fashioned ranch living and a lot of Texas pride.

CHANDRA WILSON
Actor

EXPERIENCE MY HOUSTON

You have to see downtown Houston for the skyline, you have to see the famous Astrodome, you have to visit The Galleria and go skating, and you have to take the full ride around the 610 loop.

A perfect day in Houston would consist of visiting with high school friends, eating at the Spaghetti Warehouse, seeing a show at TUTS or at the Alley Theatre, and topping off the evening at the House of Pies.

What surprises me about Houston is that even though it's such a big city, it maintains its intimate town feel.

For the rest of Chandra's thoughts and to find out what others are saying, log on to VisitMyHouston.com
Where the cool kids are

What’s new and hip in downtown this winter? Our It List gives you everything from haute fashions to icy cocktails. by Allison Bagley
Get your kicks
The Tipping Point, the hip sneaker boutique, is reintroducing PF Flyers, a line of retro-inspired men’s shoes, in December. The store also will beef up their expansive Converse collection, adding the Gallery and Japan lines. Look for a massive Black Friday sale, plus an exhibit by artist Justin Garcia, a native Houstonian, in their sleek gallery space in January. Garcia’s vibrant mixed media pieces are inspired by the local railroad system.

Discover more. There’s no place cooler than Discovery Green this winter, when The Ice at Discovery Green returns. As many as 100,000 skaters hit the frozen model boat basin last year and this season is expected to be just as popular. The 22-degree rink is powered by renewable energy and made using recycled water. The ice is open through Martin Luther King Day in January. Feeling frosty? The Ice Carving Event returns Saturday, January 9, when artists from across the country battle it out to create masterpieces from ice blocks.

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Also in the park are new art exhibitions, including Cool Globes: Hot Ideas for a Cooler Planet; StoryCorps Historias, which will allow Houstonians to record personal stories; a series of illuminated photo globes and new this year the Administaff AeroBalloon.

Stage presence
From the Houston Grand Opera’s Tosca and The Turn of the Screw to the Houston Ballet’s 40th anniversary celebration featuring traditions like The Nutcracker and the special Jubilee of Dance, a variety of performances are sure to draw visitors downtown over the holiday season. Theatre Under The Stars presents two classics, The Sound of Music and Miss Saigon, and Society for the Performing Arts focuses on an affordable lineup, including Stomp with tickets starting at just $22.

On Sundays, the Holiday Green Market features a vast selection of sustainable gifts and holiday foods.

The Grove is the place for a new Sunday brunch. Reps promise the Sunday Funday crowd “will soon be worshiping at the altar of the Clear Bloody Mary.” The spicy cocktail is made with fresh tomato water, chipotle, vodka, basil oil, baby tomatoes and jalapenos. Three other Bloody Mary options and four new mimosas promise to make nursing a downtown hangover even easier.

Aisle style
The new Byrd’s Market & Cafe on the corner of Main and Prairie has answered the need for an area grocery store. Their shelves are brimming with gourmet foods, wine, prepared dishes and freshly baked bread and pastries. Want someone else to cook? Byrd’s also makes urban living easy with catering and delivery and there’s a casual restaurant open every day for breakfast, lunch and dinner. See page 42 for the skinny.

Cosmos on the catwalk
Break out the bubbly! Dean’s Credit Clothing, the downtown bar that doubles as a vintage boutique, now has a regular schedule of fashion shows every Saturday night. Models are styled in the windows of the former department store, and guests can enjoy the institution’s famous frozen cosmos while taking in live music and perusing art for sale. The runway features either their own vintage merchandise or looks from emerging local designers. And every Tuesday evening, owner Toby Lister rocks the stage as Toby Champagne and the Deans.

The nuns consider what to do about Maria in TUTS’ The Sound of Music.
Models are styled in the windows of the former department store, and guests can enjoy the institution’s famous frozen cosmos while taking in live music and perusing art for sale.

Eat and drink

Hearsay dubs itself Houston’s first gastro lounge. The menu features an inventive spin on pub fare, with fresh fish, filet mignon, salads and soups. In addition to craft beers and an extensive scotch menu, there’s a mixologist on hand to shake up specialty cocktails. The two-level setup sits in the original Foley’s department store location – the space also served as a Civil War ammunition dump – and has been made modern with flat screen TVs, sleek seating and a crystal chandelier.

COOL AT DEAN’S

The bride wore blue

Rick’s Bridal Couture in the heart of the Theater District is more than a boutique for brides. In addition to housing a gallery-inspired showroom of gowns, it also offers specialty wedding planning services for the couple looking to personalize their wedding, no matter how unusual the request. Need a yoga instructor to get your body ready for the big day? How about a celeb chef to cook nothing but sushi for your dream reception? Rick’s experts have a Rolodex of the area’s experts. Houston designer Shawn Kingsley founded the concept using his couture design background.

Destination downtown

Houston Pavilions has scored with the installation of Lucky Strike Lanes & Lounge, a hip boutique bowling alley with a focus on specialty cocktails, high-end cuisine, clubby lights, DJs and artwork. The 25,000-square-foot space houses a VIP Luge Lounge, complete with its own bar and four private lanes. Also new to the outdoor mall is III Forks Steakhouse, featuring primo cuts and seafood dishes, as well as lighter fare and salads. House of Blues Houston still offers a Sunday gospel brunch, but there’s way more on tap. The live music venue has added a new happy hour featuring dollar beers, $3 cocktails and half-price appetizers, plus a “4 for 40 Partner Lunch” in the Foundation Room that includes an appetizer for sharing, two salads and two entrees.

Lucky Strike Lanes & Lounge rolls into downtown’s Houston Pavilions.
‘Ruff housing’
Some of the city’s best chefs will create artisan edible gingerbread dog houses on Thursday, December 1, from 6:30-8 p.m. at Voice Restaurant and Lounge inside Hotel Icon. After the complimentary cocktail party, guests are invited to a prix fixe dinner. Both events benefit Lucky Dog Rescue.

‘Downtown moves’
Put on your dancing shoes. Cielo Mexican Bistro is spicing up downtown’s nightlife scene with salsa dancing every weekend.

‘Taste of the season’
The Alden Hotel’s critically acclaimed *17 has launched new seasonal menu items and is open for festive gatherings on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day Dinners and New Year’s Eve.

‘Talk about some green’
Salata is committed to their customer’s New Year’s resolutions. The four downtown locations of the tossed-to-order salad bar are giving diners $1 off meals when they show a current gym membership. The area’s newest location is in the Allen Center tunnel.

‘A fresh feel’
At the Four Seasons Hotel Houston, four new concepts are being rolled out in time for cooler temps, starting with Quattro’s makeover, which has yanked the white tablecloth off stuffy hotel dining. Their sommelier, now known as the Head ‘Wine’brarian, has compiled a wine library featuring more than 50 wines by the glass paired with the new enoteca-inspired menu of Italian small plates priced below $10. And Thursdays in December heat up with a happy hour on the upper level pool deck, complete with firepits, hot toddies and complimentary s’mores. Cheers!

‘Dinner undressed’
Strip House, the upscale steakhouse with a tasteful burlesque feel, celebrates five years in Houston by introducing a $55 five-course menu in January. Also new is a classic cocktail menu featuring sidecars, Manhattans and pear royales. Even the weekday happy hour feels more festive these days with passed light bites and, to pair with the selection of post-work beers, house-made beef jerky.

Praise the Lord and pass the biscuits. House of Blues Gospel Brunch is downtown’s newest Sunday tradition.
They’re no pretenders. Meet the real downtowners.

cool

by Allison Bagley
Meet three unique personalities who breathe life into the spaces where they live, work and thrive. Their efforts behind the curtain help people discover and experience downtown’s unique appeal. And when they take center stage, these figures help put a face on the neighborhood. If you were a visitor, you’d be lucky to call Guy Hagstette, Dawn Fudge or Freddy Floyd your downtown tour guide. And you’d get a very different approach from each of them. One might be able to tell you what’s hidden around lesser-traveled corners, another might know the best place for cocktails with crab legs while the third is your go-to expert for everything cool.”
Native Houstonian Dawn Fudge is best known as owner of one of the city’s oldest restaurants. Last Concert Café opened in 1949 and Fudge, only the second female owner in its history, has been maintaining the eatery’s original charm for 23 years – like locking the unmarked door during regular business hours.

“We’ve done everything we can to keep people out,” jokes the jovial restaurateur. “It’s like this hidden oasis. No one knows it’s here – someone practically has to tell you.”

Fudge used to call a no-frills warehouse across from the Tex-Mex institution home, but she’s since moved a mile to a larger warehouse with plenty of green space. The “energy vortex” draws her back to the restaurant daily, where she acts as a mother hen to visiting musicians and regular patrons. “It’s my destiny. It’s my lot in my life to oversee it.”

Best-selling dishes like potato and green chili soup and cheese enchiladas attract lawyers, judges, cops and business types to the off-the-beaten-path favorite for lunch. But at night, “it turns into an opposite world,” Fudge says with her trademark laugh. “It’s like a circus!”

Artists and musicians mix with hoop dancers on the back patio, where regular live music is just one part of the entertainment – a fire spinner is not an uncommon sight at the café.

When she’s not greeting regulars, Fudge is taking in Society of the Performing Arts shows or recruiting a team for a showdown at Lucky Strike Lanes.

“I’m starting to feel like when I go out in downtown I’m not in Houston anymore,” she says. “So that’s kind of fun.”
“It’s my job to sell the city,” says Freddy Floyd, a former concierge at three of downtown’s luxury boutique hotels, the Sam Houston (now the Alden), the Magnolia and, most recently, the Hotel Icon. The handsome 36-year-old’s expertise in local attractions, especially those downtown, along with his gregarious personality, has earned him a catchy nickname. He’s known as The Consummate Concierge. “I have to be the sports fanatic, the theater patron, the foodie,” says the graduate of the University of Houston’s Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management. “I have to be all of those things so I can be informed enough to tell people.”

Floyd is a familiar face downtown, often spotted biking during lunchtime or hosting picnics at Discovery Green. Not only does Floyd act as a cheerleader for downtown—he’s come to the aid of visiting celebrities like Bow Wow, John Legend, and Chris Brown and Rhianna, “pre love spat” – he does his part to shine a new light on the city’s diverse neighborhoods for Houstonians as well.

In fact, he’s just filmed a series called The In-Town Tourist. In his segments, Floyd approaches unsuspecting Houstonians and takes them on tours. One itinerary includes a visit to a Buddhist temple, a mini lesson on Chinese history and a traditional tea ceremony.

In addition to activities that take advantage of downtown’s “rich ethnic heritage and culture,” Floyd suggests a list of downtown “daycations.” Some romantic offerings include a trip to the waterfall near the Wortham Theater Center – “a piece of utopia in the middle of the city” – a carriage ride, a private dinner at the 43rd Restaurant and Lounge and salsa dancing at Cielo Mexican Bistro.

“I get paid for my opinion,” he says warmly. “And I’m never wrong, ’cause I have fun doing everything.”
Guy Hagstette calls himself a pioneer of downtown. Considering that in 1995 the historic preservationist chipped in to save a dry goods building near Market Street Square where he still lives, the term isn’t much of a stretch.

