

25 REASONS TO LOVE Albuquerque

A great place to live—and visit

BY ASHLEY M. BIGGERS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SERGIO SALVADOR

Growing up in Albuquerque, I felt the city fit like a coat one size small. Tight across the shoulders and short in the sleeves, it seemed too restrictive to fit my dreams. As I journeyed away from my hometown, I embraced living in the mist that shrouds the Pacific Northwest, and the dazzling heat of the Arizona desert. But New Mexico always called me home. »

1 Apothecary Lounge at Hotel Parq Central

Albuquerque has several rooftop bars in its repertoire, but the downtown lights truly dazzle from this lounge's vantage point. Cozy up in one of the cocoon-like couches to sip a Prohibition-era-inspired cocktail that maintains the boutique hotel's 1920s style. If you can, book a room in this finely renovated beaux-arts-style inn. My staycation here was one I won't soon forget. 806 Central Ave.; (505) 242-0040; www.hotelparqcentral.com

Each time I returned, I grew to know Albuquerque better. Rather than asking it to meet my juvenile expectations, I embraced all the city affords. From the ancient rock art at Petroglyph National Monument to the murals of downtown, the city is rich in culture both ancient and modern. The remnants of five volcanic cones preside over an expansive landscape that awaits outdoor adventure. Yet, as the half-million-strong metropolis of the state, the city fizzes with microbreweries, pulsates with Latin dance, and is punctuated by the emphatic refrains of spoken-word poets. (Of course, our “fast pace” might be unnoticeable to a visiting New Yorker. This is New Mexico, after all.) And in the astonishing watermelon hues of the Sandía Mountains at sunset, Albuquerque’s beauty has taken my breath away.

In part, it is the characters who live here that most enliven the city. Take my neighborhood: I live in the Northeast Heights, which some may describe as a land of little boxes made of ticky-tacky, yet it still boasts intriguing denizens. One of the country’s preeminent nuclear physicists lives around the corner. The organizer of the La Luz Trail Run, which pits competitors against a nine-mile route to the top of the Sandía Crest, resides across the street. And although I assumed the pounding from another neighbor’s garage was due to band practice (it was), I also traced the sound to separate flamenco sessions when he stomped out steps on a wooden platform he’d installed for the purpose.

This city doesn’t shine when you meet her as if flirting at a cocktail party—passing through, searching for something better. Albuquerque is a city you should chat with over a soup-bowl-sized cup of coffee. It’s a city with soul and wit that will crack a joke, then give you a sidelong glance to see if you’ve found the humor, too. It’s a city with unexpected interests and secret talents—home to filmmakers who take to the gun range on weekends, and to nurses who double as landscape painters.

It’s, perhaps, a bit like me, which is why today I so proudly proclaim, “¡Soy de Burque!”

2



Indian Pueblo Cultural Center

It’s easy for a local to overlook this center, devoted to the culture and traditions of the state’s 19 pueblos, but a recent visit there reminded me it’s a true gem. Inside, museum-style exhibitions teach about Native ways in two-dimensions. In the outdoor amphitheater, Pueblo culture springs to life

most days of the week as dancers perform and talk about their rituals—right in the heart of the city. These days the Center has become a performance space in its own right; for example, it has hosted Gypsy swing by local band Le Chat Lunatique. The Pueblo Harvest Café is worth a visit, too. 2401 12th St. SW; (505) 842-7270; www.indianpueblo.org



3

Slate Street Café

A sophisticated dining destination (thanks to its food and ambiance), Slate Street also boasts a wine loft with an extensive list and tasty food pairings. If you’re frequently downtown, look for the once-a-month-wine tasting events featuring a flight of wines of a certain type or from a certain source. 515 Slate Ave. NW; (505) 243-2210; www.slatestreetcafe.com

4 Sadie’s of New Mexico

Known for its spicy salsa and chile, this is a local favorite for good ol’-fashioned New Mexican food. The wait for a table can be long, but it’s well worth it. 6230 Fourth St.; (505) 345-5339; www.sadiesofnewmexico.com



