

May 20, 2005

36 HOURS

Cleveland

By MICHAEL GOLLUST

THE Cleveland of "American Splendor," the 2003 Oscar-nominated movie, is a dreary 1980's town of thrift stores and shambling eccentrics, a place where you'd barely care to spend two hours, let alone a weekend. Today, Cleveland hardly feels like the same place. In the 1990's, public-private enterprise replaced center-city blight with new sports stadiums and the lakefront Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. Meanwhile, downtown's revival spurred gentrification into forgotten enclaves along the Cuyahoga River. There's a thriving art scene in Tremont, and the retooled Warehouse District has become a place to be, rather than flee, after dark. Clevelanders remain, by nature, a self-deprecating lot. But before long, calling their town hip, cosmopolitan - even splendid - won't sound so ironic.

Friday

5 p.m.

1) Church Hunting

Perched on a bluff across the Cuyahoga River from downtown, Tremont is a tree-lined neighborhood with a small-town feel. Stroll along West 14th Street among the grand churches built by the community's early German, Greek, Polish and Ukrainian immigrants. Farther to the east, fans of "The Deer Hunter" will recognize the distinctive onion domes of St. Theodosius Orthodox Cathedral (733 Starkweather Avenue, 216-741-1310), consecrated in 1912. Tours are available by appointment.

6 p.m.

2) Soho on the Cuyahoga

Until recently, Tremont was a rough blue-collar enclave shunned by Cleveland's more affluent east siders. Today, stylish restaurants and galleries make it a bustling nighttime destination. Visit on the second Friday of the month for the Tremont ArtWalk, when the shops and studios on and around Professor Avenue stay open late and artists mingle over music, gossip and wine. Drop by Mary Zodnik's and Ben Parsons's Azure Stained Glass Studio (2173 Professor Avenue, 216-357-2600), and hit Asterisk Gallery (2393 Professor Avenue, 330-304-8528), where Dana L. Depew showcases hip-hop photography, painting and sculpture. Anchoring the culinary scene is Fat Cats (2061 West 10th Street, 216-579-0200), where Ricardo Sandoval serves up eclectic dishes like seared duck breast with black-eyed peas, rapini, prosciutto and orange ginger sauce (\$18). Local art hangs on the walls, but the picture-window view of the Cleveland skyline dominates.

Saturday

9:30 a.m.

3) To Market

In Ohio City, Tremont's nearby sibling in urban rejuvenation, start your day at the landmark West Side Market

(West 25th Street and Lorain Avenue, 216-664-3387). Every Saturday at 7 a.m., shoppers descend on more than 100 vendors and carry off Cleveland's freshest meats, produce and ethnic foods. Grab a double latte at City Roast Coffee and Tea (\$3, 216-241-2479), and an English breakfast pie of egg, potato, cheese and beef sausage, \$2.75 at Reilly's (216-322-6144), then climb the stairs near City Roast to the balcony for the best shopper-viewing seats in the house. Across the street in Market Square Park there are live music and local crafts for sale every Saturday through the end of August (216-781-3222, www.openairinmarketsquare.com).

12:30 p.m.

4) Beer and a Bullet

It's not too early to belly up to the mahogany bar at the Great Lakes Brewing Company (2516 Market Avenue, 216-771-4404), which has produced award-winning beers for 17 years. Go for the Full Taste sampler (\$8.50) of nine brews on tap, like the refreshing Holy Moses White Ale, with notes of chamomile and orange, or the hoppy, chocolately Edmund Fitzgerald Porter. There's pub grub, too, like a bratwurst and pierogi plate (\$10.95), and free tours of the brewery across the street (Saturdays 2 p.m. to 8 p.m., on the hour). Before you leave, spot the hole in the wall behind the bar, said to have been left by a bullet aimed at Eliot Ness during his years as Cleveland's director of public safety in the mid-1930's.

2 p.m.

5) Cleveland Rocks

Elvis Presley made the Memphis sound famous, but it was a Cleveland disk jockey, Alan Freed, who named it "rock and roll" in 1951. Thanks to the Freed legend (and some intense lobbying), Cleveland beat out the likes of New York, Chicago and Memphis in 1986 to become home to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum (751 Erieside Avenue, 888-764-7625; www.rockhall.com; admission \$20). It opened in September 1995 in a 150,000-square-foot pyramidal palace designed by I. M. Pei. Today, half a million pilgrims each year visit the museum's interactive exhibits and collections of pop arcana, from David Byrne's giant padded suit from "Stop Making Sense" to Jimi Hendrix's childhood drawings. Live music is a draw, too; in June, the CMJ Rock Hall Music Fest (www.cmj.com/rockfest) comes to town.

