



philadelphia

The city that will for ever be the cradle of America's democracy has finally come of age with a burst of contemporary culture and chic, says Jackie Cooperman.

This is a city cursed and blessed by its three centuries of history. Since its founding in 1682, Philadelphia has boasted great accomplishments – site of the nation's first lending library and medical school, and by year's end the only major US city to have city-wide Wi-Fi coverage. But it has also been a near-eternal also-ran, a stop between the capitals of commerce – Manhattan – and of politics – Washington DC.

That's changed. Signs advertising new luxury condominiums are omnipresent. The downtown population is growing, but the city remains compact and pedestrian-friendly. The result is an extraordinary place to visit, with a burgeoning restaurant, gallery and shopping scene, renowned museums and orchestras, and a long-ingrained sense of humour. Many buildings bear plaques identifying their critical role in the nation's history, but look closely and you'll note alternative versions, such as the one on 3rd Street reading: "On this site in 1887 nothing happened."

The city's best hotel, The Rittenhouse, offers the choicest location, on Rittenhouse Square, one of five parks planned by city founder William Penn. Ask for a room overlooking the square, enjoy the bedside chocolates, made daily by the in-house

chocolatier, and book a table at Lacroix, where chef Jean-Marie Lacroix oversees a seasonally driven menu and selects the exquisite floral arrangements framing the views over the square.

The Rittenhouse Square Bed and Breakfast, Philadelphia's closest approximation to a boutique hotel, provides cosy alternative lodging to its neighbour without any compromise on luxury. Converted from a 19th century carriage house, it has lured the likes of Samuel L Jackson with a mix of contemporary flourishes (plasma screen TVs) and working fireplaces.

Another excellent option is the stately Four Seasons Hotel, with quiet rooms and sweeping vistas over Logan Square, which was laid out to mirror Paris's Place de la Concorde. The grand hotel draws the city's political and cultural elite, so don't be surprised if you bump into Pennsylvania governor and former city mayor Edward Rendell dining in the Swann Restaurant.

A close neighbour of the hotel is the neoclassical Philadelphia Museum of Art, in Fairmount Park on

the banks of the Schuylkill River. Here the world's largest collection of works by Marcel Duchamp coexists easily with Cy Twombly, impressionist paintings and installations of brilliant Persian turquoise tiles. Next to the museum, a lesser-known treasure, the Rodin Museum, holds the greatest collection of Rodin's sculpture outside Paris. Walk through hushed halls to see Rodin's Falstaffian Balzac and imperious-looking Jules Barbey d'Aureilly.

Hail a taxi for a five-minute drive to Fairmount Park, where the Philadelphia Museum of Art has just completed a two-year restoration of Mount Pleasant Mansion. Built for Scottish sea captain John Macpherson and completed in 1765, the building was later owned by Benedict Arnold and has 30-inch cedar

shingles, limestone fireplaces, flowery mantels and arched Gothic dormer windows. It has been left unfurnished, providing an intimate glimpse of both the estate's solid structure and its whimsical ornamentation.

A couple of miles east, the Old City district has long been famous for being the hub of Philadelphia's oldest homes and monuments, but more recently it has been colonised by some of the city's brightest new restaurants. Have lunch at Fork, run by cheerful co-owner Ellen Yin, who has a penchant for European wines and satisfying dishes such as grilled duck breast with ginger compote and wilted spinach.

From Fork, stroll north via a clutch of contemporary art and design galleries. Visit The Clay Studio for pieces by local and international ceramic artists, including the insouciant Hirotsune Tashima, whose "Hot Spring" sculpture shows a couple soaking in a ramen bowl. At the far north-west corner of Old City, the Wood Turning Center features sophisticated international artisans and works such as a \$10,000 maple and boxwood table and chess set.

After whiling away a day amid the city's art and architecture, delve into the emerging Queens Village neighbourhood, a mile south of Old City. Here, Daniel Stern is establishing a cult following at his new

Above: illuminated 19th century boathouses along the Schuylkill River. Below: the Rodin Museum.



restaurant Gayle. The congenial Stern, 35, former executive chef at the city's legendary Le Bec Fin, circulates nightly among the diners at his 35-seat restaurant. Order the sautéed scallop, flanked by a pair of homemade crabmeat tortellini, or Stern's irreverent take on shepherd's pie. Nearly every wine on the well-edited list is available by the bottle or the glass.

