



Secrets of the



SERVICE WITH A SMILE

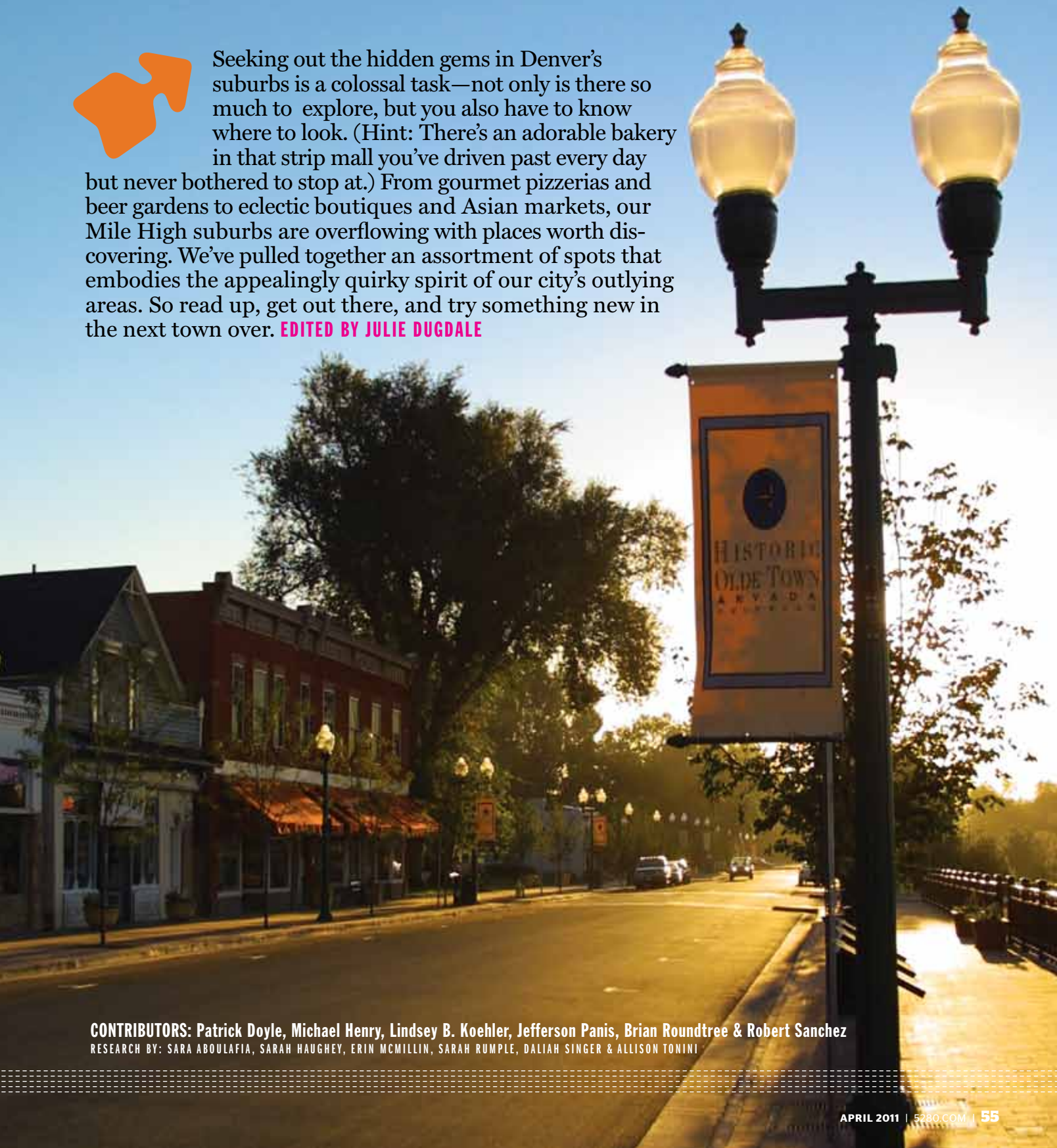
Littleton's cheerful Tres Jolie is a favorite for a mid-afternoon snack or tea break. Opposite: Historic Olde Town Arvada.