“I can remember when it was so quiet here you could hear the buzzing of street lights at night,” says the president of Discovery Green, who has also spearheaded major projects for the Downtown District, Main Street Square and Sesquicentennial Park. “It was beyond dead.”

Hagstette has been a champion for downtown causes since he moved to the neighborhood, not just because he’s interested in preservation but because he’s a proponent of how easy it is to live here. He has decorated his large, loft-style home, which boasts a courtyard garden and 13-foot ceilings, with art he’s collected downtown. He walks to the dentist, doctor, post office and shops from his home or office. For entertainment offerings, he says, the expanse of choices is an improvement from days when only one option existed for dinner – Spaghetti Warehouse.

The native Houstonian says he’s excited about development that has made downtown “appeal to a broader range of personalities,” evidenced by the increased sidewalk traffic he sees and the younger demographic he sees moving in. It’s beginning to feel like a “real neighborhood.”

In addition to attractions like Discovery Green and Houston Pavilions, Hagstette is equally excited about smaller scale projects of late. Referencing the addition to Christ Church Cathedral and development of smaller office spaces, the YMCA and the Ballet Academy, “It all brings a different kind of life to downtown.”

“Each step offers a richer, more urban experience,” he says. 

THE VISIONARY
Explore the Holidays at Discovery Green.

**TAKE TO THE ICE** – The Ice at Discovery Green presented by the Houston Chronicle, Houston’s ice skating rink set in the heart of downtown! Enjoy free events such as movies, music and even Capital One Bank Snow Day and Ice Carving events…on ice! Thanksgiving Day through Martin Luther King Jr. Day

**TAKE TO THE SKY** – Houston’s magnificent downtown skyline as never seen before – floating 35 stories above the city in the exciting new Administaff Holiday Balloon! December through February

**CHECK WWW.DISCOVERYGREEN.COM** for Ice Skating and Administaff Holiday Balloon ticket prices, group sales, hospitality opportunities and our special event schedule.

Catch one of the Holiday Trolleys at Discovery Green connecting all of the festive happenings in downtown.

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You know the feeling. Everywhere you look, you’re bombarded with messages about going green and being environmentally conscious. The push for both individuals and businesses to reduce their carbon footprints is a strong and growing movement. In fact, within the past several years downtown has begun its own transformation. Younger workers expect to live and work in sustainable environments and the marketplace has responded. New buildings are being designed and constructed to achieve LEED certification and many existing buildings are retrofitting to achieve U.S. DOE Energy Star ratings and LEED existing building certifications.

So where does that leave you as an individual? It’s one thing to talk about “going green.” It’s another thing entirely to manage it realistically in your day-to-day life. So we thought we’d offer up some real-life tips for being more eco-friendly. Because even small steps can make a real difference for the planet.

**LOOK FOR THE LABEL**

When it’s time to make a big (or a small) purchase take the time to look for certification labels and use them as your guide. There are a few trusted certifications out there that, while not perfect, are reliable. Look for the federal government’s Energy Star designation on appliances and electronics; the USDA organic seal on food and cosmetics; the Green Seal (and, in Canada, EcoLogo) on household cleaning products; and the Forest Stewardship Council logo on wood and paper products.

**THINK ABOUT PACKAGING**

Green products are a great choice, but buying conventional products in bulk can be just as important. Instead of individual bags of chips or cookies, buy a big bag and put them in reusable containers when you pack up lunch for the kiddos. Bring your own travel mug to your favorite coffee shop and ask them to use that instead of a disposable cup. When you buy a product or package that’s recyclable, make sure it’s actually recyclable in your area and then be sure to follow through and put it in the recycling bin.

**TRUST YOUR GUT**

If a company is making green claims that seem counterintuitive, approach with caution. Car companies and oil companies are great examples of industries that work hard to create a greener image but still have a long way to go. So applaud and reward real changes, but don’t lose sight of the big picture. A company’s marketing strategy should match their actions. And if a claim seems too good to be true, it probably is.

**RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH**

Sometimes you’ve got to make a decision while standing in the grocery aisle, but if you have time, it pays to do some googling. Web sites like greenerchoices.org, greencars.org and the electronic product environmental assessment tool at epeat.net can help you make sense of manufacturers’ claims on big-ticket items, while ewg.org and responsiblepurchasing.org have helpful information on smaller items like cosmetics, cleaners and food.
So Percussion
The Brooklyn–based quartet creates music that is both raucous and refined.
So is: Josh Quillen, Adam Sliwinski, Eric Beach and Jason Treuting.
THEATER

A CHRISTMAS CAROL
Through Nov 29 The Houston premiere of the musical by award-winning composer Alan Menken (Little Shop of Horrors, The Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast) and celebrated lyricist Lynn Ahrens (Seussical, Ragtime, Once On This Island). Mean and miserly Ebenezer Scrooge declares charity, compassion and Christmas itself to be a humbug, only to have his Christmas Eve interrupted by a series of ghosts, each imploring, cajoling and threatening the wicked old man to change his ways or be bound to the heavy chains of regret and avarice in the afterlife. Hobby Center, 800 Bagby. 713.315.2525. masqueradetheatre.com

CHRISTMAS CAROL – A GHOST STORY OF CHRISTMAS
Through Dec 27 A Christmas Carol – A Ghost Story of Christmas returns this year with a re-telling of Charles Dickens’ classic story, which follows Ebenezer Scrooge’s journey with three ghostly spirits who visit him on Christmas Eve. A Christmas Carol instills a powerful message about redemption and the spirit of the holiday season, through a dazzling production. Tickets $21–$100. Alley Theatre, 615 Texas. 713.220.5700. alleytheatre.org

THE SANTALAND DIARIES
Nov 28-Dec 27 Company actor Todd Waite will reprise his role as Crumpet the Elf in the outlandish, and true, chronicles of David Sedaris’ experience as a worker in Macy’s Santaland display. This compact, one-character, one-hour comedy is a hilarious cult classic, featuring comic encounters during the height of the holiday crunch. NPR humorist and best-selling author of Me Talk Pretty One Day and Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim, David Sedaris has become one of America’s pre-eminent humor writers. Tickets $21–$100. Alley Theatre, 615 Texas. 713.220.3700. alleytheatre.org

WONDERLAND
Jan 15-Feb 14 Composer Frank Wildhorn’s (Jekyll and Hyde) returns to the Alley with Wonderland, a delightful new musical that updates Alice’s adventures through an amazing pop score. Alley audiences will be among the first to see this new production filled with extraordinary songs, fantastic characters and lots of heart. Tickets $21–$85. Alley Theatre, 615 Texas. 713.220.5700. alleytheatre.org

TOSCA
Jan 22-Feb 7 Renowned soprano Patricia Racette makes her debut as the passionate Floria Tosca in Puccini’s timeless drama. Tenor Alexey Dolgov is the painter Mario Cavaradossi, whom Tosca adores, and Raymond Aceto sings the menacing Baron Scarpia, who will stop at nothing to destroy the object of Tosca’s affections. Created especially for Houston Grand Opera, this new production by John Caird features classic sets and costumes designed by Bunny Christie in the style of 19th-century Rome. Tickets $23–$200. Wortham Center, 501 Texas. 713.228.6737. houstongrandopera.org

STOMP
Feb 12-14 The return of the percussive hit brings some new surprises, with sections of the show now updated and restructured and the addition of two new full-scale routines, using props like tractor tire inner tubes and paint cans. “Every reworking has involved losing some pieces and gaining new ones, but has always stayed true to the original premise of the show: to create rhythmic music with instantly recognizable objects, and do it with an eccentric sense of character and humor,” says co-creator Steve McNicholas. Tickets $22–$62. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. 713.227.4SPA. spahouston.org

CIRQUE DREAMS ILLUMINATION
Feb 23-Mar 7 From the creators of the groundbreaking Broadway hit, Cirque Dreams: Jungle Fantasy comes an all new journey of nighttime dreamers whose imaginations are ignited within a landscape of towering buildings and infinite possibilities. Audiences of all ages will marvel and experience a journey of city dwellers who reinvent everyday objects, balance beyond belief, delicately dangle from wires, leap tall buildings and redefine the risks of flight in an array of astounding occurrences that
transform the ordinary into extraordinary. Tickets $20–$130. Hobby Center, 800 Bagby. 800.745.3000. broadwayacrossamerica.com

PERFORMING ARTS

THE NUTCRACKER
Nov 27–Dec 27 Featuring glorious scenery and costumes by Tony Award-winning designer Desmond Heeley, Ben Stevenson’s breathtaking production of The Nutcracker is set in 19th-century Germany. The ballet opens at a charming Christmas party at which the mysterious Dr. Drosselmeyer gives his little niece Clara a magical toy that takes her on an unforgettable journey. From the Christmas tree that grows to a towering 40 feet in the air in the second act, is sure to delight audiences of all ages. Tickets $17–$94. Houston Symphony for a Christmas concert featuring Garrison Keillor’s unique blend of improvisational storytelling and songmaking. Tickets $35–$130. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. 713.224.7575. virtuosoofhouston.org

A LITTLE DAY MUSIC
Dec 2 A Little Day Music concerts fulfill an important aspect of Da Camera’s mission to develop the audience for chamber music and jazz by making it accessible to everyone and part of everyday life. Downtown workers, schools, seniors and day care centers are among the many who enjoy Da Camera’s free lunchtime concerts in the lobby of the Wortham Theater Center. Bring your lunch and enjoy the wide variety of artists and ensembles presented this season. Tickets free. Noon. Wortham Center, 501 Texas. 713.524.5050. dacamera.com

BOWFIRE
Dec 3 Holiday Heart Strings mixes greatest hits with a holiday twist. Celebrate the festive season with some of the world’s greatest fiddlers and violinists in many genres with step dancing like you have never seen. Holiday Heart Strings includes all-time favorite classics such as The Nutcracker Suite, Sleigh Ride, So this is Christmas, Dreggall, Dreggall, Dreggall, and The Christmas Song. Tickets $22–$62. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. 713.227–4SPA. spahouston.org

JUBILEE OF DANCE – 40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Dec 4 Looking back and looking forward, the 40th anniversary Jubilee of Dance celebrates the best of Houston Ballet. Featuring highlights of company and audience favorites, previews of upcoming productions, and works created especially for the 40th Anniversary Jubilee, this is a one-night-only event. The 2009 Jubilee of Dance will also pay tribute to retiring company star Barbara Bears with a video montage and a one-time-only performance by Ms. Bears of Mikhail Fokine’s bravura solo The Dying Swan. Tickets $35–$160. Wortham Center, 501 Texas. 713.227–ARTS. houstonballet.org

DIANNE REEVES – CHRISTMAS TIME IS HERE
Dec 4 Vocalist Dianne Reeves performs music from her beloved recording Christmas Time Is Here, which includes her renditions of Carol of the Bells, Let it Snow, Little Drummer Boy, I’ll Be Home for Christmas and other holiday favorites. Dianne Reeves is the pre-eminent jazz vocalist in the world today. Reeves was awarded the Grammy for Best Jazz Vocal Performance for four consecutive recordings – a Grammy first in any vocal category. Tickets $40–$60. Wortham Center, 501 Texas. 713.524.5050. dacamera.com

THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS
Dec 5 Just one day of Christmas is never enough. The Houston Symphony will give you 12 like you’ve never experienced before. Enjoy this perfect family holiday outing, complete with a visit from Santa Claus and an audience sing-along. Tickets $15–$22. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. 713.224.7575. houstonsymphony.org

