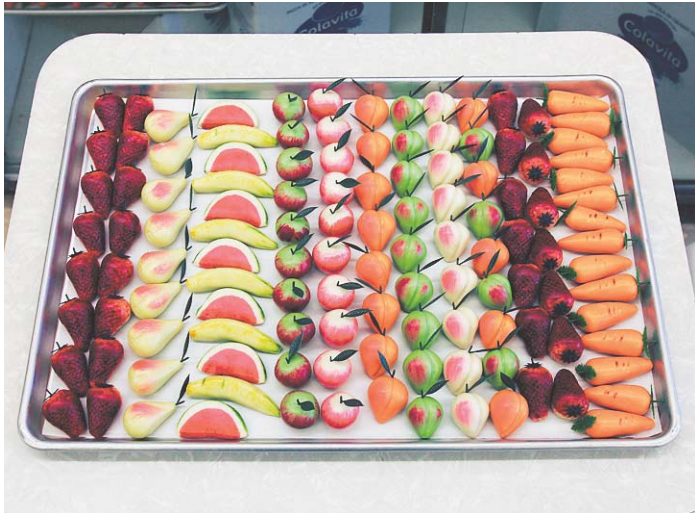


Explore New England

BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE OCTOBER 19, 2008 | BOSTON.COM/TRAVEL



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The Italian heart of town



PHOTOS BY PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

With the Big Dig dust settled, trendy mixes with traditional in an accessible North End

By Niece Regis
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

It is a warm, weekday afternoon in early fall, and Hanover Street is abuzz with activity. Trucks double park, unloading cases of wine and crates of vegetables for the restaurants lining the street as gelato-eating tourists saunter past elderly gents sipping espresso and bantering in Italian.

Off the main thoroughfare, where flowers bloom in boxes along narrow, cobblestone

streets and scents of garlic, pecorino, and cured meats waft from the open doorways of small salumerias, one can be forgiven for indulging in the fantasy of having traveled to a small town in Italy.

After years of dust, noise, and upheaval caused by the Big Dig project, the North End is once again an accessible treasure. The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway makes it easy to navigate from the Haymarket subway terminal to Cross Street and from there to Hanover, which stretches like a spine to the waterfront.

While the city's construction project was transforming the surrounding landscape, the North End, home to the Old North Church and Paul Revere's house along the Freedom Trail, also was changing. Known for decades as a neighborhood where pizza and pasta with red sauce ruled supreme, the North End is now home to a number of sophisticated eateries and fashionable boutiques. On a menu, you are as apt to find artichoke-pecorino ravioli topped with a cream of langoustine condiment as spaghetti with meatballs.

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Longtime favorites thrive, like Maria's Pastry Shop, with its marzipan fruit; Salumeria Italiana's cheeses and meats; Caffè Vittoria, a neighborhood meeting spot; and Caffè dello Sport, where soccer and sweets reign. The Velvet Fly, a newcomer, is a women's boutique.

PORTSMOUTH, N.H.

Art uncorks evenings of seeing, savoring, spending



DAVID LYON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Nahcotta gallery welcomes abstract aficionados last month.

By Patricia Harris
and David Lyon
GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

Kim Ferreira sat behind the desk at her **Three Graces Gallery** (105 Market St., 603-436-1988) and surveyed the art clustered on the walls. "I was still hanging pieces at 5:30," she admitted. "There are 35 artists in the show, and some have six pieces."

She had pounded the final nail and straightened the last frame just in time for Art 'Round Town, the coordinated openings at six Portsmouth galleries that take place on the first Friday evening of every month. Clearly it was worth the effort. "We get a great turnout," she said. "Often you can hardly move in here."

As gallery-hoppers sipped wine and closely studied the small paint-

ings, photographs, and prints, Ferreira's boyfriend, Bob Marino, circulated through the crowd. "This building was a former counting house for the harbor," he explained, pointing out a safe embedded in one wall and a trap door in the wide wooden floorboards. Marino met Ferreira, an artist who opened her gallery in May 2004, when he stopped in to have some artwork framed. "I think she thought my taste was a little conservative," he said, but the relationship blossomed nonetheless.