NAME TK

Suburbs



Seeking out the hidden gems in Denver's suburbs is a colossal task—not only is there so much to explore, but you also have to know where to look. (Hint: There's an adorable bakery in that strip mall you've driven past every day but never bothered to stop at.) From gourmet pizzerias and beer gardens to eclectic boutiques and Asian markets, our Mile High suburbs are overflowing with places worth discovering. We've pulled together an assortment of spots that embodies the appealingly quirky spirit of our city's outlying areas. So read up, get out there, and try something new in the next town over. **EDITED BY JULIE DUGDALE**



CONTRIBUTORS: Patrick Doyle, Michael Henry, Lindsey B. Koehler, Jefferson Panis, Brian Roundtree & Robert Sanchez
RESEARCH BY: SARA ABOULAFIA, SARAH HAUGHEY, ERIN MCMILLIN, SARAH RUMPLE, DALIAH SINGER & ALLISON TONINI



Something's Brewing

Downtown real estate is expensive, so it's no surprise that some of the best local breweries are outside the city of Denver's borders. Kevin DeLange, who bought The Brew Hut (www.thebrewhut.com), a homebrewing equipment and supplies shop, in an Aurora strip mall 10 years ago, started serving his own suds in 2005 when he opened Dry Dock Brewing (www.drydockbrewing.com) next door. The cozy spot won the coveted "Small Brewing Company of the Year" award at the 2009 Great American Beer Festival. Farther west, we've whiled away many an afternoon draining pitchers of hoppy Evolution India Pale Ale at Golden City Brewery (www.gcbrewery.com), whose "beer garden" is a low-key affair of mismatched picnic tables and chairs that attracts post-ride cyclists, Golden families, School of Mines students, and anyone looking to kick back for the afternoon. Finally, if you really want to know what you're drinking, visit Westminster's Do Your Brew (www.doyourbrew.com) on a Wednesday night for an introductory homebrewing class (\$85); you'll leave with a five-gallon batch of your choice—and just maybe, a new hobby.



YOURS FOR THE PICKIN'

Sunny Saturday mornings from June through November are perfect for bringing the kids to **Berry Patch Farms** (www.berrypatchfarms.com) in Brighton. They'll love having a real working-farm experience, whether they're picking their own fruits and veggies or petting the farm animals. The produce is certified organic, and the farm's market teams with the Berry Patch's just-harvested goodies that you can't pick on your own. Rather than charge admission, the family-owned 40-acre farm charges by the weight of your bounty, so you can leave with as much as you need. A mini tractor pulls farm-goers around the property to designated picking patches—a treat your little ones will get a kick out of.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: MARC PISCOTTY, COURTESY CITY OF AURORA
THIS PAGE: FROM TOP, ISTOCKPHOTO, COURTESY MCBOT PHOTOGRAPHY

Behind the bar at Dry Dock: head brewer Bill Eye (left) and owner Kevin DeLange.





Break time at Tres Jolie.

TEA TIME, ALL THE TIME

It's a British tradition, and we love that we can find it in so many nearby neighborhoods these days. Next time you're poking around Belmar, take an afternoon tea break at **Wystone's World Teas** (www.wystonestea.com) to recharge. Peruse the extensive loose-leaf tea menu and treat yourself to one of the signature tea-infused dishes, like the roasted red pepper hummus handmade with Moroccan mint tea. Thirty minutes south in Littleton, pop into the adorable **Tres Jolie** (www.tresjoliestyle.com) where you can savor a dainty cup and fresh pastries while browsing the attached home accessories boutique. Or, for a truly Victorian experience, visit the cozy **Serendipi-TEA Shoppe** (www.serendipi-teashoppe.com) just a few blocks away—but remember to make reservations for afternoon tea, beginning at 2:30 p.m. For a charming high tea served with an endearing British accent, try the **Wildflowers Tea Room** (www.guest-house.com) off the lobby of Broomfield's Hilltop Inn. The home-made scones with Devonshire cream and jam are just the right amount of authentic.