COURTESY ISOTOPES

5

Albuquerque Isotopes

The ballpark is one of the best places to pass a summer night in the city. Zealous fans will root, root, root for our home minor-league-baseball team, a Dodgers Triple-A outfit. Even if you aren’t a baseball fan, you can still grab a beer (the Isotopes Slammin’ Amber, perhaps?) and pass the evening in great company. Opening day is April 13, when the Isotopes host the Omaha Storm Chasers at 7:05 p.m. www.abqisotopes.com

6

Sunday Chatter

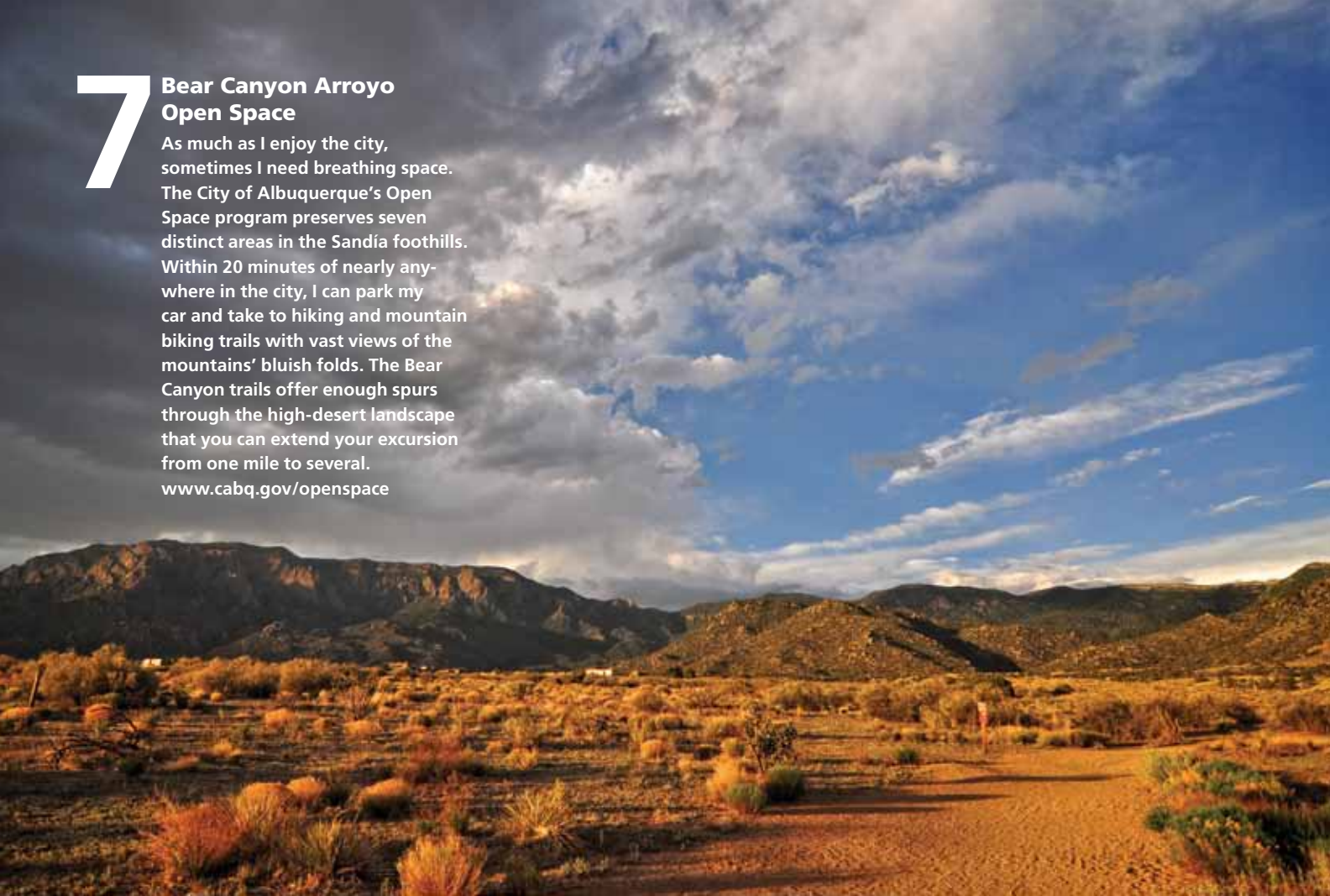
Formerly known as the Church of Beethoven, this weekly gathering celebrates superb—mostly classical—music, poetry, and companionship in The Kosmos, a quirky warehouse/gallery space. Complimentary cappuccinos and delightful scones are served to boot! www.chatterchamber.org/sunday