While we can't guarantee that you'll find true love, Art 'Round Town does deliver an entertaining evening of socializing — and lots of inexpensive wine. Even the city streets take on an upbeat, artistic vibe. As we left

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WITH HALLOWEEN LOOMING, SALEM IS IN THE SPOTLIGHT. VISIT OUR DESTINATION GUIDE AT BOSTON.COM/TRAVEL.

Where old world and modern mix

► **NORTH END**
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But those who loved the old North End should not despair. The neighborhood has managed to preserve its identity while expanding its repertoire to include the upscale and trendy. Restaurants may now have large windows that open to the street — rather than dark interiors with Chianti bottles overhead — but you still find places like the Caffè dello Sport, with Italian soccer team schedules taped to the cash register, two big-screen TVs to catch the action, and cappuccino topped with schiuma perfetta.

► **NORTH END TOUR**
Find your way with an interactive map and photos at boston.com/travel.

Eating well is a hallmark of the North End. You may spend a little or a lot but you won't be hungry when you leave.

The line stretches from the counter out the door most days at Galleria Umberto. Open for lunch only, this cavernous, no-frills operation has been in business since 1973. The pizza is Sicilian-style: large pans of bubbling cheese with sauce cut into squares. The arancini (deep-fried rice balls stuffed with meat and cheese) are the size of candlepin bowling balls and the yam-shaped panzarotti (deep-fried breaded mashed potatoes with cheese and herbs) are surprising-ly light and fluffy.

Of course every return visitor has his or her own favorite pizza. Christine Scannell of Topsfield, a self-described "pizza snob," swears by the more than 30 varieties of pies at Ernesto's Pizzeria on Salem Street.

"This is it for me. I absolutely love it," said Scannell, who was eating a slice while her to-go order sat on the table. "I have to bring some home for my son. If he finds out I stopped here without him he'll get mad."

If these establishments represent old-world style, the new can be found a few doors down on Salem Street at Neptune Oyster. So what if the white tile and dark wood interior feels more like a bistro than a trattoria? The changing varieties of oysters and shellfish at the raw bar are as fresh as the sea, and the chowder, fried clams, lobster roll, and half dozen entrees feature local ingredients.

If you prefer a linguine marinara or fettuccini Alfredo served beneath a ceiling painted to resemble Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, head to Lucia Ristorante and Bar. The Frattaroli family has owned this establishment for more than 30 years, and even with recent renovations it still offers pre-Big Dig charm.

More regional menus can be found at Trattoria il Panino, which features Amalfi Coast Mediterranean cuisine, and at Taranta where chef Jose Duarte combines Southern Italian and Peruvian cuisines to perfection.

Sweet tooth? North End bakeries and cafes are abundant.

Open from 6 a.m. till midnight, Caffè Vittoria has been serving customers in its elegant Hanover Street space since 1929. At its small round tables it's easy



PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Visitors hungry for a taste of the old North End can find it in Lucia Ristorante and Bar's marinara or Galleria Umberto's pizza.



WENDY MAEDA/GLOBE STAFF

to linger over coffee, gelato (including pistachio, ciccolata, hazelnut), and pastries (including cannoli, sfogliatelle, rum baba) while sipping a Campari or grappa.

On a sunny day, get your order to go from Maria's Pastry Shop and sit near the fountains along the Greenway. Less celebrated than others on the strip, this unassuming bakery is where locals go for homemade, authentic Italian cakes, cookies, candies, breads, and confections such as pasticcotti, mini pies with either vanilla cream or sweetened ricotta filling. (Don't forget to ask for powdered sugar on top.)

One of the more noticeable changes in this area is the number of boutiques selling clothes, jewelry, shoes, and gifts. The mix of old and new in the North End suits the sensibility at The Velvet Fly, where owners Beth Ann Hoyos and Lorrinda Cerrutti sell a combination of vintage and modern dresses, shirts, coats, bags, and shoes at affordable prices.