FARMHOUSE FREE-FOR-ALL

There's something about the countrified simplicity of a farmhouse that gets us every time—even when there's a retail explosion inside. In a handsome 6,000-square-foot farmhouse due east of Broomfield's 1st Bank Center, the **Shops at Rustic Ranch** (www.shopsatrusticranch.com) houses 16 merchants under one roof for your treasure-hunting pleasure. Whether you're in the market for hand-painted birdhouses, one-of-a-kind accessories, custom fly and spinning rods with hand-carved cork grips, or stunning nature photographs for your mountain cabin, there's likely a specialty shop here that's got you covered.

WE'RE ALL HUMAN...RIGHT?

Let's face it: Suburbanites and city dwellers think differently, live differently, and act differently. Ever tried to convince a city dweller that big-box stores aren't the downfall of society? Ever tried to tell a suburbanite that more isn't always more? Good luck. Sometimes, we just have to agree to disagree. —ROBERT SANCHEZ

URBANITE VS. SUBURBANITE

TWENTY MILES IS...

A day trip.

A one-way trip to work.

YOU SECRETLY THINK...

Your suburban friends are bad with money; they paid way too much for that five-bedroom cookie-cutter monstrosity.

Your city friends are bad with money; they pay rent.

YOU CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT...

Fresh sushi.

Freshly cut grass.

A BICYCLE IS...

An eco-friendly form of transportation.

A child's plaything.

YOU THINK YOU'RE COOL...

Because you have three plots in your community's urban garden.

Because you have a three-car garage—and a garden.

YOUR BUMPER STICKER SAYS...

"Coexist."

"My child is an honor student at (insert school name)."

YOUR MOST ANNOYING CONVERSATIONAL HABIT IS...

Telling your suburban friends about the great Moroccan joint that just opened down the street that serves the most amazing *harira* soup—and gosh you haven't had *that* since your last visit to North Africa.

Telling your city friends that they could have a place the size of Morocco if they bought the house next door to you.

A NEIGHBOR'S DOG JUST "NUMBER TWO'D" ON SOMEONE ELSE'S LAWN. YOU...

Burst out of your town house and scold the dog owner about the need to preserve green spaces.

Call your homeowners association and log an anonymous complaint.

GIVING DIRECTIONS TO LITTLE RAVEN STREET...

Is easy. Obviously, it's the street downtown where Zengo is located.

Is easy. Obviously, it's the street after Little Raven Road that forks off of Little Raven Boulevard right before it turns into Little Raven Circle and loops around Little Raven Park.

YOU'RE CUTTING IT CLOSE FOR DINNER DOWNTOWN AND CAN'T FIND PARKING. YOU...

Skip the appetizers and drive around the block 14 times until a spot opens up.

Skip dinner altogether and drive 14 miles home.

YOU'VE JUST VISITED FRIENDS WHO LIVE A HALF HOUR AWAY. YOUR FIRST THOUGHT AS THE DOOR CLOSES ON YOUR WAY OUT IS...

How can they live like this?

How can they live like this?





LOUISVILLE
THE COLORS OF MAIN STREET



Get Cookin'

There are plenty of cooking schools in Denver—we've tried nearly all of them, and they're great. But lately, when we really want a satisfying and memorable experience, we sign up for a class at the Landmark's Kitchen Table Cooking School (www.kitchentablegy.com) in Greenwood Village. The course selection is giant, from cooking basics (Sauces 101) and specialties (Outrageous Holiday Desserts) to regional themes (Peru: Winter in the Andes) and a wine series. The school even has teen and kids' programs. Bonus: The gift shop has the best-priced knives in town. Our latest purchase there was \$95. The same knife cost a cool \$44 more at Williams-Sonoma.



CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

Love to get your splash on, but not up for the city crowds at Confluence Park? Hone your paddling skills on the quarter-mile course at Golden's **CLEAR CREEK WHITE WATER PARK** (www.ci.golden.co.us).

Three sections provide varying conditions—wave drops, eddies, pools, and boulders—for kayakers and canoers to practice

their moves. The course is unsupervised—so if you're just learning or you're still a novice paddler, think about taking a lesson at the Golden Parks and Recreation Department's indoor pool.

If you prefer wheels over waves, check out the new **GOLDEN BIKE PARK** (www.goldenbikepark.com) at the Tony Grampas Memorial Sports Complex. Navigate through terrain for all abilities, from a beginner trail to a downhill flow track with rollers, berms, and jumps.