7 Bear Canyon Arroyo Open Space

As much as I enjoy the city, sometimes I need breathing space. The City of Albuquerque's Open Space program preserves seven distinct areas in the Sandia foothills. Within 20 minutes of nearly anywhere in the city, I can park my car and take to hiking and mountain biking trails with vast views of the mountains' bluish folds. The Bear Canyon trails offer enough spurs through the high-desert landscape that you can extend your excursion from one mile to several.

www.cabq.gov/openspace



8

Tree Spring Trail to South Crest Trail

The popular La Luz Trail, on the Albuquerque side of the Sandia Mountains, is quite challenging. For a more demure climb along an equally popular trail, travel to the east side of the mountains, past Sandia Ski Area, to the Tree Spring Trail. As it winds through the trees—offering a pleasant, shaded hike in summer—the trail affords incredible views of the valley on the east side of the mountains, and plenty of bird-watching. It leads to the South Crest Trail, which you can traverse as far as you wish to take in expansive city views.



9

Marble Brewery

Linger over your conversation and your handcrafted brew at this welcoming neighborhood pub. A hearty helping of hipsters frequent this joint—but these hipsters are likely to invite you to join them at their potluck dinner (the brewery has a limited food menu) in the beer garden. If you're a fan of IPAs, hop to it for a chance to taste this brewery's take on the variety. I enjoy the Amber Ale and Oatmeal Stout. 111 Marble Ave. NW; (505) 243-2739; www.marblebrewery.com

To discover 25 more reasons to love Albuquerque, visit www.nmmagazine.com.



Albuquerque Downtown Growers' Market

Although Albuquerque counts 14 farmers' markets in the surrounding area, this market (held in Robinson Park at Eighth St. and Central Ave.) achieves status as a community event. Stands from local farms such as Los Poblanos Organics, Frost Hill, and Red Tractor burst with seasonal produce. You might experience the drool-inducing scents of thin-crust creations from Firenze Mobile Pizza. Join the knitting circle at the Sweater Girls' trailer, or gambol in the field to bluegrass tunes from the likes of the Squash Blossom Boys and Up the Hollar. Look for the market Saturday mornings, May 28–October 29. www.downtowngrowers.com

Seasons Rotisserie & Grill

One of the top fine-dining restaurants in the city (along with sister restaurants Savoy and Zinc), Seasons boasts an elegant dining environment just off Albuquerque's historic Old Town. In warm weather, the rooftop cantina is the perfect place to while away the evening sipping my favorite drink. Called The Angry Bee, the cocktail includes fierce green-chile-infused tequila, Cointreau, honey, and fresh lime juice. 2031 Mountain Rd. NW; (505) 766-5100; www.seasonsabq.com



12 18-mile-per-hour speed limits

This is a great town for bicyclists. Albuquerque's Bicycle Boulevards are marked with purple signs to siphon two-wheeled cruisers along these scenic streets—and 18-mile-per-hour speed-limit signs to alert motorists to the presence of cyclists. Along with several biking trails, the city counts more than 400 miles of bike-friendly routes. If you're just visiting, check out a cruiser with sunflower-yellow wheels from Routes Rentals to tour the city in the slow lane. Bike map: www.cabq.gov/gis/bikemap Routes Rentals: 1102 Mountain Rd. NW, Suite 101; (505) 933-5667; www.routesrentals.com



13 University of New Mexico Art Museum

One of the city's best-kept secrets, this visual powerhouse is tucked into the university's Center for the Arts (also home to Popejoy Hall). It boasts an extensive photography collection and the works of New Mexico modernist Raymond Jonson, which it parades out for the occasional exhibition. Revolving exhibitions highlight contemporary sculpture, photography, and painting. At a \$5 suggested donation, the museum's offerings are also accessible on any budget. 1 University of New Mexico; (505) 277-4001; www.unmarmuseum.unm.edu