INAUGURAL CONCERT OF THE 2009-2010 SEASON
Dec 6 Virtuosi of Houston is a premier youth chamber orchestra celebrating its 14th season. The musicians, ages 11 to 18, are from the greater Houston area and are selected from annual auditions. The limited size of the orchestra, 50 players, requires the young artists to perform at an exemplary level. Artistic directors and conductors are Franz Anton Krager and Andrzej Grabiec, who are also faculty members at the Moores School of Music, University of Houston. Tickets $10–$35. Hobby Center, 800 Bagby. 713.315.2525. virtuosiofHouston.org

GARRISON KEILLOR’S CHRISTMAS
Dec 9 Join Garrison Keillor and the Houston Symphony for a Christmas concert featuring Keillor’s unique blend of improvisational storytelling and songmaking. Tickets $35–$130. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. 713.224.7575. houstonsymphony.org

Hallelujah Messiah
Dec 11 The holidays aren’t complete without hearing Handel’s famed Messiah. Ring in the holidays with Mercury Baroque in a moving performance of the most famous and recognized highlights from this quintessential holiday masterpiece. Hear the Messiah and its Hallelujah chorus as you have never heard it before thanks to the clarity and freshness of Mercury’s period instruments. Tickets $35–$130. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. 713.333.0080. mercurybaroque.org

VERY MERRY POPS
Dec 11-13 You and your family will treasure this festive, heartwarming annual tradition featuring Mike Krajewski, the Houston Symphony and Houston Symphony chorus as you have never experienced before. Enjoy this perfect family holiday outing, complete with a visit from Santa Claus and an audience sing-along. Tickets $15–$22. Wortham Center, 501 Texas. 713.333.0080. mercurybaroque.org

houstonballet.org

houstondowntown.com
Downtown kicks off the season with the 2nd annual Holiday Spectacular and spectacular it most certainly is. It all gets going with the H+E+B Holiday Parade on Thanksgiving Day, but that’s just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Don’t miss the nighttime Art Car Parade on Saturday, November 28 and be sure to take a spin on the Ice at Discovery Green. Of course the Theater District goes strong throughout November and December with some classic performances you won’t want to miss. Houston Ballet presents The Nutcracker starting Friday, November 27, Theatre Under The Stars has the family favorite The Sound of Music on tap, Houston Symphony’s A Very Merry Pops always pleases audiences, Masquerade Theatre and Alley Theatre offer up their own takes on A Christmas Carol and Society for the Performing Arts wows with Bowfire: Holiday Heart Strings. Enjoy the twinkling decorations, great shopping deals and dining and take advantage of the free trolleys running every weekend through January to make it all super easy to celebrate the holidays downtown. houstondowntown.com

MESSIAH
Dec 12 Handel’s Messiah is the quintessential holiday tradition, yet it is rarely performed uncut. Hear Handel’s epic masterpiece in its complete and excellent entirety. Tickets $25-$52. Wortham Center, 501 Texas. 713.533.0080. mercurybaroque.org

A TWISTED HOLIDAY
Dec 15 GMCH takes popular holiday tunes, refamiliarizes you with them, then twists them ‘til you are rolling with laughter. For good measure, they’ll even throw in a few unique songs for your future holidays. GMCH is here for your holiday rescue, twisting up and down Carolers’ Lane. Tickets $22-$55. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. 713.521.7464. bayoucityperformingarts.org

JIM BRICKMAN – BEAUTIFUL WORLD CHRISTMAS
Dec 16 In this very special concert, Jim will introduce fans to Beautiful World plus his favorite holiday music from classic to contemporary. Enjoy an evening of dazzling solo piano, vibrant vocals plus warmth and humor with very special guests. Beautiful World creates a musical celebration for audiences seeking an escape from the hectic demands of the holiday season. Tickets $35-$50. Wortham Center, 501 Texas. 713.629.3700. ticketmaster.com

HANDEL’S MESSIAH IN CANDLELIGHT
Dec 18-20 Experience Handel’s Messiah as audiences would have in the 1700s. Feed your soul with this transcendent experience of text and music. Tickets $25-$80. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. 713.224.7575. houstonsymphony.org

AMAHIL & THE NIGHT VISITORS
Dec 19-20 Sandra Organ Dance Company presents Amahl and the Night Visitors, the story of Amahl, a poor shepherd boy who, with his mother, is visited one night by three wise men seeking lodging during their star-led journey. The magi tell Amahl of the remarkable child they have set out to see. Choreographed by James Sewell, Amahl also includes American Sign Language to tell Amahl’s story and share the themes of hope, healing, and compassion. This family-friendly Christmas story is fast becoming a holiday favorite. Tickets $22-$42. Hobby Center, 800 Bagby. 713.315.2525. organdance.org

SHEN YUN PERFORMING ARTS
Dec 21-23 Shen Yun Performing Arts, the world’s premier Chinese music company, brings to life classical Chinese dance and music in a gloriously colorful and exhilarating show. Its masterful choreography and graceful routines range from grand classical processions to ethnic and folk dances, with gorgeously costumed dancers moving in stunning synchronized patterns. Tickets $30-$150. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. 713.629.3700. ticketmaster.com

A NEOPOLITAN NEW YEAR
Dec 31 Ring in 2010 with Houston’s most elegant New Year’s Eve celebration. Rising stars soprano Ava Pine and mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton join the ensemble for the American premiere of J. A. Hasse’s Neopolitan masterpiece Marc Antonio e Cleopatra. A festive gala follows, with champagne, delectable hors d’oeuvres and fabulous prizes at our annual silent auction. Tickets $31.25-$41.25. Hobby Center, 800 Bagby. 713.315.2525. arslyricahouston.org.

MARIN ALSOP’S MAHLER’S FIRST
Jan 7-10 Marin Alsop, the first woman to head a major American orchestra, brings her unstoppable energy back to Houston. Tickets $29-$116. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. 713.224.7575. houstonsymphony.org

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP
Jan 15-16 The Mark Morris Dance Group has stayed true to its founder’s convictions – dancing with live music performed by some of the world’s best musicians. The company will perform Excursions with music by Samuel Barber; the tour de force Going Away Party to the music of Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys; the powerful Italian Concerto, danced to the J.S. Bach score; and the astonishing Grande Duo, with music by Lou Harrison. Tickets $22-$57. Wortham Center, 501 Texas. 713.227.4545. spahouston.org

RHAPSODY IN BLUE
Jan 15-17 Hear how three masters infuse jazz and dance hall music into these witty, brilliant scores. Tickets $29-$116. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. 713.224.7575. houstonsymphony.org

COMPANY CLARE DYSON: THE VOYEUR
Jan 21-23 DiverseWorks is proud to present the U.S. premiere of The Injurer, the latest performance installation by Australian-based Company Clare Dyson that explores notions of intimacy, desire, and the act of revealing. In this exciting new work, audiences are not passive viewers, they choose where and how they view the performance. Seats on stage surround the set, situated in front of specially designed “peepholes,” giving specialized viewing experiences. Some seats have binoculars, others headsets that reveal the performers’ inner monologues. Each audience member chooses how they move in the space and what is most important to them as they participate. Tickets pay-want-you-want. DiverseWorks, 1117 East Freeway. 713.223.0346. diverseworks.org

THE PLANETS – AN HD ODYSSEY
Jan 21-24 The Houston Symphony has commissioned celebrated producer/director Duncan Copp to assemble state-of-the-art, high-definition images from NASA’s exploration of the solar system to accompany Holst’s exciting, cosmic score, along with commentary by the world’s leading planetary scientists. Be present for this special world premiere event. Tickets $29-$116. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. 713.224.7575. houstonsymphony.org

A LITTLE DAY MUSIC
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RED CARPET OSCAR PARTY
Feb 5-7 Remember your favorite Oscar-winning blockbusters with music from Lawrence of Arabia,
LA BAYADÈRE ("THE TEMPLE DANCER")
Feb 25-Mar 7 The high point of Houston Ballet’s 40th anniversary season will be a spectacular new production of one of the great classical works of the 19th-century repertoire, featuring choreography by Stanton Welch and lavish scenery and costumes by the celebrated English designer Peter Farmer. Set in the royal India of the past, La Bayadère is a story of eternal love, mystery, fate, vengeance and justice. Tickets $17-$160. Wortham Center, 501 Texas. 713.227.ARTS. houstonsymphony.org

FRANKIE VALLI AND THE FOUR SEASONS
Feb 25 The Tony Award–winning Broadway musical Jersey Boys portrayed the lives of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons to international acclaim. Now hear them live with the Houston Symphony singing Sherry, Big Girls Don’t Cry, Walk Like a Man and Oh, What a Night. Tickets $45-$175. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. 713.224.7575. houstonsymphony.org

MICHAEL CAVANAUGH SINGS BILLY JOEL & MORE

THE SPIRIT OF ENGLAND
Feb 12 Three gems of the British chamber music repertoire are featured in this English tribute: Vaughan Williams’s atmospheric settings of A.E. Housman poems, Elgar’s majestic Phantasy Quartet. Tenor Andrew Kennedy, known for his dramatic performances in song and opera, and celebrated rising-star Orion Weiss make their Da Camera debuts. Tickets $35-$45. Wortham Center, 501 Texas. 713.524.5050. dacamera.com

ROMEO AND JULIET
Feb 13 This Valentine’s Day, bring your date and join Mercury Baroque and Dominic Walsh Dance Theater as they remount their popular opera–ballet Romeo and Juliet. Shakespeare’s epic love story will be staged by Dominic Walsh and scored to the music of Vivaldi as arranged by Mercury’s artistic director Antoine Plante. With breathtaking sets, stunning dancing, and passionate music, Romeo and Juliet is the perfect outing on Valentine’s Day weekend. Tickets $20-$47. Wortham Center, 501 Texas. 713.533.0080. mercurybaroque.com and dwdt.org

BEETHOVEN’S PASTORAL SYMPHONY
Feb 19-21 Conductor Hans Graf rearranged his schedule to join legendary pianist Radu Lupu so they can together illuminate Mozart’s emotionally charged – even operatic – masterpiece. Tickets $29-$816. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. 713.224.7575. houstonsymphony.org

BAND OF THE IRISH GUARD
Feb 23 The Irish Guards were formed on April 1, 1900 on the expressed wish of HM Queen Victoria to commemorate the bravery of the many Irish regiments who had fought in the South African campaigns. The Regimental Band was formed at about the same time and consisted initially of 35 musicians and a warrant officer, Mr C. H. Hassell, who was the bandmaster. Tickets $22-$57. Jones Hall, 615 Louisiana. 713.227.4SPA. spahouston.org

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COOL GLOBES: HOT IDEAS FOR A COOLER PLANET

Through Dec 31

Outdoor public art exhibit featuring 50 colorful, super-sized globes designed by international, national and local artists to depict everyday solutions to global warming. Free. Discovery Green, 1500 McKinney. 713.400.7336. coolglobes.org

SPINNING A YARN: HOUSTON HISTORY THROUGH CLOTHING

Through Jan 3

In Spinning a Yarn, the park’s historic houses will come to life with the stories of the people who lived in them. These stories will be told by featuring clothing and accessories from the 1830s through the 1920s from The Heritage Society’s permanent collection. Free. The Heritage Society, 1100 Bagby Street. 713.655.1912. heritagesociety.org