7 p.m.

6) Dressed Up Downtown

The original site of Cleveland's late-1980's nightlife revival was the Flats, a string of margarita bars and music clubs along the banks of the Cuyahoga River. These days, the more fashion-forward crowd has migrated to the Warehouse District, home to rehabbed lofts and flashy restaurants like Johnny's Downtown (1406 West 6th Street, 216-623-0055). Try its rugged Northern Italian specialties like a veal chop Milanese topped with tomato concassé, arugula and balsamic vinaigrette (\$39). Better still, stroll up Ontario Street and dine al fresco at Jacobs Field, the spectacular sandstone and steel home of the Cleveland Indians (2401 Ontario Street, 866-488-7423; cleveland.indians.mlb.com). Seats start at \$6, hot dogs are \$3, sightlines are outstanding, and even if the team on the field isn't, the stadium's signature brown Bertman Original Ball Park Mustard is the best in the big leagues.

10:30 p.m.

7) Frank, Dino and Dickens

Nick Kostis helped kick off the Warehouse District boom when he opened Hilarities Comedy Hall in 1985 on then-desolate West 6th Street. In 2002, he opened Pickwick & Frolic Restaurant & Club (2035 East 4th Street, 216-241-7425) on a sleepy lane known more for its wig shops than its nightlife. Mr. Kostis's eccentric pleasure dome combines a comedy club with a Dickens-inspired restaurant with the 60's-retro Kevin's Martini Bar. Armed with a raspberry-infused Red Sky at Night (\$8.50) from Kevin's, swagger into the adjoining cabaret

space for the Midnight Martini Show, a boozy salute to Las Vegas lounge lizardism, complete with dueling Sinatra interpreters and a fully feathered showgirl.

Sunday

10 a.m.

8) Museum Mile

University Circle, four miles east of downtown along Euclid Avenue, claims to have more cultural and performing arts institutions in one square mile than anywhere else in the country. Fuel up with the continental breakfast (\$8) at the Glidden House (1901 Ford Drive, 800-759-8358), then look for the footless bronze cast of Rodin's "Thinker," the victim of a vandal's bomb in 1970, on the steps of the nearby Cleveland Museum of Art (11150 East Boulevard, 216-421-7340). Admission is free. The museum's collection of Asian art is internationally renowned, and the medieval Armor Court has been a favorite of generations of Cleveland's children. Head for the tropics at the Cleveland Botanical Garden's two-year-old \$37 million Eleanor Armstrong Smith Glasshouse (11030 East Boulevard, 888-853-7091; admission \$7.50). Inside, 200 tropical butterflies flutter through the mist of a simulated Costa Rican cloud forest. A doorway away, iguanas and chameleons roam the spiny desert of Madagascar.

1 p.m.

9) Form and Function

You can't miss the stainless steel ribbons festooning Frank Gehry's Peter B. Lewis Building on the campus of Case Western Reserve University's Weatherhead School of Management (11119 Bellflower Road). Sign up for a free half-hour tour, offered Saturdays and Sundays from 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., by phone (216-368-4771) or online (www.weatherhead.cwru.edu/tour). Harder to find, and in a different league architecturally, is the Barking Spider Tavern (11310 Juniper Road, 216-421-2863), a former carriage house that offers live music seven nights a week and on Sunday afternoons. Sit down with a cold Pinkus Müller Hefe-Weizen (\$4.50) for a set of New Orleans jazz.

Visiting Cleveland

Cleveland is served by most major airlines and rental car agencies. Hop the R.T.A. Red Line train (216-621-9500, www.riderta.com) at the airport for a \$1.50 25-minute ride to the downtown Tower City Center shopping complex. Amtrak and Greyhound have stations downtown.

The grand old Renaissance Cleveland Hotel (24 Public Square, 216-696-5600), in the center of town, has a plush lobby lounge and 491 well-appointed rooms starting at \$139.

Modeled after the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan, the Arcade has a stunning 100-foot-high skylight and was the nation's first indoor shopping mall when it opened in 1890. After a \$60 million restoration, it re-emerged in 2001 as the Hyatt Regency Cleveland at the Arcade (420 Superior Avenue, 216-575-1234) with 293 rooms starting at \$149.

Clifford House (1810 West 28th Street, 216-589-0121), a comfortable bed-and-breakfast in Ohio City, has two rooms that share a bathroom (starting at \$85), a suite and an apartment. Jim Miner, the owner, makes a mean pancake breakfast and is an expert on Cleveland.