"The old neighborhood is mixing in with the new. There's a lot of energy. Everyone knows everyone," said Hoyos.

"This is one of the few parts of the city with a real neighborhood character. It has old world charm and new world flair," said Cerrutti.

Farther down the street, Meri-

lee Wolfson sells eclectic jewelry from all over the world at High Gear Jewelry. One of the first boutiques in the area, the space doubled when Wolfson moved to Hanover Street three years ago. Look for the Trend Board featuring stories about the newest hip jewelry designs.

"I try and get ahead of everyone else. For example, links are huge right now. And purple is big this year. If it's 'in' we've got it," said Wolfson.

Open since 1932, Polcari's Coffee is less a boutique and more a local institution. Walking inside is like stepping back in time: The floor is part wood and part linoleum, and the wood and metal shelves overflow with 150 spices, dried legumes, rice, grains, over a dozen types of flour, 27 varieties of coffee, bulk teas, oils, vinegars, pasta, stove-top coffee pots, and sets of espresso cups. Robert Eustace, whose mother was born in the North End, is more than happy to answer questions — in Italian or English — about his products and the neighborhood.

To bring a little piece of Italy home, head to Salumeria Italiana. Open for more than 40 years, this small storefront on Richmond Street is filled with aromas of goat, sheep, and cow cheeses, cured meats, and 14 varieties of olives. Nonperishable items include imported olive oils, aged



DINING

- 1 Neptune Oyster
- 2 Ernesto's Pizzeria
- 3 Taranta
- 4 Trattoria il Panino
- 5 Galleria Umberto
- 6 Lucia Ristorante and Bar

SHOPS

- 7 High Gear Jewelry
- 8 Polcari's Coffee
- 9 Salumeria Italiana
- 10 The Velvet Fly

SIGHTS

- 11 Copp's Hill Burying Ground
- 12 Old North Church
- 13 Paul Revere House

SWEETS

- 14 Caffè dello Sport
- 15 Caffè Vittoria
- 16 Maria's Pastry

ED WIEDERER/GLOBE STAFF

balsamic vinegars, canned tomatoes, peppers, coffee, honey, preserves, and seemingly endless varieties of pastas.

Though all-things-Italian dominate the landscape, it wasn't always so. As North End Secret Tours guide and resident Guild Nichols may remind you, the history of the area stretches back to the 1600s. Since then, waves of immigrants moved through as fortunes rose and fell and rose again: from the Puritans and early Anglicans, through a time when the area was called the "Murder District," through an influx of Irish, the arrival of Eastern European Jews, to the 1860s when the first Italian immigrants settled here.

Last, and certainly not least, the North End lies along the

Freedom Trail, which includes the Old North Church (of "One if by land, two if by sea" fame), Copp's Hill Burying Ground, and Paul Revere House, which is the only remaining example of 17th-century architecture in downtown Boston.

In the house is a replica of an early kitchen, with apple slices strung across the hearth to dry and a piece of (faux) meat waiting to be grilled. After contemplating such a meager meal, and the North End's humble beginnings, it was heartening to know that the vitality, charm, and culinary delights of Italy were waiting just outside the door.

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If you go . . .

Art 'Round Town
artroundtown.org
The first Friday of every month from 5-8 p.m. Check the website for information on participating galleries and coming exhibitions.

Where to eat

Victory
96 State St.
603-766-0960
96statestreet.com
After gallery openings, Deb Thompson often heads to the bar to sample small plates such as an artichoke and goat cheese fondue, a farmstead cheese plate, or hand-cut french fries with aioli. Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday 5-9 p.m., Friday-Saturday till 10 (or later). Small plates \$5-\$13.50, dinner entrees \$21-\$32.

Muddy River Smokehouse
21 Congress St.
603-430-9582; muddyriver.com
Artist Sarah J. Sims is an aficionado of the fried pickles, but many of the locals come for the St. Louis-style ribs. Sunday-Thursday 11 a.m.-9 p.m., Friday-



DAVID LYON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Margaret Bieniek studies works at Gallery eLO.