After dinner, sip sangria and join the clapping, stomping and dancing at Amada, a lively new bar and restaurant in Old City where the city's young professionals gather to drink, flirt and watch weekly flamenco performances. If you're still peckish, the restaurant's menu includes dishes that are simple (tomato bread marinated with highest quality tuna) and decadent (duck with fig and cabrales cheese; lobster paella suffused with squid ink).

Start the next morning with an artfully made cappuccino at La Colombe Torrefaction. This is a Rittenhouse Square café with pedigree, as the Philadelphia-based



Clockwise from above: Daniel Stern outside Gayle; the Kimmel Center illuminating the arts; decoupage at Petulia's Folly.

shoes, and also employs 50 expert European tailors.

A few blocks south, Martin McNamara has converted a former ice cream parlour into Gallery 339, a luminous space exhibiting work by local and international photographers. From there, walk east, past the brick façades of Federalist and Victorian houses on Delancey Street (avoid touristy Elfreth's Alley) before continuing on Pine Street to the shops lining the blocks between 8th and 10th Streets, known as Antique Row.

At Linu, owner Karina Sotnik carries gorgeous hand-woven Latvian linen shawls

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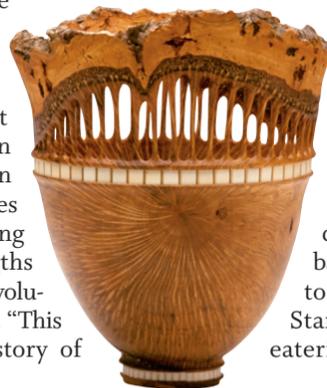
company sells coffee to the likes of New York über chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten.

Take up the shopping trail two blocks east. On Sansom Street, Joseph Fox Bookshop sells an excellent assortment of literature, design and architecture books, and amiable second-generation owner Michael Fox will engage you in a wide-ranging discussion of Philadelphia's history. Next door, women's boutique Petulia's Folly carries shoes by Sigerson Morrison and Hollywould, clothes from Nicole Farhi and Catherine Malandrino, Rajasthan cashmere and John Derian decoupage plates.

For serious fashion, Philadelphians turn to nearby Boyds, a third-generation emporium of men's and women's clothing and accessories. Founded in 1938, the four-storey department store stocks designers such as Gucci, Etro, Burberry and Canali, is the only shop in Philadelphia to carry Jimmy Choo and Manolo Blahnik

and made-to-measure curtains and tablecloths, as well as contemporary Baltic amber jewellery. A block east, M Finkel and Daughter is one of the world's leading sources for 18th and 19th century American and British needlework. Further north, on Washington Square, the Locks Gallery features Louise Nevelson, Robert Rauschenberg and local artist Diane Burko. In warm weather, the roof becomes an open-air sculpture gallery.

Continue north for a nuanced history lesson at the National Constitution Center, which opened in 2003. Permanent galleries include exhibits examining the Constitution's strengths and flaws, chronicling its evolution through current events. "This is really a warts-and-all story of



the birth of the republic, and how flawed in many ways that was," says curator and former *Time* magazine editor Richard Stengel. "The real genius of the system is it allowed the Constitution and the republic to try to heal itself."

Back on Rittenhouse Square, attend a student recital under frescoed ceilings at the beaux arts mansion housing the Curtis Institute of Music, alma mater of Leonard Bernstein and nearly half of the musicians currently playing in the celebrated Philadelphia Orchestra.

Enjoy an early dinner at the Striped Bass, a dramatic dining room in a former bank. The restaurant belongs to mogul Stephen Starr, whose 13 eateries include the

glamorous Asian-fusion Buddakan and Morimoto – both of which recently opened in New York – and who, in the last decade, has introduced cosmopolitan chic to Philadelphia's restaurant scene.

Starr confesses awe before the city's history. "Philadelphia will never be New York," he says, "it's more like New York Junior. Still, I walked by a building today and saw that it was the site of the first Republican national convention in 1856. That's just amazing."