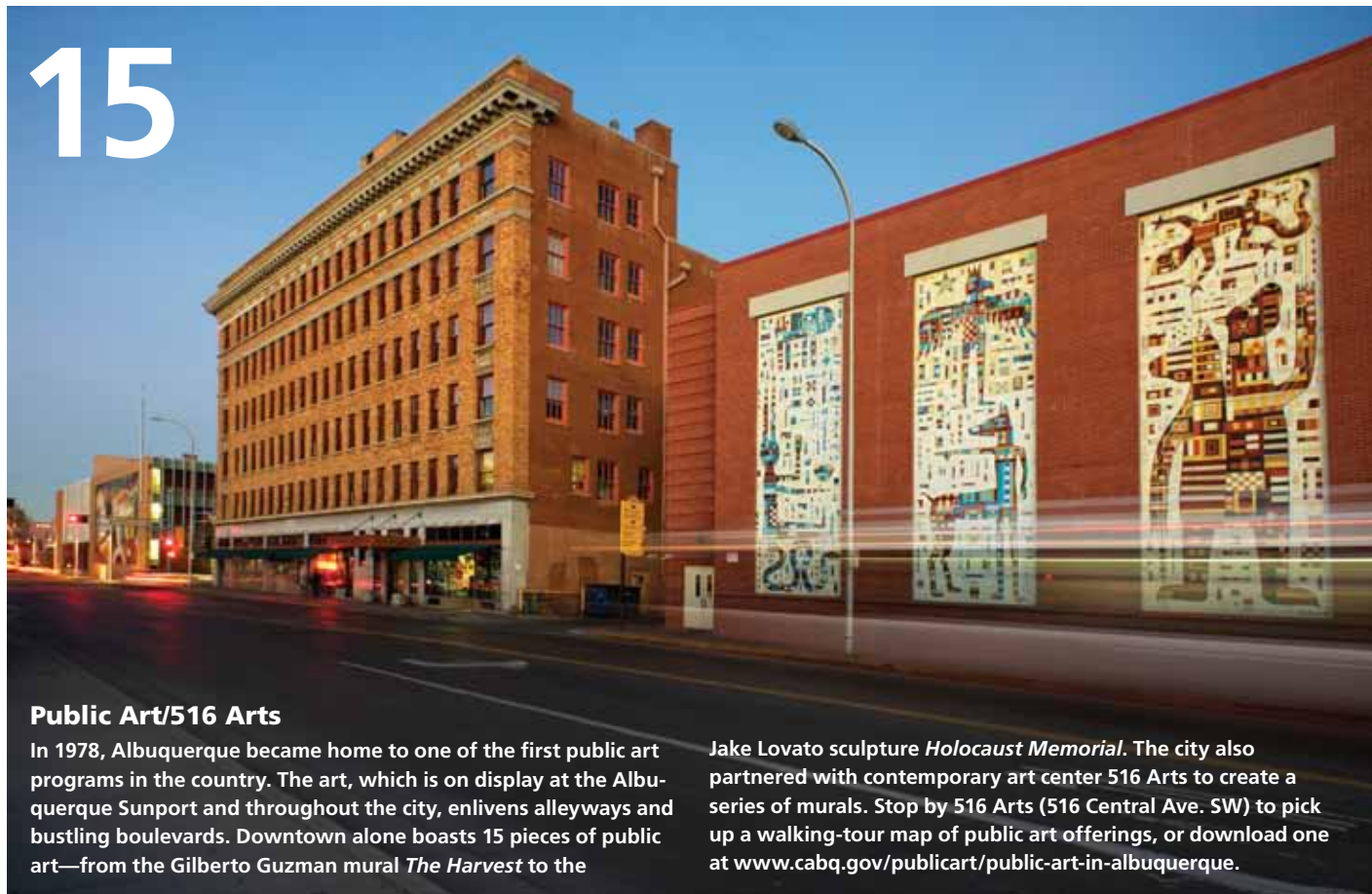
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Bookworks and PageOne

If you want to read like a local, these two independent bookstores, at nearly opposite ends of the city, share several qualities: large sections devoted to books on New Mexico topics, a full calendar of events featuring local authors, and excellent customer service.