BEHIND THE BUILDING

Through Jan 5

This exhibition is presented by the Associated General Contractors of America Houston History Project to celebrate the work of Houston builders. It will focus on Houston monuments and the people who built them from 1923–2000. Architecture Center Houston, 315 Capitol. 713.520.0155. aiahouston.org

EXHIBITS & VISUAL ARTS

TIERNY MALONE: THIRD WARD IS MY HARLEM

Through Dec 19

Houston artist Tiereny Malone transforms the DiverseWorks Main Gallery into a massive multi-media installation and community center with his latest work. Drawing from his own Southern roots and experiences, growing up in urban black America, Malone reframes American history and situates himself and his audience firmly in complex, non-linear narratives full of stoic nostalgia and sophistication. During the course of Malone’s residency at DiverseWorks, he will work alongside young, aspiring artists from Houston’s historically significant Third Ward to craft an undeniably personal story of that place in a way that speaks to the experiences of much more than just one man. Free. DiverseWorks, 1117 East Freeway. 713.223.0346. diverseworks.org

RAIN OR SHINE: HOW HOUSTON DEVELOPED SPACE CITY BASEBALL

Jan 12–Apr 4

George Scroggins, Texas Baseball Hall of Fame director, and Mike Acosta, Astros archivist are the guest curators for the Rain or Shine exhibit featuring the history of, and memorabilia from, Houston professional baseball teams. Free. The Heritage Society, 1100 Bagby Street. 713.655.1912. heritagesociety.org

ON PAPER: THE LINCOLN CENTER/ LIST COLLECTION

Through Feb 13

Houston’s Bank of America Center’s new art exhibit is a selection of more than 40 rarely seen contemporary works from Lincoln Center’s acclaimed List Fine Art Poster & Print program. The Lincoln Center exhibition is the first of an ongoing series of exhibitions in the newly completed art gallery in the lobby of the building. Free. Bank of America Center, 700 Louisiana. bankofamericacenterhouston.com

FILM

FIRST THURSDAYS AT DEAN’S

Dec 3, Jan 7 & Feb 4

Every first Thursday of the month you can check out the screening of award-winning, Texas-made short film entries from the Houston Film Commission’s Texas Filmmakers Showcase or from other film festivals. Free. Dean’s Credit Clothing, 316 Main. 713.437.5249.

ANGELIKA FILM CENTER

Ongoing

Elegant cinema playing eclectic mix of art films and commercial movies from major studios. Tickets $9 adults, $7 matinee, $6.25 kids, $6.5 seniors (note: if you park in the Theater District garage, they will deduct from your ticket price but you must bring parking ticket with you). Call or go online for list of films and showtimes. Bayou Place, 510 Texas. 713.225.1470. angeliكافilmcenter.com

CONCERTS

VERIZON WIRELESS THEATER

Dec 1

Jackson Browne

Dec 6

311

Dec 16

Underoath

Verizon’s concert calendar is continuously being updated. Check online for more info and to purchase tickets. Verizon Wireless Theater, 520 Texas. 713.230.1600. livenation.com

HOUSE OF BLUES

Every Sunday Gospel Brunch

Nov 25

Raphael Saadiq

Nov 28

Misfits, Hell City Kings w/Motov, Compromise & the Ghost Storys

Nov 30

Taking Back Sunday

Dec 4

Aaron Neville’s Christmas Show

Dec 7

Trivium

Dec 10

Sister Hazel

Dec 17

LMFAO’s Party Rock Tour w/Shwayze

Dec 28

Robert Earl King

Jan 24

The Anvil Experience

Jan 29

Badfish – A Tribute to Sublime

HOB’s concert calendar is continuously being updated. Check online for more info and to purchase tickets. House of Blues, Houston Pavilions, 1204 Caroline. 888.402.5837. hob.com

TOYOTA CENTER

Dec 4

Aventura

Dec 8

WWE SMACKDOWN

Dec 12

NCAA Men’s Basketball: Texas A&M University vs. University of New Mexico

Dec 27

Trans Siberian Orchestra (two shows)

Jan 2

Playhouse Disney

Feb 5 & 6

Harlem Globetrotters

Feb 28

Lipizzaner Stallions

Toyota Center’s concert calendar is continuously being updated. Check online for more info and to purchase tickets. Toyota Center, 1510 Polk. 713.4HOU.TIX. toyotacenterhouston.com

WORTHAM TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY

Nov 25

Hundreds of Houston area children will celebrate the beginning of the holiday season at the Wortham Theater Center Tree Lighting Ceremony, a joyous, colorful festival held in the Grand Foyer of the Wortham Theater Center. The highlight of the event will occur when the Sugar Plum Fairy will illuminate 8,000 twinkling lights on Wortham Theater Center’s 25-foot Christmas tree. The festivities will include visits by costumed characters
from Houston Ballet’s The Nutcracker, including life-size fuzzy mice and toy soldiers. Free. Wortham Center’s Grand Foyer, 501 Texas. 713.237.1439. houstonballet.org

**H-E-B HOLIDAY PARADE**

**Nov 26** The H-E-B Holiday Parade is celebrating 60 years in Houston – making it one of the city’s longest-running traditions. In honor of the 60th anniversary, the parade will feature all-new floats, as well as giant helium balloons and more than 5,000 parade participants. Free. Begins at Minute Maid Park, 713.654.8808. hebparade.com

**THE ICE AT DISCOVERY GREEN, HOLIDAY SKATING ON KINDER LAKE PRESENTED BY THE HOUSTON CHRONICLE**

Nov 26-Jan 18

Make Discovery Green your tradition during the holidays with an array of activities offered for families, couples, and visitors to the city. Admission $10 includes skate rental and tax. 1500 McKinney. 713.400.7336. discoverygreen.com

- Holiday art exhibits include local artist David Graeve’s illuminated globes featuring photos taken by FUUSA students.
- Get from Discovery Green to all of the activities downtown on two Holiday Trolleys with routes available on weekends. It’s all part of the Downtown Holiday Spectacular.

**BUFFALO BAYOU CHRISTMAS CRUISES**

Dec 4-5 & 19 Join Buffalo Bayou Partnership in celebrating the holiday season with 30-minute pontoon boat rides along Buffalo Bayou served up with plenty of decorations, brightly colored lights, song and cheer. First come, first serve, no reservations, 20 person max per trip. $7 adults, $5 for kids 4–12. Sabine Promenade at Sabine. 713.752.0314. buffalobayou.org

**SNOW IN THE CITY AT THE HOUSTON PAVILIONS**

Nov 27-Dec 24 Every day catch the holiday spirit at Houston Pavilions twice a day while power shopping and dining. It will “snow” twice a day for 30 minutes at Houston Pavilions during lunchtime and again at happy hour in Center Court. Houston Pavilions, 1201 Fannin & Main. 832.320.1200. houstonpavilions.com

**SHOPS AT HOUSTON CENTER HOLIDAY PERFORMANCES**

Dec 4, 11 & 18 Enjoy holiday performances in the food court during December. The Shops at Houston Center, 1200 McKinney. 713.759.1442. shopsatc.com

**MAYOR’S HOLIDAY CELEBRATION**

Dec 4 Join Mayor Bill White for music, fireworks and the lighting of the official holiday tree. Free. Hermann Square at City Hall, 901 Bagby. 713.247.3500. houstontx.gov

**GINGERBREAD HOUSE WORKSHOP FOR KIDS & AFTERNOON TEA FOR PARENTS**

Every Sat & Sun in Dec Bring the family to the Four Seasons each weekend in December for a festive twist on traditional tea time. Parents can relax in Quattro and enjoy an elegant afternoon tea as the pastry chefs lead a gingerbread house building.

**BREAKFAST WITH SANTA AT DOWNTOWN AQUARIUM**

Every weekend in Dec before Christmas & weekdays Dec 21-24 Join Sharkey and Santa Claus for a very merry holiday breakfast. Guests of all ages enjoy a bountiful breakfast buffet and photos with Santa. Scuba Santa will also make a special appearance, greeting guests underwater. $7.99 kids (ages 4–12) & $14.99 adults (plus tax and service charge). Downtown Aquarium, 410 Bagby. 713.223.3474. aquariumrestaurants.com

**BUFFALO BAYOU PARTNERSHIP**

Join Buffalo Bayou Partnership in celebrating the holiday season with 30-minute pontoon boat rides along Buffalo Bayou served up with plenty of decorations, brightly colored lights, song and cheer. First come, first serve, no reservations, 20 person max per trip. $7 adults, $5 for kids 4–12. Sabine Promenade at Sabine. 713.752.0314. buffalobayou.org

**GREAT CREEK PARK**

Every Sat & Sun in Dec Bring the family to the Four Seasons each weekend in December for a festive twist on traditional tea time. Parents can relax in Quattro and enjoy an elegant afternoon tea as the pastry chefs lead a gingerbread house building.
workshop for children. $38 adults, $45 children under 12. Ticket price includes Discovery Green ice skating. Quattro, Four Seasons Hotel, 1300 Lamar. 713.650.1300. houstonfourseasons.com

DOWNTOWN YMCA CHEVRON JINGLE BELL RUN & WALK
Dec 13 More than 5,000 runners, volunteers, sponsors, individuals, children, and families, at all fitness levels (and many sporting holiday costumes), make their way through the streets of downtown Houston. Advanced registration required. Downtown YMCA, 1600 Louisiana. 713.758.9295. jinglebellrunonline.org

FAMILIES ON THE GREEN PRESENTED BY BRACEWELL & GIULIANI LLP
Feb 28 Generous donations from individuals and companies to Discovery Green Conservancy support the hundreds of free programs at the park. Join us for the inaugural Families on the Green, a daylong festival offering a sampling of the diverse programs at the park every season. Tickets $50. Discovery Green, 1500 McKinney. 713.400.7336. discoverygreen.com

THE LIPIZZANER STALLIONS
Feb 28 The Lipizzaner Stallions return to Toyota Center with all new music and routines and routines in their 40th Anniversary Tour. The show emulates the Spanish Riding School of Vienna, Austria, in its presentation of the Lipizzaner breed. Originally used as a horse of war, evolving into a horse of nobility and aristocracy, and now into a living form of equestrian art, the Lipizzans will perform traditional as well as entertaining maneuvers, showcasing the skills used in their different roles throughout history. Toyota Center, 1510 Polk. 713.974.7825. houstontexans.com

THE MONEY SHOW OF THE SOUTHWEST
Dec 3-5 Find out what your old coins and paper money are worth. Meet 400+ dealers, specializing in U.S., world and ancient coins and paper money, medals, tokens, stamps, gems and jewelry from across the globe. Tickets $2, 13 and under, free. George R. Brown Convention Center, 1001 Avenida de las Americas. 713.586.9727. houstoncoinshow.org

HIGH CALIBER GUN & KNIFE SHOW
Dec 5-6 & Jan 2-3 Trade for the gun you’ve always wanted and see hundreds of displays of new and old guns, ammo, gun parts, books, knives, coins, camouflaged and related items at discount prices. Tickets $8. George R. Brown Convention Center, 1001 Avenida de las Americas. 281.331.5969. highcalbergunshow.com