Making waves at Clear Creek White Water Park.



And hey, if gravity—or defying it—is really your thing, get down to Lone Tree for a session at **SKY-VENTURE COLORADO** (www.skyventurecolorado.com), the state's only indoor skydiving facility. You will actually physically fly and experience that free-falling sensation (with professional instructors, of course) in a giant vertical wind tunnel that sustains a safe and controlled airflow column via a 1,200 horsepower fan system—the same airspeed a real skydiver experiences after jumping from a plane.

STRIKE IN 1850, THE FIRST KING SOOPERS IN 1947, AND T.H. KRAUSE, WHO INVENTED THE AUTOMOBILE TURN SIGNAL. **CENTENNIAL** POPULATION: 100,377 **DID YOU KNOW:** WHEN CENTENNIAL WAS INCORPORATED AS A CITY IN 2001, IT WAS THE



THE COMBO, PLEASE

And by combo, we mean eating and watching—as in, dinner and a movie at **Cinebarre** (www.cinebarre.com) in Thornton. The trendy establishment, one of only five locations across the country, offers a lineup of both blockbusters and indie flicks and a cheeky menu of dishes with names that play on famous films, such as *Body Snatchers* (loaded potato skins) and *the Rocky* (prime rib stacked with veggies and provolone). You choose your own seat, where you can wine and dine throughout the movie with the provided order card, pencil, and menu. Bonus: Cinebarre selects film shorts from independent filmmaker submissions to screen before the feature—a perfect aperitif for the audience.



Smokin' Hot

It's impossible to wax too poetic about good barbecue, but we're gonna try anyhow. No matter what your favorite style of 'cue happens to be—Memphis, Kansas City, Carolina—you'll lick your fingers clean after a meal at **Hoke's BBQ** (www.hokesbbq.com) in Westminster. Everything at this place passes for delicious, but our money is on the tender beef brisket and flavorful chopped pork. The fall-off-the-bone ribs ain't half bad either. For a little heat, try the German hot links paired with a cold brewski—now that's barbecue heaven.

AND FINALLY, BLISS

HOW WE LEFT OUR HOUSE IN THE CITY BEHIND, ONLY TO ARRIVE...HOME. BY MICHAEL HENRY

WHEN MY WIFE and I decided to move from Denver to the suburbs several years ago, I had waking nightmares of a new life: day-long, stressed-out trips to Costco, unchecked weight gain in the gut region, a frantic obsession with Kentucky bluegrass, and the desire to own a gun, for no reason at all.

But there was no way around it. Our historic Victorian in trendy, up-and-coming Curtis Park was just too damn small. With two growing daughters, we needed square footage: A crib shoehorned into a closet is no place for a baby to sleep. We also figured it was about time we started paying back our student loans—which meant we would be priced out of our own neighborhood. We threw open the *I Ching*—an ancient method of divination for those freaking out about big decisions—and its message said, “Traveler: You are not defined by where you are.”

OK, we thought. Suburbia it is. Thornton, to be exact. I thought we'd never survive. I feared we would become strangers to ourselves—shells of our former on-the-go personalities. Nonetheless, we bid adieu to our just-edgy-enough 'hood and

followed the moving van north on I-25.

To our amazement, it's been a pleasant surprise. We have a spacious four-bedroom house, complete with a totally rad 1980s hot tub. Across the street there's a playground, a tennis court, and a roller hockey rink. Our daughters ride their bikes to school. We rollerblade and play tennis whenever we like. We love spotting the rust-colored fox that rules the neighborhood. In the garage, I have a workbench where I keep a hammer, some screwdrivers, and an impressive assortment of duct tape. I've yet to spend more than 30 minutes in any big-box store, Costco or otherwise.

Our neighborhood might not be considered hip, but it's a peaceful place, with mesmerizing Colorado sunsets we relish from our back porch. Because, yes, we have a *porch*—and two apple trees, and a garden our former selves would've killed for. And, well, all those extras we'd wished for but could never quite fit into our historic city digs. Truthfully, we cherish these comforts. Our daughters cherish them, too. And that's important. We may be traveling through, but it sure feels like home right now.



GETTING CONNECTED

WHY SOCIAL MEDIA SOOTHES MY SUBURBAN SOUL.