Bookworks: 4022 Rio Grande Blvd.; (505) 344-8139; www.bkwrks.com
PageOne: 11018 Montgomery Blvd. NE; (505) 294-2026; www.page1book.com

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Public Art/516 Arts

In 1978, Albuquerque became home to one of the first public art programs in the country. The art, which is on display at the Albuquerque Sunport and throughout the city, enlivens alleyways and bustling boulevards. Downtown alone boasts 15 pieces of public art—from the Gilberto Guzman mural *The Harvest* to the

Jake Lovato sculpture *Holocaust Memorial*. The city also partnered with contemporary art center 516 Arts to create a series of murals. Stop by 516 Arts (516 Central Ave. SW) to pick up a walking-tour map of public art offerings, or download one at www.cabq.gov/publicart/public-art-in-albuquerque.

Ballooning

Confession: When the blockbuster Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta approaches each October, I groan slightly at the thought of the added traffic caused by the 100,000 visitors that flock to the city. But without fail, when I see those candy-colored drops take to the skies, I feel immense delight, and my traffic woes are quickly forgotten. The balloons' beauty doesn't only alight once a year; pilots regularly take advantage of the city's prime soaring conditions. In fact, I took my first ride in April. My best friend's birthday was a fantastic excuse for a flight. What will yours be?

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DAVID BALES

20

Paseo del Bosque Trail

In a city known for its great running conditions—mild weather, high altitude, and plenty of trails—a quorum of enthusiasts convenes on this path, which stretches 16 miles through the Río Grande bosque. The trail is uninterrupted by car traffic, making it the perfect locale for the out-and-back route of the Duke City Marathon, held here each October. Near Montañito Road you'll pass the Aldo Leopold Trail—easy going, interpretive paths that lead to the river and honor this founding father of conservationism, who once resided in the city. Access the trail off Alameda and Paseo del Norte roads, from Tingley Beach, or other points. www.cabq.gov/openspace/paseodelbosquetrail.html

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National Hispanic Cultural Center

The center's impressive permanent art collection alone makes it worth a visit, but its ongoing series of visual arts exhibitions and performances make it a can't-miss destination. At the Roy E. Disney Center for Performing Arts, for example, I've taken in independent film premieres and performances by Yjastros, the dance company of Albuquerque's National Institute of Flamenco. 1701 Fourth St. SW; (505) 246-2261; www.nationalhispaniccenter.org

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Barelas Coffee House

This South Valley eatery near the National Hispanic Cultural Center is an institution. Known for its posole and huevos rancheros, it's a homey joint where locals dine—many of them for decades. 1502 Fourth St. SW; (505) 843-7577



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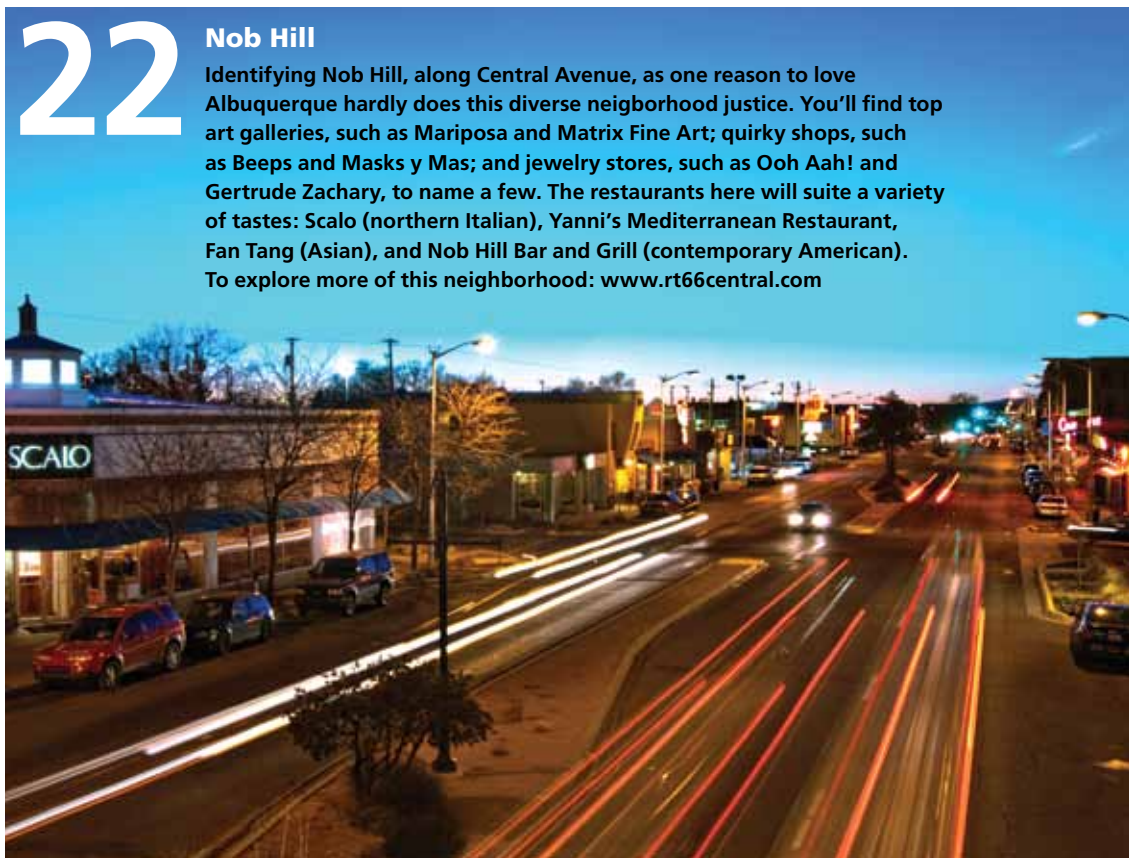
BioPark