CHERSSPORT GRAND CHAMPIONSHIP
Dec 6 Game on! Get fired up at this major cheer competition, George R. Brown Convention Center, 1001 Avenida de las Americas. 888.732.3965. cherssportcorp.com

HOUSTON CAT CLUB 58TH ANNUAL CHARITY CAT SHOW
Jan 9-10 This two-day show features vendors selling everything from furniture for cats to cat-themed accessories for humans. Tickets $8 adults, under 12 and seniors, $4. George R. Brown Convention Center, 1001 Avenida de las Americas. houstoncatclub.com

FIND OUT WHAT YOUR OLD COINS AND PAPER MONEY ARE WORTH. MEET 400+ DEALERS, SPECIALIZING IN U.S., WORLD AND ANCIENT COINS AND PAPER MONEY, MEDALS, TOKENS, STAMPS, GEMS AND JEWELRY FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE. TICKETS $2, 13 AND UNDER, FREE. GEORGE R. BROWN CONVENTION CENTER, 1001 AVENIDA DE LAS AMERICAS. 713.586.9727. HOUSTONCOINSHOW.ORG

HIGH CALIBER GUN & KNIFE SHOW
DEC 5-6 & JAN 2-3 TRADE FOR THE GUN YOU’VE ALWAYSANTED AND SEE HUNDREDS OF DISPLAYS OF NEW AND OLD GUNS, AMMO, GUN PARTS, BOOKS, KNIVES, COINS, CAMOUFLAGE AND RELATED ITEMS AT DISCOUNT PRICES. TICKETS $8. GEORGE R. BROWN CONVENTION CENTER, 1001 AVENIDA DE LAS AMERICAS. 281.331.5969. HIGHCALBERGUNSHOW.COM

CHERSSPORT GRAND CHAMPIONSHIP
DEC 6 GAME ON! GET FIRED UP AT THIS MAJOR CHEER COMPETITION, GEORGE R. BROWN CONVENTION CENTER, 1001 AVENIDA DE LAS AMERICAS. 888.732.3965. CHERSSPORTCORP.COM

HOUSTON WEDDING SHOWCASE
Feb 27 Meet Houston’s top wedding professionals without driving all over town. Spectacular fashion shows, new ideas, expert advice. Tickets $10, cash only, 12 and under, free. George R. Brown Convention Center, 1001 Avenida de las Americas. 713.952.5252. houstonweddingshowcase.com

SPORTS
HOUSTON AEROS
For schedule info and tickets, call or check the Web site. Toyota Center, 1310 Polk. 713.974.7825. aero.com

HOUSTON DYNAMO
For schedule info and tickets, call or check the Web site. University of Houston Robertson Stadium, 4800 Calhoun. 713.276.7500. houstondynamo.com

HOUSTON ROCKETS
For schedule info and tickets, call or check the Web site. Toyota Center, 1510 Polk. 866.4HOU.TIX. rockets.com

HOUSTON TEXANS
For schedule info and tickets, call or check the Web site. Reliant Stadium, Two Reliant Park, 832.667.2002. houstonTexans.com

RICE OWLS
For schedule info and tickets, call or check the Web site. Rice Stadium, 6100 S. Main. 713.522.OWLs. riceowls.com

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COUGARS
For schedule info and tickets, call or check the Web site. University of Houston Robertson Stadium, 4800 Calhoun. 713.GO.COOGS. uhcougars.com

TOURS
KAYAK TOURS
Nov 22 & Dec 13 Kayak adventures go through Houston’s stunning urban wilderness and downtown. All equipment is provided, including a tandem sit-on-top kayak. Reservations required, cancellations must take place 48 hours prior to the tour. $60 per person, ages 14+. Sundays. Meet at St. Thomas High School parking lot. 713.752.0314. buffalobayou.org

LOOKING BACK HISTORY BOAT TOURS WITH LOUIS AULBACH
Dec 5, Jan 2 & Feb 6 Learn about Houston’s rich history from local historian Louis Aulbach while cruising down the bayou. Reservations required. 10-noon west of downtown. 1-3 east of downtown. Tickets $40. 713.752.0314. buffalobayou.org

BUFFALO BAYOU WALKING TOURS
Dec 5, Jan 2 & Feb 6 Architecture Center Houston, with the cooperation of Buffalo Bayou Partnership ArchDocents, will lead you on this two-hour
architectural stroll along Buffalo Bayou Parkway for an overview of downtown Houston’s history and architecture from its beginnings in 1836 to the efforts to revitalize the central city today. $15 per person ($10 for AIA, ArchiTypes, and Bayou Buddies members). Meet at the AIA office, 315 Capitol, Suite 120, 713.520.0155. aiahoustontx.org

SECOND SATURDAY BUFFALO BAYOU BOAT RIDES
Dec 12, Jan 9 & Feb 13
These 30-minute pontoon boat cruises are a great way to spend the afternoon with your family and friends. First come, first serve, no reservations, 20 person max per trip. $7 adults, $5 for kids 4-12. Sabine Promenade at Sabine. 713.752.0314. buffalobayou.org

DISCOVER HOUSTON TOURS
Ghost tours, tunnel walk and rail tours, architecture tours and more are available. Tour guide Sandra Lord is the resident expert and has been conducting downtown and Houston tours since 1988. Ticket prices vary. 713.222.9255. discoverhoustontours.com

EXPERIENCE HOUSTON WALKING TOURS
Downtown tours include the downtown tunnel system, historic places and panoramic views from the city’s best observation spots. Ticket prices vary. Visitors Center @ City Hall, 901 Bagby, 713.465.7415. visithoustontx.com

HERITAGE SOCIETY HISTORIC HOMES TOUR
Nestled among 19 acres in the heart of downtown Houston, the Heritage Society boasts eight historic structures dating from 1823 to 1905. Each historic structure is authentically restored to reflect its original magnificence. $6 adults, $4 seniors and free for kids under 18. Tue-Sat 10, 11:30, 1, 2:30 and Sun 1, 2:30. 1100 Bagby. 713.655.1912. heritagesociety.org

MINUTE MAID PARK TOUR
Get a behind-the-scenes look at Minute Maid Park, including the historic Union Station, broadcasting booth or press boxes. Astros or visitors’ dugout, luxury suites and much more. $9 adults, $7 seniors and $5 for kids 3-14. Mon-Sat 10, noon, 2. Minute Maid Park, 501 Crawford. 713.259.8687. astros.com

TOYOTA CENTER’S BACKSTAGE TOUR
The one-hour backstage tour will take you behind the scenes of Houston’s premier destination for sports and entertainment. $7 adults, $5 for kids 12 and under and seniors. Toyota Center, 1510 Polk. 713.758.7715.

SAINT ARNOLD BREWING COMPANY TOURS
Come visit Texas’ oldest craft brewery in their new location! The tour begins at 1 and lasts approximately 35 minutes. After the tour, guests are welcome to stay for a free tasting. $5, no reservations required. All minors under the age of 21 must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. 2000 Lyons @ 1-10. saintarnold.com

FREE SELF-GUIDED AUDIO WALKING TOURS
Put on your headphones, hit play and let local insiders, captivating voices and an original soundtrack envelop you in stories of Houston’s past and present. No need to worry about which way to go or what to look for, we’ll point out everything along the way. Three tours are available: The Ultimate Downtown Tour, Museum District Walk & Roll and A Walk in the Park: Discovery Green Walking Tour. Tours are free and available to download to your iPod or MP3 player at houstontoyotacenter.com or as a podcast on iTunes. Be sure to also download the accompanying map for reference.

DON’T FORGET! PUP SQUAD PET ADOPTIONS
November 28 & every Saturday in December
Pup Squad helps find permanent homes for orphaned puppies, kittens and nursing litters. It’s the ultimate holiday gift, but you must be sure that you are ready for the responsibility of a rescue pet.
Houston Pavilions, 1201 Fannin @ Main. 832.320.1200. houstonpavilions.com

houstondowntown.com
Everything you need is closer than you think.
Fall Creek offers all the amenities of a master-planned community just 15 minutes from Downtown.

- Acclaimed Humble ISD schools
- Trails, parks and greenbelts
- Wooded and lakefront homesites
- Redstone Golf Club
- 10-acre recreation complex
- Houston’s top builders
- Sports complex opening in 2010

FALL CREEK
So Much. So Close.
A Johnson and Jefferson Community
Homes from $150s to the millions  FallCreekHouston.com  281.458.8000
Open for business
Linger over drinks and gourmet bites at Hearsay, 218 Travis. >>
17 Restaurant New American  Found in the lobby of the luxurious Alden Hotel, this lush and lavish destination oozes elegance. Detailed American cuisine and smart service make this a restaurant of note. aldenhotels.com. Alden Hotel, 1117 Prairie, 832.200.8800, L by reservation only; D Daily. $$$

a+ bar and grille American Casual  The Alden Hotel’s relaxed dining option where you’ll find a breakfast buffet and a great bar menu with tasty appetizers, salads, burgers and sandwiches every day of the week. A good spot for a fast lunch or a bite before the ballpark, you’ll also love their happy hour and cocktail offerings. aldenhotels.com. Alden Hotel, 1117 Prairie, 832.200.8800, B, L & D Daily. $

Angelo’s Italian Drafthouse  With a menu inspired by traditional Southern Italian cuisine, the specialty of the house is their hand-tossed pizzas baked in the brick oven located behind the 50-foot bar. From the pasta to the sauce to the bread, everything is made fresh to order. With over 50 beers on tap this bistro-meets-tavern concept will surely become a local favorite. angeloshouston.com. 711 Main, 713.225.3500, D & LN Daily. $$

Artista American  Artista offers inspirational contemporary American cuisine and theatrical ambiance with high ceilings, glass walls and sweeping views of the Houston downtown skyline. cordua.com. Hobby Center, 800 Bagby, 713.728.4782, L, Mon-Fri; D Mon-Sat (Open for L & D on Sunday only if a theater performance is scheduled). $$$

Atrium Lobby Lounge Contemporary  Located inside the DoubleTree Hotel overlooking Allen Center courtyard. Relax after a busy day and enjoy your favorite beverage or a bite to eat while you watch on the day’s news on the wide screen TV. DoubleTree Hotel, 400 Dallas, 713.759.0202, L, D & LN Daily. $$

Azuma Sushi & Robata Bar Japanese/Sushi  Voted “Best sushi in Houston” by Citysearch.com, this new-age Japanese restaurant is anything but typical. The ambience is terrific, the sushi is innovative and fresh and the outside seating area provides great people watching. azumajapanese.com. 1410 Bell Street, 713.224.9494, L, D & LN Daily. $$

Banzai Sushi Japanese/Sushi  Count on Banzai Sushi at Bayou Place for the freshest sushi, sashimi and specialty rolls. If sushi isn’t your thing, try their vegetable tempura, Chilean sea bass, Korean ribs or chicken teriyaki. Lunch combos start at just $8 and you can receive 10 percent off your bill with a theater ticket for that night. Bayou Place, 550 Texas, 713.225.1167, L & D Daily; LN Fri & Sat. $$

Benihana of Tokyo Japanese  While some restaurants allow their guests to view the kitchen, this Japanese grill brings the kitchen to you. Benihana chefs set up shop right in front of your table. The meal is made from scratch, and you can witness the entire session. The show is amazing and the food is excellent. benihana.com. 1318 Louisiana, 713.659.8231, L & D Daily. $$$