BY JEFFERSON PANIS

A FEW WEEKS AGO, I was riding the morning train through south metro Denver to the office downtown, browsing my smart phone for news of the day, when I stumbled onto a post announcing Smashburger's new Sin City burger. It was the fried egg on top that caught my eye. Since I had time to kill before

my stop, I threw a note on my Facebook wall, figuring someone from my family would notice, prompting a tasty burger dinner sometime soon. My family did notice—but they weren't the only ones. Within an hour, my friend Eric commented on the post: "I've never been, but I've heard good things...." Then Shannon piped in: "Love!" So, Eric replied, suggesting we all check it out: "Preferably together?" The thread continued to grow; Mike joined with "I'm in!" After some back-and-forth we settled on a time and location—all before my afternoon coffee break. It was a date.

That mundane exchange might not appear extraordinary, but that same outing likely wouldn't have happened so easily a few years ago—before the onslaught of social media. Back then, I'd occasionally see Eric and Mike on the disc golf course. We'd talk about how much our kids had grown, share recent drama at work, and at the end of the round agree that we should all meet up for dinner with our wives and kids. It rarely happened. We are scattered across the metro suburbs—Eric and Caroline live in Parker, Mike and Shannon in Highlands Ranch, my family in Littleton—and we just didn't run into each other often.



Smashburger
Our New "Sin City" Burger

59 minutes ago · Like

2 people like this.



Shannon LOVE!
32 minutes ago · Like



Eric We should all check it out, preferably together?
28 minutes ago · Like

end up getting groceries at the same Whole Foods where all of his neighbors shop. And while my city-dwelling friends find that gathering at a local watering hole is relatively easy—in fact, they can often walk or bike down the street and bump into friends wherever they decide to stop—I don't have the same drop-it-and-go ability from our house down south. This isolation was always my biggest issue with suburban life, and it created a nagging envy of my downtown friends, who seemed able to meet up with each other without any trouble and without much planning.

Then social media was born. The random, organic gatherings and frequent exchanges online have helped smother that sense of isolation. Now, I look forward to the train commute to and from work, wondering where the next meet-up will be. It might be a drink with friends after work or a day game at Coors Field; the randomness makes the journey interesting. And, because I no longer feel so alone out here, I've come to embrace my suburban home—the open space, the family vibe, the relaxed pace—knowing that my friends are always at my fingertips.



Jeff Panis Hey, we should get a drink after work.
2 minutes ago · Like

View all 12 comments



Arthur Murray Dance Studios instructors Juan Castillo and Angelica Garcia.

So You Think You Can Dance

When you want to hit the dance floor in a major way, you might think of clubbing in downtown Denver. But when you actually want to learn to dance—as in, less awkward gyration, more legitimately sweet moves—consider heading outside the city lines. Arthur Murray Dance Studios (www.coloradodancestudios.com)—of which there are three in the metro area and dozens around the country—will get your body moving and your heart pumping. Whether you're looking to master salsa, rumba, fox-trot, swing, or waltz, the super-friendly (and, OK, kinda sexy) dance instructors can show you the basic steps or get you in top shape for future dance competitions. The flexible class schedule offers both private sessions and group lessons.

CHRISTINA KIFFNEY



MADE IN CHINA

In January, *Chinese Restaurant News*' prestigious "Top 100 Chinese Restaurants" national competition wrapped up with plenty of Colorado representation, rounded out by more than a few spots in—you guessed it—Denver's suburbs. The awards are meant to set the bar for "universal excellence in dining standards" for Chinese food in the states. Lone Tree's **Jasmine Asian Cafe** (www.jasmineasiancafe.com) and Lakewood's **Great Wall Super Buffet** (www.greatwallsuperbuffet.com) both snagged spots in the top 100 for overall excellence, while Aurora's **Little Panda** (www.littlepandaaurora.com) and Firestone's **King Wah Asian Food** (6050 Firestone Blvd., Unit 201, Firestone) cleaned up in the take-out category. To find out which other Colorado places picked up honors, visit www.top100.chinesemenu.com.