Saturday till 10:30. Sandwiches and barbecue platters \$8.99-\$15.99.

Flatbread Company
138 Congress St.
603-436-7888
flatbreadcompany.com
Bob Marino likes the atmosphere and the pizzas, made with organic wheat and baked in a wood-fired oven. Daily from 11:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Pizzas \$8.25-\$18.75.

Friday night lights up the galleries and eateries

► **PORTSMOUTH**
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Three Graces, an artist was cajoling passersby to twirl a hula hoop on their hips as she snapped photos. Elsewhere, we listened to street musicians and watched a sidewalk artist working on black and white drawings of local street scenes.

You might also get a chance to observe art-in-progress at **Piscataqua Fine Arts** (23 Ceres St., 207-337-1651), the printmaking studio and gallery opened by artist Don Gorvett about a year and a half ago. "People walk in here and say it smells like ink," said Sean Hurley, the gallery manager and one of four artists who regularly print their work on two large etching presses. "Ignore the mess," Hurley cheerfully told visitors. "It's hard to balance a working studio and a gallery." A few of his finely detailed etchings hung behind the counter, where visitors crowded around a tray of cheese and crackers. But most of the wall space is covered with Gorvett's vigorous reduction woodcut prints of coastal scenes. The gallery, an 1850s warehouse steps from the tugboat docks, fig-

ures in a number of the images.

Three Graces and Piscataqua sit on the harbor edge of the Market Square shopping district, Portsmouth's successful tourist-haven makeover of more than a decade ago. **Kennedy Studios Gallery & Custom Framing** (41 Market St., 603-436-7007), which features local artists in its frame shop, also shares the Market Square bustle.

But in time-honored fashion, artists are helping to reclaim one of the city's down-on-its-luck districts: historic State and Daniel streets, which fell into neglect when skinny Memorial Bridge was superseded by the Interstate 95 span connecting New Hampshire and Maine. **Gallery eLO** (110 State St., 603-433-9110) opened within sight of the old bridge in September 2007. "This end of town is going through a renaissance," said Glenn Dilando, one of the four artist co-owners. "People are discovering us."

The gallery, with its "100 percent free speech environment" sign on the door, "encapsulated art magazine" vending machine in one corner, and unframed prints hanging from clips on the

walls, just joined the Art 'Round Town event. "We have that outsider vibe about us," says Byrde Dilando, Glenn's sister and another co-owner. "It's nice to work with the other galleries. Everybody is doing something different."

The gallery emphasizes young and undiscovered artists, such as Margaret Bieniek, who had turned out for the event in red-and-black tiger-stripe tights and a jersey with more colors than a well-used palette. She'll have a piece in an upcoming exhibition. "This is a nice place for young people to hang out," she said.

The more established New Hampshire Art Association's **Robert Lincoln Levy Gallery** (136 State St., 603-431-4230) is just a few doors down from eLO. The large space is divided into three galleries and usually features the work of member artists. "We have 450 members in New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont, and Massachusetts," said Billie Tooley, executive director.

Portsmouth serves as a small-city locus for these widely scattered artists. "I love coming here for the open galleries," said Sarah

J. Sims, who was exhibiting her acrylic paintings of bright biomorphic forms. "I live in Loudon and even in Concord we don't have anything like this. It's wonderful. My pieces don't fit in a lot of New Hampshire settings."

Since Deb Thompson opened **nahcotta gallery** (110 Congress St., 603-433-1705) eight years ago, she's been building a market for abstract work, featuring both local and national artists. She's also watched her street, which was once Portsmouth's main shopping drag, rebound. "It was just coming back when I opened," she said, listing the variety of shops and restaurants filling once empty storefronts.

In fact, we were disappointed that many of Portsmouth's more interesting shops didn't stay open on gallery night. Restaurants, on the other hand, were hopping. "It's become a tradition in the community," said Thompson. "Check out what's happening in the galleries, and then go out to dinner."

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