Birraporetti’s Italian  This Italian restaurant/Irish bar is a Theater District staple. Their delicious pizzas continue to hit the spot, while items such as the chicken picatta and La Dolce Vita have become standouts. Enjoy a signature dessert to finish the meal. birrarestaurant.com. 500 Louisiana, 713.224.9494, L, D & LN Daily. $$

Bistro Lancaster New American  Located in the historic Lancaster Hotel, this cozy getaway is a great place to dine before catching a show in the Theater District. Their new seasonal menu continues Bistro Lancaster’s commitment to local, fresh ingredients of the highest quality. You’ll find hearty soups, sizzling steaks and savory seafood. thelancaster.com. Lancaster Hotel, 701 Texas Ave, 713.228.9502, B, L & D Daily. $$$$

Bon Jour Cafe Deli  Offering soups, sandwiches and salads. 945 Capitol, 713.237.0419, B & L Mon-Fri. $

Bouray’s Burrito Bar Fast Food  A burrito bar with tons of ingredients and sides that allow you to create the burrito of your dreams. bourays.com. 609 Clay, 713.652.5999, L, Mon-Fri. $

Brazos Restaurant American  Upscale seafood and casual American fare come together in a Texas-chic atmosphere. Newly refurbished, black booths and white tablecloths offer elegance and décor not typically found in hotel restaurants. Crowne Plaza Hotel, 1700 Smith, 713.495.7854, B, L & D Daily. $$$$

Brown Bag Deli  Located in the former Antone’s space in the Houston Club building, Brown Bag Deli serves up tasty, fresh sandwiches “just like you like it.” Known for their fluffy, soft bread you won’t be disappointed and neither will your wallet. thenewbrownbagdeli.net. 810 Capitol, 713.224.7000, L Mon-Fri. $

Burger King Fast Food  810 Capitol, 713.223.4114, B & D Mon-Sat. L Daily. $

B.U.S. Sports Grill and Bar American  The ultimate hangout spot before or after a ballpark game. Come and enjoy your favorite cold beverage or bite to eat while cheering the home team to victory. B.U.S. is also a great place to catch the latest sporting event on the big screen! Two locations. Before/after Rockets games, 1800 Texas. Great spot for a fast lunch or a bite before cheering the home team to victory. $20-$29

Byrd’s Market & Cafe American  Byrd’s Market & Cafe combines the convenience of an upscale market and gourmet bistro. Byrd’s features a chef-driven, casual dining restaurant serving breakfast, lunch and dinner seven days a week. Byrd’s also features a prepared food market, freshly baked breads and pastries and a wide selection of food, wines and local household necessitates. Grab a seat on the mezzanine level, overlooking Main Street and enjoy a butternut squash roasted pork sandwich with sweet potato fries! byrdsmarket.com. 420 Main, 713.225.0100, B, L & D Daily. $$

Cabo Mexican  The “Mix-Mex” grill is a spicy blend of South and Central American flavors. A fun downtown spot with the ultimate outdoor balcony for dining overlooking the streets of downtown. cabomixmex.com. 419 Travis, 713.225.2060, L & D Mon-Sun; LN Mon-Sat. $$

China Garden Chinese  A popular Chinese restaurant, China Garden has been serving downtown for more than 30 years. Their egg rolls and lemon chicken have become favorites. Friendly service and a nice atmosphere are additional reasons this spot is a must. 1602 Lebanon, 713.652.0745. L Mon-Fri; D Daily. $

Chipotle Mexican  Known for their large portions, this Mexican fast casual spot offers a variety of wholesome menu items. Chipotle is an affordable choice and with patio seating available, guests can enjoy their meal al fresco. chipotle.com. 909 Texas, 713.225.6633. L & Early Mon-Fri. $

Cielo Mexican  This new upscale Mexican bistro offers patrons Latin American favorites in a sophisticated, urban setting. Cielo has a fantastic bar and happy hour menu for late nights, also a large patio for al fresco dining. Tequila and wine tasting dinners will be offered monthly. bellarestaurants.com. 300 Main, 713.229.9500, L & D Mon-Sat; LN Fri & Sat. $$

The Cafe American  Located in the lobby of the Hilton Americas. An elaborate buffet is offered for breakfast, with a la carte selections from the menu available for lunch and dinner. Hilton Americas, 1600 Lamar, 713.739.8000, B, L, D & LN Daily. $$

Cafe Express Fast Casual  Need to grab a quick lunch? Cafe Express is an informal yet sophisticated choice. One of the originals in the fast casual restaurant category, you can always find a variety of delicious entrees, salads and sandwiches. cafeexpress.com. 650 Main, 713.237.9222, B & L Mon-Sat; D Mon-Fri. $

Cava Bistro American Bistro  Enjoy a diverse menu when dining at this rustic eatery situated on Main Street in downtown’s Historic District. Menu items include escargot, leek tart, ahi tuna, short ribs, gnocchi and whole red snapper. An impressive wine list, great service and affordable prices make this bistro unique. bellarestaurants.com. 300 Main, 713.229.9504. L Mon-Fri; D Mon-Sat. $$

KEY TO SYMBOLS

These listings are not reviews but are a guide to downtown dining spots. "Recommended" restaurants are selected by Downtown Magazine editors and are based on food quality, menu selection, service, ambiance and value. 

Recommended

Just opened

Average price of an entrée

$ - $10 or less

$ - $11-$19

$$ - $20-$29

$$ - $30+

B: Breakfast

L: Lunch

D: Dinner

LN: Late Night

For a searchable database of downtown Houston restaurants by cuisine, location and price, visit houstondowntown.com and click on Dining.
HERE THE WASHINGTON CORRIDOR ENDS and downtown begins stands Hearsay – Houston’s first ever gastro lounge. Think gastro pub with way better food. Located in the city’s second oldest standing commercial building at 218 Travis, the new upscale restaurant/lounge features a delectable French fusion menu from executive chef Pedro Silva of Grille 5115 fame and a sophisticated cocktail menu from talented mixologist and whiskey expert Britton Douglass.

Silva’s menu is ready to satisfy any appetite. If you’re looking to dabble, try the grilled baby portabellas – an absolute revelation – or shrimp spring rolls off the Tastes menu. If you’ve brought your appetite, start with the warm baked goat cheese salad or seared yellow fin tuna before plunging into an entree like the chicken breast stuffed with goat cheese, spinach and sun dried tomatoes or the grilled mahi mahi Hearsay fish tacos served with Southwestern mango slaw.

Thirsty? Try a couple of Douglass’ concoctions like The Twelve Spot made with Wild Turkey bourbon and fresh squeezed orange juice, the scotch apple martini made with Hendrick’s gin, orange liqueur and Apple Puckers, or the Mai-Tai Tini made with Treaty Oak rum, Frangelico liqueur and fresh squeezed juices and you’ll never look at your liquor cabinet quite the same way again. Hearsay also features a selection of Saint Arnold’s hand-crafted beers on tap.

Come for the food, stay for the ambiance. The antique-chic building formerly served as an ammunition dump during the Civil War and as the first W.H. Foley’s department store back in the late 1800s. The space literally drips with history, but don’t get us wrong. Hearsay doesn’t feel old. It feels historic.

Hearsay’s more modern amenities include plush seating and community tables on the first floor; banquets, cocktail tables, and sofas on the second floor; a refinished antique wood bar; plasma televisions upstairs and down; and a state-of-the-art sound system.

In addition to tube lighting strung throughout the space creating an indoor starry sky, Hearsay is home to a stunning early 20th-century Tuscan crystal chandelier hanging from the soaring 50-foot ceiling – a showpiece fixture that immediately identifies the space as something altogether different.
**Corner Bakery Fast Casual** A bakery cafe, offering fresh breads, salads, sandwiches, soups and sweets in a casual atmosphere. Located on Main Street Square, you can’t beat the people watching or relax and watch the rail line and Main Street Square’s jumping fountains. cornerbakery.com. 1000 Main, 713.651.0673. B & L Mon–Fri. $

**Craiganales Italian Deli Italian Deli** A family-owned Italian–styled deli located close to Minute Maid Park and the Courthouse District. Craiganales features a tasty and affordable selection. craiganalesdeli.com. 415 Caroline, 713.237.0000. L Mon–Fri. $

**Decafe Fast Casual** Located in the lobby of the Hyatt Regency, visit this marketplace cafe anytime, day or night, when you are craving something delicious. Decafe offers brick oven pizza, deli sandwiches, salads, homemade pastries and, of course, an entire selection of your favorite coffee beverages. Hyatt Regency Hotel, 1200 Louisiana, 713.654.1234 x 4088. B, L, D & LN Daily. $

**Domino’s Pizza** 804 Main, 713.227.3030. $

**Don Diego Coffee House/Columbian/Wine Bar** This quaint neighborhood spot features Columbian breakfast specials served with plantains and rice. They have 100 wines by the bottle– all under $20 and feature Katz’s coffee. Desserts include pears soaked in wine with mascarpone cheese, warm chocolate cake and Italian cream cake. Its cozy atmosphere and free WiFi make it the perfect hang-out spot. 208 Travis, 713.228.3560, L & D Mon–Sun; LN Fri & Sat. $

**Don Patron Bar & Grill Mexican** Good Mexican food and margaritas, Don Patron is great for lunch and a good spot for an after–work happy hour. Available on weekends for private parties donpatron.com. 500 Dallas, One Allen Center. B, L & D Mon–Fri. $$

**The Downtown Aquarium Seafood** The menu features a huge variety and offers something for everyone. While dining, guests are surrounded by a 150,000 gallon aquarium. Enjoy the sights and a great meal at this family–friendly spot. aquariumrestaurants.com. 410 Bagby, 713.223.3474. L & D Daily. $$

**Downtown Donuts Bakery** This little shop puts out a large assortment of breakfast goodies. Daily fresh baked choices include glazed, iced or filled donuts, bear claws, cinnamon rolls and turnovers and they also have kolaches – be sure to try the spicy boudin kolache. 1207 Prairie, 713.236.0500. B & L Mon–Fri. $

**Downtown Hunan Cafe Chinese** Fast casual spot offering all your Asian favorites. 613 Clay, 713.739.0515. L Mon–Fri. $

**Droubi Bro. Mediterranean Grill Mediterranean** This authentic Mediterranean grill offers up a quick and satisfying spot for lunch. Pita sandwiches are popular. 507 Dallas, 713.652.0058. L Mon–Fri. $

**Eats Mesquite Grill Classic American** Craving a burger downtown? Popular for its juicy burgers and great–tasting fries. Eats makes for a great lunchtime stop. Guests can make their burgers exactly how they like them. 804 Milam, 713.223.3287. L Mon–Fri. $

**El Rey Taqueria Cuban/Mexican** This fast casual Cuban and Mexican eatery is home to tasty plantains and juicy roasted chicken. El Rey opens early for those craving breakfast tacos and is open late on weekend nights for night owls craving a Cuban sandwich. elreytaqueria.com. 233 Main, 713.225.1895. B & L Mon–Fri; D & LN Fri & Sat. $

**Falafel Frenzy Mediterranean** This quaint spot serves up all your Mediterranean favorites, including beef and chicken kabobs, hummus and of course falafel. 914 Prairie, 713.237.8987. L Mon–Fri. $