TECH ELITE

We love our Macs, but we still feel compelled to note that Lone Tree is home to one of only eight **Microsoft** (<http://store.microsoft.com>) stores in the entire nation. Amid much buzz about its retail proximity to the Apple store, Park Meadows opened the location, only the third at the time, this past summer. New Yorkers are still griping—the store still hasn't made it east of Chicago.



KNOWING 'BOUT GROWING

Admittedly, our thumbs could use some greening—which is why we're planning a trip to Centennial's award-winning **Tagawa Gardens** (www.tagawagardens.com). We'd be surprised if there was a gardening need that couldn't be met within the center's 3.5 acres of indoor greenhouse space. Need tips on pruning your rose bushes? Check. Innovative ways to xeriscape? Check. Patio furniture to go with your water garden? Check. We like perusing Tagawa's helpful blog for detailed and seasonal tips on plant arrangements, porch pots, harvesting, and more before visiting the center. If you're a hands-on kind of person, make sure to check the schedule of classes and webinars—perhaps "Herbs for Cold and Flu" or "Preparing Your Pond for Spring" is just what you need.



COURTESY DICK KURATLI, TAGAWA GARDENS; LAURIE SMITH



Straight from Italy, Virgilio's serves it piping hot.



Pie in the Sky

Pizza isn't one-size-fits-all—everyone has his own idea of what makes for a sublime slice—but lucky for us, the metro area has more than enough options to find the perfect fit. Here, a few standouts:

FOR THE ORGANICALLY MINDED TRENDSTER: **Lucky Pie** (www.luckypiepizza.com) in Louisville offers all-natural, brick-oven pizza made with Colorado-grown flour and locally sourced ingredients like Hazel Dell mushrooms—not to mention a hearty selection of obscure craft beers like Steelhead Double IPA, Milk Stout on nitro, and Duchesse De Bourgogne Flemish Red on tap.

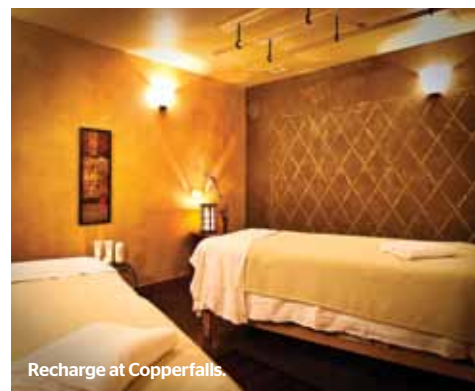
FOR THE DIE-HARD ITALIAN TRADITIONALIST: **Virgilio's Pizzeria Napoletana** (www.virgiliospizzeria.com) in Belmar dishes out a real slice of Italy; owner Virgilio Urbano was born near Naples, Italy, and the grow-your-own-tomatoes technique came with his family when they immigrated. The Belmar spot was so successful that he opened a spacious Littleton location this past summer and added a wine list (www.virgiliospizzeriaandwinebar.com).

FOR THE BROOKLYN TRANSPLANT: **Big Bill's New York Pizza** (www.bigbillsnypizza.com) does thin-crust, grease-drenched, foldable slices the way they're done in the Big Apple—but in Centennial. No frills, no gourmet touches (although whole wheat and gluten-free crusts are now options). Just straight-up gooey cheese and sauce. Fuhgeddaboutit.



Day Trippin'

If you're heading south to Castle Rock, get your gas money's worth and spend the day: Start with a trip to **The Barn** (www.thebarncastle-rock.com), a building more than 100 years old that houses a slew of antique, specialty, and home decor shops that could occupy you for hours. Next, take your retail-weary bones around the corner to the tranquil **Copperfalls Aveda Spa & Salon** (www.copperfalls.com) for a rejuvenating Caribbean Mud Therapy Treatment. Once your mind and muscles are sufficiently sated, time to work on the appetite: Amble another couple of blocks to the **Old Stone Church Restaurant** (www.oscrestaurant.com) for a leisurely meal in what was once Castle Rock's first church building, constructed in 1888. Don't miss happy hour at the attached Chaplain's Bar for \$5 apps and drink specials.



Recharge at Copperfalls.