The BioPark includes Albuquerque's Zoo, Botanic Garden, Aquarium, and Tingley Beach. These destinations are wonderful at any age, but children will take special delight in visiting each. This summer, look for the Zoo's new snow-leopard twins (born July 2011) and a new lioness. Check out the PNM Butterfly Pavilion at the Botanic Garden. And don't miss Tingley Beach, a sometimes underappreciated member of this quartet, which features several small lakes for fishing. www.cabq.gov/biopark



The Grove Café & Market

Open for breakfast and lunch, this eatery's menu is flush with seasonal, local, and organic ingredients. You'd be hard-pressed to find an item here menu that *isn't* delicious. You can't go wrong with the Grove Pancakes—French crêpe-style folds topped with fresh fruit, crème fraîche, and honey—and the Farmer's Salad with house-made lemon basil vinaigrette. The décor is as refreshing as the food. 600 Central Ave.; (505) 248-9800; www.thegrovecafemarket.com



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Nob Hill

Identifying Nob Hill, along Central Avenue, as one reason to love Albuquerque hardly does this diverse neighborhood justice. You'll find top art galleries, such as Mariposa and Matrix Fine Art; quirky shops, such as Beeps and Masks y Mas; and jewelry stores, such as Ooh Aah! and Gertrude Zachary, to name a few. The restaurants here will suite a variety of tastes: Scalo (northern Italian), Yanni's Mediterranean Restaurant, Fan Tang (Asian), and Nob Hill Bar and Grill (contemporary American). To explore more of this neighborhood: www.rt66central.com

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Albuquerque Theater Guild

The city is home to at least 30 live-theater organizations, which, under the umbrella of the Albuquerque Theater Guild, raise the curtain on more performances each weekend in the Duke City than most cities this size can boast. The Theater Guild includes well-known groups, such as the Albuquerque Little Theater and Musical Theater Southwest, as well as more off beat, though no less talented, ensembles such as Tricklock Company. www.abqtheatre.org



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Guild Cinema

Sprinkle a bit of red-chile powder on your popcorn and fold down a seat at this indie movie house. The Guild, established in 1966, screens both national and local independent films in its cozy theater—which has just the right amount of vintage charm. 3405 Central Ave. NE; (505) 255-1848; www.guildcinema.com

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Casablanca Room at Hotel Andaluz

Housed in a historic building opened in 1939 by New Mexico native Conrad Hilton, Hotel Andaluz reigns as an elegant, Spanish-inspired boutique hotel in the city's center. If you're looking for live music from Thursday through Saturday nights, head to the Casablanca Room for the likes of Latin act Nosotros and jazz trios. If the vibe in Casablanca leaves you too spent to head home, you can book an environmentally friendly stay at the hotel—Andaluz is among the few hotels in the U.S. certified LEED Gold. 125 Second St.; (505) 242-9090; www.hotelandaluz.com



DJ Quico, last New Year's Eve, at Hotel Andaluz

Ashley M. Biggers is featured in "Storytellers," on page 5.

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