**Flying Saucer Pub Fare** Offering more than 200 beers, almost half on draft, Flying Saucer is a beer–drinker’s paradise. Excellent staff and tasty eats give the place an identity all its own. beerknurd.com. 705 Main, 713.228.7468. L, D & LN Daily. $

**Frank’s Pizza Pizza** Home of the “late–night slice,” Frank’s Pizza has built a quality reputation for itself serving up delicious food in a great atmosphere. Not only can you grab a slice of pizza, Frank’s also serves up darn good hamburgers, Philly cheesesteak sandwiches, Buffalo wings, lasagna and salads. frankspizza.com. 417 Travis, 713.225.5656. L & D Daily; LN Fri & Sat. $

**The Grove American Rustic** This two–story, ultra–urban restaurant is found at Discovery Green, downtown Houston’s newest park. The menu features rustic American cuisine such as Gulf Coast seafood, steaks and signature rotisserie dishes. The Tree House roof deck bar features casual bar snacks and a see–and–be–seen atmosphere for cocktails. grovehoustonte.com. Discovery Green, 1611 Lamar, 713.317.7231. L & D Daily. $$$

**Grum Bar & Grill Classic American** A casual dining and nightlife spot with a traditional bar and grill menu including pizzas, sandwiches, burgers and steaks. Comfortable atmosphere with walls featuring work by local artists, a wide selection of beers, good food and friendly staff make this a place you want to check out. 306 Main, 713.224.6448. L Mon–Sat; D Thu–Sat. $

**Guadalajara del Centro Mexican** This family-owned restaurant consistently serves up tasty food in a new, very cool environment. It’s the perfect place to bring the family or a large group of co–workers or friends. Great happy hour specials. guadalajarahacienda.com. Houston Pavilions, 1201 San Jacinto, 713.650.0010. L & D Daily. $$

**Hard Rock Cafe Classic American** What do you get when you mix a music–themed diner with an All–American menu? Hard Rock is a great family–friendly spot serving up items such as burgers, nachos and chicken varieties. hardrock.com. Bayou Place, 570 Texas, 713.227.1392. L, D & LN Daily. $$

**Hearsay gastro Lounge New American** Located in a beautifully refurbished historical building, this upscale restaurant and lounge serves up delicious French–inspired sandwiches, salads and entrees. They feature an extensive wine list, numerous beers on draft and bottle and premium liquors with a focus on Scotch whiskey. Open late night and serving up small and large appetizers, Hearsay is a great place for a late night cocktail and bites. hearsayhoustonte.com. 218 Travis, 713.225.8079. L & D Daily LN Fri–Sat. $

**Home Plate Bar & Grill Classic American** A great hangout spot before or after an Astros baseball game. Enjoy American food with all menu items (except for sampler platters) less than $10. homeplategrill.com. 1800 Texas, 713.222.1993. L & D Daily (may close earlier during off–season so call first). $

**Hong Kong Diner Chinese** A favorite of downtown locals, Hong Kong Diner will not disappoint with its expansive menu and delicious chef’s specials. Be sure to try their dumplings. 909 Franklin, 713.236.1688. L & D Mon–Sat. $


**Houston Tamales Factory Mexican** Family recipes made with fresh ingredients. Great breakfast tacos and of course the tamales are the specialty of the house. houstontamalesfactory.com. 1205 Travis. B & L Mon–Sat. $

**Hubcap Burger Grill American Classic** Small but quaint burger joint. 1111 Prairie, 713.223.5885. L Mon–Sat. $

**Humble Cafe American** The Humble Cafe is a full–service restaurant serving up breakfast and dinner in a casual atmosphere. Courtyard by Marriott, 916 Dallas, 832.366.1600. B & D Daily. $

**Hunan Downtown Chinese** You’ll be impressed by the elegant décor and their Chinese cuisine is as impeccable as the restaurant itself. Guests can indulge in traditional favorites or try new creations. 812 Capitol, 713.227.8999. L & D Mon–Sat. $$

**Irma’s Mexican** Irma Galvan has been crowned Houston’s Tex–Mex goddess. This authentic spot is a longtime favorite among Houston politicos and downtown business people. Traditional, home–cooked Mexican cuisine is served for breakfast and lunch on weekdays. 22 North Chenevert, 713.222.0767. B & L Mon–Fri. $$

**Irma’s New Southwest Grill Mexican** Irma’s second location is a hip spot to satisfy a Mexican food craving. Enjoy tasty foods and great drinks for lunch or dinner. Only a few short blocks from Minute Maid Park. irmassouthwest.com. 1314 Texas, 713.247.9651. B & L Mon–Fri. Open on Astros baseball game days and nights three hours before first pitch. $$

**James Coney Island Fast Food** This local favorite has been serving delicious hot dogs to downtown Houston patrons since 1923. The chili recipe has stayed the same, but new menu additions include Polish sausage, a Chicago–style dog and a New York–style dog. jamesconeyisland.com. 815 Dallas, 713.652.3819. B, L & D Mon–Sat. $

**Jason’s Deli** Order to please, Jason’s will make your sandwich or salad exactly how you like it.
jasonsdeli.com, 901 McKinney, 713.650.1500. B & L Mon–Fri. $ Jimmy John’s Gourmet Sandwiches Deli Try the tasty 8-inch subs starting at $3.50 for a Plain Slim (meat, cheese and bread only) or $7.75 for the J.J. Gargantuan which has five different meats. All subs are served on your choice of fresh-baked French bread or thick-sliced 7-grain bread or try the low carb lettuce wrap: all the regular sandwich ingredients without the bread. jimmyjohns.com. 820 Main, 713.222.9995. B & L Mon–Fri. $ NEW Lucky Strike Lanes & Lounge American Upscale bowling alley with a separate restaurant/lounge area. Bowlers and patrons relax on sleek leather couches and enjoy floor-to-ceiling video screens that flash movie clips and music videos as DJs deliver danceable grooves. Delectable munchies, including tomato and cheese s’more and mac-and-cheese bites, are available lane–side in the lounge. bowlyuckystrike.com. Houston Pavilions, 1201 San Jacinto Street, Level 3, 713.343.3300. L, D & LN Daily. $$$ Josephine’s Ristorante Italian Enjoy traditional favorites made from scratch at this family–owned eatery. Great service and a cozy, casual atmosphere make you feel right at home. josephinestitan.com. 1209 Caroline, 713.759.9323. L Mon–Fri; D Mon–Sat. $$ The Lake House Fast Casual The Lake House offers family–friendly food, featuring burgers, Kobe beef hot dogs, salads, shakes, wine and beer. Located on Kinder Lake, there is a huge patio where you can watch model boats race across the water or listen to some live music from the nearby amphitheater stage. thelakehousehouston.com. Discovery Green, 1611 Lamar. L & D Daily. $ La Palapa Fast Food A Courthouse District favorite, there’s always a line at this free–standing pink concession stand for breakfast tacos and hamburgers. 110 Preston, 713.228.9620. B & L Mon–Fri. $ Last Concert Cafe Mexican Tucked away in the Warehouse District, this Tex–Mex cafe was born in 1949 and still supplies tasty food and local music today. Spend some time on the leafy back patio and you’ll swear you’re in your neighbor’s backyard throwing back a cold one. Insiders know that to get in you have to knock on the red door. lastconcert.com. 1403 Nance, 713.226.8563. L Mon–Fri; D Mon–Sun; LN Fri–Sat; Bar & Live Music Tue–Sat. $ Les Gival’s Kahve Vietnamese Winner of the 2006 “City’s Best” award for Vietnamese restaurants in Houston, Les Gival’s offers up a delicious menu and great service. Located in downtown’s historic Market Square. lesgivars.com. 801 Congress, 713.547.0444. B Mon–Fri; L Mon–Sat; D Fri & Sat. $ Little Napoli Italian Offering southern Italian items in a casual setting, you can opt for indoor seating or take a spot on their large patio right on Main Street. Their healthy options, such as whole wheat pizza crust and low–fat cheeses are a nice touch. littlenapoli.net. 1001 Texas, 713.225.3900. L, D & LN Daily. $$$ Longhorn Café Homestyle Longhorn offers up a Texas–style experience. Old–fashioned burgers, sandwiches and fries contribute to the down–south feel of the café. longhorncafe.com. The Shops at Houston Center, 1200 McKinney, 713.751.0021. L Mon–Sat; D Mon–Fri. $ NOOK Luby’s, etc. American Enjoy an incredible view of downtown along with 10 food stations offering a wide variety of goodies: a build–your–own salad bar, made–to–order grill, pizza by–the–slice, delightful deli, global café and traditional Luby’s cafeteria line with all the classic dishes. lubysetc.com. 1301 Fannin, 13th Floor, 713.759.9954. B & L Mon–Fri. $ Mandarin Hunan Restaurant Chinese This upscale eatery gives its guests an engaging experience in Chinese cuisine. Located in the Skyline District, Mandarin’s floor–to–ceiling glass windows provide a great view of the streetscape. 777 Walker, 713.224.1212. L & D Mon–Fri. $ Market Square Bar & Grill American This Chicago–style neighborhood hangout is a local favorite. Roasting a handful of “fire–powered” burgers, Market Square offers plenty of reasons to stop by for a meal or drink. The backyard patio, friendly staff and full bar add flavor. marketsquarehouston.com. 311 Travis, 713.224.6133. L, D & LN Mon–Sat. $ Massa’s Restaurant Seafood An upscale and elegant restaurant offering a fine selection of American and seafood cuisine. Superior service and a great dining atmosphere allow guests to enjoy a memorable experience. massas.com. 1160 Smith, 713.650.0837. L Mon–Fri; D Mon–Sat. $$ Massa’s Seafood Grill Seafood Like its sister restaurant, you can count on superior service and a great dining atmosphere. Conveniently located close to the convention center and Toyota Center, it’s a great spot for lunch and dinner. massas.com. The Shops at Houston Center, 1331 Lamar, 713.655.9100. L Mon–Fri; D Mon–Sat. $$ McCormick & Schmick’s Seafood The extensive menu changes daily depending on each day’s fresh seafood deliveries. With more than 80 preparations on the menu each day, every guest is sure to find something to satisfy their palate. mccormickandschmicks.com. Houston Pavilions, 1201 Fannin, 713.658.8100. L & D Daily. $$$ McDonald’s Fast Food 808 Dallas @ Milam, 713.631.9449. B & L Daily; D Mon–Fri. $ Mia Bella Italian Located in the heart of the Historic District, you’ll enjoy an eclectic variety of Italian cuisine blended with a Mediterranean feel. A longtime favorite, this intimate little bistro’s simple, yet appealing décor, makes it a downtown standout. bellarestaurants.com 320 Main, 713.237.0505. L & D Daily; LN Fri & Sat. $$ Mingalone Italian Bar & Grill Italian A dedication to authentic Italian cuisine makes Mingalone a special place. Just seconds away from all the major theaters, Mingalone is the perfect spot to enjoy dinner before or after a show. mingalone.com. Bayou Place, 540 Texas, 713.223.0088. L & D Mon–Sun. $ Molly’s Pub Pub Fare A good ol’ Irish bar with tasty food to soak up the beer. Your standard pub fare—sandwiches, dogs and pretty much anything that’s not good for you. mollyspubs.com. 509 Main, 713.222.1033. L, D & LN Daily. $ Morton’s The Steakhouse Steak House This award–winning steakhouse offers an outstanding menu. The downtown location features their new bar concept, Bar 12–21, which includes an impressive wine and martini menu along with their specially priced “bar bites.” mortons.com. 1001 McKinney, 713.659.3700. D Mon–Sun. $$$ Murphy’s Deli Deli Indulge in a variety of sandwiches and salads. Hot or cold, Murphy’s specializes in creating your sandwich any way it’s ordered. 601 Jefferson, 713.652.4939. 1021 Main, 713.275.1912. 440 Louisiana, 713.247.9122. B & L Mon–Fri all locations. $$ New Orleans Cajun Po–Boy Fast Food A great place to grab a fried shrimp or crawfish po–boy. 648 Polk, 713.750.0007. L Mon–Fri. $ New York Pizzeria Pizza 604 Polk, 713.759.9800. L Mon–Fri; D Tue–Fri. $ Pappas BBQ Barbecue Voted one of Houston’s best year after year, this barbecue joint offers an excellent selection with Texas–sized portions. Traditional favorites such as brisket, ribs, sausage and ham are served with Pappas’ flare. Delivery and take–out are available. pappasbbq.com. 1217 Pierce, 713.659.1245. L & D Daily. 1100 Smith, 713.759.0018. L & D Mon–Fri. $ Paul’s Snack Shop Deli Sandwiches, salads and snacks to–go.1213 Prairie, 713.224.4701. B & L Mon–Fri. $ Perbacco Italian An adorable little spot located at street level of one of Houston’s skyscrapers, Perbacco serves up Italian cuisine in a modern and fresh atmosphere. Catering to downtown workers and the theater crowd, you always get quick and friendly and tasty food. 700 Milam, 713.224.2422. L–Mon–Fri; D Thu–Sat. $ Picazo Bar & Grill International Picazo’s very diverse menu features everything from pizza and salad to prime steaks and signature martinis. Picazo offers free downtown delivery and full–service catering. picazodowntown.com. 1421 Preston, 713.236.1300. B & L Mon–Fri; D Mon–Sat. $$ Plaza Bistro Fast Casual Kick back at Jones Plaza and enjoy a quick bite to eat. Plaza Bistro also serves up treats during scheduled Jones Plaza events. 600 Louisiana, Jones Plaza, 713.226.8850. L–Mon–Fri. Also open for plaza events. $$ Ponte Vecchio Ristorante Italiano Italian Don’t let the cafeteria–style service at Ponte Vecchio fool you, everything is prepared from scratch. You’ll find many delicious, healthy selections on the menu at this luncheon eatery, all at a reasonable price. alpontevenecco.com. 507 Dallas, 713.659.9400. L Mon–Fri. $ Popeye’s Fast Food 1116 Travis, 713.571.8600. L & D Mon–Sat. $
Red & White Bistro International  A Chef’s Table buffet features a variety of world cuisines and an assortment of delectable desserts. Compliment your meal with a selection from Red & White’s two 1,500 bottle wine towers. houstonyotocater.com. 1510 Polk, 713.758.7534. Open 90 minutes prior to the start of Toyota Center events; call ahead for reservations. $$$$  