Sip a sparkling negroni and ask sommelier Lauren Bernardikni to match a glass of wine to each course. The chef will send out an *amuse*-like seasonal speciality such as butternut squash soup, flecked with shiso leaves, cranberries and topped with an ethereal dollop of spun sugar. For a main course, try the black truffle-topped orecchiette with porcini mushrooms.

After dinner, take in a concert at the nearby Kimmel Center, designed by Rafael Viñoly with modular stages and high-tech acoustics to show off the 700 yearly performances by the city's orchestra and ballet and touring artists. Sit in the Verizon theatre, all mahogany wood and blood orange upholstery, or stop by a master class, where visiting performers such as Branford Marsalis subject aspiring musicians to a rarefied version of *American Idol*, deconstructing their playing in front of an audience. Sated by supper and celebrity, ride

the lift to the glass-enclosed roof garden for a twilight view of the city, illuminated and abuzz. ♦

Left: craftsman's art from the Wood Turning Center.

THE HIT LIST

HOTELS

Prices are for two people sharing a double room, including breakfast.

Four Seasons Hotel Philadelphia, One Logan Square (001215-963 1500; www.fourseasons.com/philadelphia); from £230. **Rittenhouse Square Bed and Breakfast**, 1715 Rittenhouse Square (001215-546 6500; www.



rittenhousebb.com); from £150. **The Rittenhouse Hotel** (pictured), 210 West Rittenhouse Square (001215-546 9000; www.rittenhousehotel.com); from £195.

RESTAURANTS AND CAFES

Prices are for a three-course meal for one with half a bottle of wine.

Amada, 217-219 Chestnut Street (001215-625 2450); £30. **Fork**, 306 Market Street (001215-625 9425); £25. **Gayle**, 617 South Third Street (001215-922 3850); £50. **Striped Bass**, 1500 Walnut Street (001215-732 4444); £60. **La Colombe Torrefaction**, 130 South 19th Street (001215-563 0860).

SHOPS AND GALLERIES

Boys, 1818 Chestnut Street (001215-564 9000). **The Clay Studio**, 139 North Second Street (001215-925 3453).

Gallery 339, 339 South 21st Street (001215-731 1530). **Joseph Fox Bookshop**, 1724 Sansom Street (001215-563 4184). **Linu Boutique**, 1036 Pine Street (001215-206 8547). **Locks Gallery**, 600 Washington Square South (001215-629-1000). **M Finkel and Daughter**, 936 Pine Street (001215-627 7797). **Petulia's Folly**, 1710 Sansom Street (001215-569 1344). **Wood Turning Center**, 501 Vine Street (001215-923 8000).

SIGHTS

The Curtis Institute of Music, 1726 Locust Street (001215-893 7902). **Kimmel Center**, 260 South Broad Street (001215-790 5800). **Mount Pleasant Mansion**, Mount Pleasant Drive, Fairmount Park East (001215-763 8100), Tues-Sun, 10am-4pm. **National Constitution Center**, 525 Arch Street,

Independence Mall (001215-409-6600), Sun-Fri 9.30am-5pm; Sat 9.30am-6pm. **Philadelphia Museum of Art**, Benjamin Franklin Parkway and 26th Street (001215-763 8100), Tues-Sun, 10am-5pm, Fri until 8.45pm. **Rodin Museum**, Benjamin Franklin Parkway and 22nd Street (001215-763 8100), Tues-Sun 10am-5pm.

LESS THAN AN HOUR AWAY

Head west, stopping first at the University of Pennsylvania's Fisher Fine Arts Library (001215-898 8325), with its glorious stained glass windows and grand reading room. Continue to the posh Main Line suburbs, home to many of the city's oldest families (think *The Philadelphia Story*) and visit The Barnes Foundation (001610-667 0290) with its incomparable holdings of

Renoir, Cézanne and Matisse. Finish with lunch and shopping along Main Street in Manayunk, a 19th century mill town now full of chic boutiques.

WHEN TO GO

Spring and early summer, when the city's many gardens are blooming, are lovely, but avoid the humidity of August. In autumn, take in the changing leaves and university crews rowing on the Schuylkill River.

HOW TO GET THERE

British Airways (0870-850 9850; www.ba.com) has two flights daily from Heathrow to Philadelphia International Airport, from £270. **US Airways** (0845-600 3300; www.usairways.com) has one flight daily from Gatwick and one from Manchester, from £280.