ROCKIN' THE SUBURBS

BEYOND DENVER'S LIGHTED STAGE. BY BRIAN ROUNDTREE

AS A SUBURBAN FATHER—of six, mind you—with a demanding city job and a lengthy commute from Highlands Ranch, I'm rarely able to leave my cookie-cutter home to sample the nightlife and hang with friends. However, I do happen to front a basements-only (so far) rock band in my sporadic free time, so I jumped at the chance to investigate the live music scene in the suburbs—which, of course, required that my incredibly patient wife handle the children for a week's worth of post-work outings. I'm not above a little healthy bribery, so one new set of long-coveted silk sheets later, I had her blessing to rock.

My tour kicked off on a Wednesday night. I jumped in my white Dodge Grand Caravan, popped in my new CD, *Blah Blah Blah Plus Tax* (recorded by fellow "burb bro"—yeah, you heard it here first—Bill Leirer with his band, Sloan Valve), and headed north on I-25 to catch the dueling pianos of Landmark's Chez Cirque. Over the next few days, I zigzagged from Greenwood Village to Lakewood to Parker to Centennial, with various 'burb bros riding shotgun on my quest to find the musical underbelly of suburbia (see "Follow the Beat" below).

By the time Sunday hit, I was blissfully exhausted (and inspired) from venue-hopping, so I got my fix at home with my own band's rehearsal. Our group is comprised of six cats with a passion for playing classic rock and blues, and writing original tunes. All of us

have played in cul-de-sacs and garages, and almost everyone balances busy careers with carpools to dance recitals and baseball practices by day, while churning out lingering 12-bar blues chord progressions and smashing cymbals at night.

Music, for me and for basement rockers all over, was born in suburbia. We play because we're inspired; because we have the space; because we love it. I've always imagined the day when our band steps out of the basement and onto the stage. But as we ramped up for our newest set, I thought about the musicians I'd heard all week, playing the unpretentious taverns of suburbia, because *they* were inspired. It wasn't about the size of the stage or the cost of the cover. Under those lights, their music was the only thing that mattered.

My tour ended with a trip to Greenwood Village's Slam Bar on Tuesday night to hear the acoustic samplings of songwriter Craig Haller, who provided a Shawn Mullins-esque soundtrack to the subdued early-week atmosphere. At the end of the night, I parked the minivan in our driveway and let the last notes of Sloan Valve's chugging rock anthem "Local Motive" trail off before killing the engine. I quietly slipped into the house to keep from waking the kids and cuddled up with my sleeping beauty of a wife, noticing she'd made the bed with the shiny silk sheets. I spied the receipt on the nightstand with a note scribbled on it: *Thanks for the new sheets, rock star—don't forget to let the dog out.*



FOLLOW THE BEAT Think the city is the best place to catch live music? Think again. Here, what my journey through suburbia uncovered. —BR

NIGHT ONE GREENWOOD VILLAGE

>**Chez Cirque**
www.chezcirque.com
Lead piano player (and owner) Jimmy C. and "Naked Pete" tickled the ivories with drummer in tow.
>**Baker Street Pub & Grill**
www.sherlockpubco.com

Two blocks from Chez Cirque, the address is technically Denver—but the duo-acoustic gig by Jason Vigil and Stu Miller was too captivating to omit.

NIGHT TWO LAKEWOOD

>**Eck's Saloon**
www.eckssaloon.com

Denver's heavy-metal heroes, Five13, prompted a night of healthy head-banging.

NIGHT THREE PARKER, LONE TREE

>**Tailgate Tavern**
www.tailgatetavern.com
The fun-loving Tripping Griswolds jammed tirelessly

at this humble pub in Parker.
>**Swingers**
www.swingersgolfhouse.com
Lone Tree's swanky sports bar hosted the Bill McKay Band's deep, Delta-infused blues.

>**NIGHT FOUR
CENTENNIAL**
>**Rhythms Sports Bar & Grill**

www.rhythmsbarandgrill.com
Jungle-boogie time with the Nacho Men's '70s disco tribute.

NIGHT FIVE GREENWOOD VILLAGE

>**Slam Bar**
www.grandslamdenver.com
Singer-songwriter Craig Haller brought my tour to a close.