Red Cat Jazz Café Cajun Cajun style blends with Houston flavor at the Red Cat. Indulge in the distinct ambiance, cuisine and sounds offered at this laid-back spot. Live music nightly. redcatjazzcafe.com. 924 Congress, 713.226.7870. D & LN Daily. $$$  

Sambauc New American A hip, trendy and upscale restaurant right in the mix of Main Street. The menu includes a wide variety of favorites and combined with the live music, Sambauc is Houston’s upper class club. sambucarestaurant.com. 909 Texas, 713.224.5299. L. Mon-Fri; D & LN Daily. $$$  

SG’s Express Vietnamese Vietnamese You’ll find all your Vietnamese favorites here: vermicelli bowl, the sandwich, egg drop soup, egg rolls and many different flavorful noodles. 1225 Travis, 713.659.0200. L. Mon-Prob; D & LN Daily. $  

Shay McElroy’s Pub Fare  This authentic Irish pub offers up a menu of appetizers, sandwiches, salads and soups. mcelroypub.com. 909 Texas, 713.223.2444. L. Mon-Prob.  


Shula’s American Steak House Steak House Dark wood, sports memorabilia and menus hand-painted on official NFL game footballs makes Pro Hall of Famer Don Shula’s Steak House stand out from the rest. Become a member of the 48oz Club by finishing a 48-ounce Shula Cut. donsshula.com. Hyatt Regency Hotel, 1200 Louisiana, 713.375.4777. B, L & D Daily. $$$  

Skyline Deli Deli With their freshly baked bread, Skyline makes a great deli sandwich. 717 Texas, 713.571.0509. B & L Mon-Fri.  

State Bar Pub Fare Located on the second floor of Post Rice Lofts with a beautiful balcony overlook- ing Texas Ave., this lounge also serves appetizers and hearty sandwiches with your martinis and margaritas. thestatebar.com. 909 Texas, Suite 2A, 713.229.8888. Mon–Sat.  

Strip House Steak House Only minutes from the convention center and Toyota Center, Strip House’s mouth-watering steaks are accompanied by a seductive ambiance. Red walls and carpet give this steak palace a unique interior. An international collection of wines puts the finishing touches on the restaurant. striphouse.net. The Shops at Houston Center, 1200 McKinney, 713.659.6000. L. Mon-Fri; D Daily; LN Fri & Sat. $$$$  

Subway Fast Food  405 Main, 713.227.4700. 805 Dallas, 713.651.1331. Daily. $  

Table 7 Bistro American With their classic American menu, the eatery is the perfect place to enjoy everything from salads and burgers to blackened mahi mahi and turkey meatloaf lasagna. The best part - every item on the menu costs $1 or less. district7grill.com. 720 Fannin, 713.227.4800. B Mon-Sun; L & D Mon-Sat.  

Thephidhaa Thai A traditional Thai restaurant located at the ground level of the loft residence Hogg Palace. The warm and cozy atmosphere offers a great setting for a dinner escape and is a local favorite. 401 Louisiana, 713.225.4900. B Mon-Sun; L & D Mon-Sat.  

Thryforks American Upscale, warm atmosphere and impeccable service sets the stage for this well known steakhouse. New York strip and filet mignon, bone-in ribeye, porterhouse, young rack of lamb and veal chop are served with dessert potatoes, off-the-cob cream corn, and perfectly-textured vegetables. Seafood items include Chilean sea bass, Ahi tuna, salmon, halibut, scallops and lobster tails, which are flown in daily. illforks.com. Houston Pavilions, 1201 San Jacinto Street, Level 1, 713.658.9457. L. Tue–Fri; D Mon-Sat. $$$$  

Travis Chinese Restaurant Chinese All your favorites at affordable prices. 1122 Travis, 713.655.8787. L Daily. $  

Treebeards Cajun Homestyle A downtown institution for more than 30 years, Treebeards offers tasty Cajun dishes that are sure to satisfy. Favorite menu items include the chicken and shrimp gumbo, red beans and rice and étouffée. For dessert, try their famous butter bar. treebeards.com. 315 Travis, 713.228.2622. Cloisters at Christ Church Cathedral, 1117 Texas, 713.229.8248. L Mon-Prob.  

Trofi Restaurant Continental Trofi’s menu is described as Continental with a Mediterranean and Latin flair and the ambiance is casual simple yet sophisticated. Lunch buffets are available Monday through Friday. 400 Dallas, Doubletree Hotel, 713.759.0202. B, L & D Daily. $$  

Vict & Anthony’s Steak House This world-class steak house is one of the most elegant dinning locations in Houston. It boasts rich mahogany woodwork and one-of-a-kind hospitality. Located in the heart of the Ballard Park District and across from Minute Maid Park, Vic & Anthony’s is the ideal spot for entertaining business clients, a special celebration or for a pre/post-game dinner. vicandanthony’s.com. 1510 Texas, 713.228.1111. L Fri; D Daily. $$$$  

Voice Restaurant & Lounge Modern American A fine dining experience located in the historic lobby of Hotel Icon’s landmark bank building. The intimate dining room is extravagant, and the exquisite dishes from the Gulf Coast and South Texas emphasize fresh ingredients. A contemporary lounge with a modern setting for cocktails and an elegant after-work meeting place. hotelicon.com. Hotel Icon. 220 Main, 832.667.4470. B Daily; D Mon–Sat. $$$$  

Warren’s Inn Fast Casual The good times roll with a killer jukebox, excellent drinks, and a fun, bohemian environment. Quick sandwiches and other items are served during the day; you can order in from nearby restaurants at night if you have the munchies. 307 Travis, 713.247.9207. L Mon–Fri; LN Daily. $  

Wimpy’s Hamburgers Fast Food Wimpy’s serves up a pretty good burger but they also have many other down-home favorites. 632 Polk, 713.652.0123. B & L Mon-Prob.  


Zula New American  This eclectic restaurant is memorable with its 25-foot ceilings, mirrors and elaborate color scheme. The menu offers traditional favorites along with new, innovative items. zulahouston.com. 705 Main, 713.227.7052. D Mon–Sat. $$$$  

Zydeco Louisiana Diner Cajun This cafeteria-style Cajun joint brings Louisiana dishes to the Hospital District of downtown Houston. Traditional Cajun items such as po-boys, jambalaya and gumbo make Zydeco a great lunch stop. A casual atmosphere adds to the enjoyment. 1119 Pease, 713.759.2001. L Mon-Prob.  


Rachel’s Sandwich Shop Deli A good little sandwich shop. 421 San Jacinto, 713.223.3913. B & L Mon–Fri. $  

Ray’s Franks American Ray’s serves up hotdogs and burgers in an environment that is full of b-horror movie nostalgia. Menu items include The Leatherface bacon cheeseburger, there’s also The Blob, which is a chili cheeseburger, and the Freddy Krueger, which is a deep-fried hot dog served with fried jalapenos and onions on top and The Mummy, an all-beef wiener wrapped with bacon. Vegetarians aren’t left out, as Ray’s serves a black bean Blacula burger and a Clockwork Orange veggie dog. rayfranks.com. 1302 Nance, 713.224.6441. L. D Mon–Sat. $  

Spaghetti Warehouse Italian Making its home in an old warehouse, this Italian–American eatery offers up large portions for lunch and dinner. Traditional menu items such as spaghetti and meatballs, lasagna and pizza allow the Spaghetti Warehouse to cater to all ages and appetites. 901 Commerce, 713.229.0009. L. D Daily. $  

Red & White Bistro International  A Chef’s Table buffet features a variety of world cuisines and an assortment of delectable desserts. Compliment your meal with a selection from Red & White’s two 1,500 bottle wine towers. houstonyotocater.com. 1510 Polk, 713.758.7534. Open 90 minutes prior to the start of Toyota Center events; call ahead for reservations. $$$$  

Trash Cat Jazz Café Cajun Cajun style blends with Houston flavor at the Red Cat. Indulge in the distinct ambiance, cuisine and sounds offered at this laid-back spot. Live music nightly. redcatjazzcafe.com. 924 Congress, 713.226.7870. D & LN Daily. $
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