LITTLETON POPULATION: 41,737 DID YOU KNOW: MATT STONE, THE CO-CREATOR OF TV'S INFAMOUS *SOUTH PARK*, ATTENDED HERITAGE HIGH SCHOOL IN LITTLETON. AND ALFRED PACKER, THE FAMOUS ALLEGED CANNIBAL, IS BURIED IN LITTLETON.



GOLDEN

GATEWAY TO THE FOOTHILLS



BAKER'S DOZEN

Yes, there are easily a dozen standout bakers in the 'burbs—but here, we're paying homage to those most responsible for thwarting our otherwise intact New Year's resolutions to lose the sweet tooth. In no particular order, we would like to:

THANK Rocky Treats cream puffery (www.rockytreats.com) in Highlands Ranch for bringing the devilishly irresistible profiterole back into our lives. We dream in caramel cream these days.

WARN anyone hanging on to a shred of willpower to stay far, far away from **Cheesecake Therapy** (www.cheesecaketherapy.net) in Arvada because this place will break you. It will obliterate your commitment to vegetables and replace it with uncontrollable cravings for decadent Roasted Banana Rum cheesecake. (Psst: banana = good for you.)

NOTE that we could die happy never having snacked on a warm baguette from a charming French bakery in Paris, because we've got the real thing, **La Baguette de Normandy** (www.labaguettedenormandy.com), right here in Parker.

PLEDGE our eternal devotion to **Dolce Sicilia Italian Bakery** (www.dolcesiciliabakery.com) in Wheat Ridge for perfecting the three deadly Ps: pastries, panini, and pizza. And the Cs, too: cookies, calzones, and cannoli. Need we go on?



Asian Imports

INDIAN: Get your fix at Jewel of India (www.jewelofindia.com) in Westminster,

where owner Jujhar Singh has infused the trademark hospitality of his home state—Punjab, India—straight into the suburbs of Denver. You can't go wrong with the fresh buffet—trust us, you'll want seconds of the spicy lamb vindaloo.

VIETNAMESE: With the opening of Pho 7 (3917 E. 120th Ave.) several months ago, the savory flavors of Vietnam have finally reached Thornton. The soup vendor seems to be a real hit with the previously pho-deprived populations of Thornton and Northglenn.

FUSION: Indochine (www.indochine-cuisine.com) in Parker has stolen hearts in the south metro area with its dynamic Asian combination of Thai and Vietnamese cuisines—perfect for those who like it all.



Dinnertime bustle at Indochine.



Nomélie Cupcakes owner Selah Davenport whips up tempting treats.



Cupcakes on Call

You're shopping at Southlands Mall in Aurora. It's a madhouse. A little pick-me-up is in order. Head for the fire pit, behind which you'll find Bliss Cupcakes (www.blisscupcake.com). If available, try the King—aka the fluffy banana cupcake filled with sinful peanut-butter mousse and topped with peanut-butter buttercream. (Tip: Ask for shredded bacon on top. Really.) Or, maybe you're perusing downtown Parker—in which case, pop into the charming Nomélie Cupcakes (www.nomeliecupcakes.com) for a taste of fresh, handmade ingredients and yummy flavors like Mom's Fave Jam. And, for you really ambitious folks, let us point you toward The Makery (www.themakery.com) in Centennial, where the "we bake, you make" policy lets you create and decorate your own designer (fancy tools provided) cupcakes and cakes while leaving the hard part—fear not, our oven-challenged friends—to the pros.

CENTER STAGE

Talent isn't necessarily proportional to the size of the stage. This past fall, in a strip mall-esque space in Westminster, the nonprofit **73rd Avenue Theatre Company** (www.the73rdavenuetheatrecompany.com) produced a drama called *The Container*, about smuggling immigrants across a border. The entire play occurred *inside* an actual boxcar-size shipping container, audience and all—making for an intimate, thought-provoking, searing snapshot of humanity. In Arvada, try the **Festival Playhouse** (www.festivalplayhouse.com) for top-notch family-friendly theater; the historic playhouse, constructed in 1874, is Arvada's oldest building. Or, reserve a table at **Longmont's Jesters Dinner Theatre** (www.jesterstheatre.com) for dinner and a show. The costume shop, open to the public, is a Halloween jackpot.

LITTLE ITALY No neighborhood would be complete without a homey, all-in-the-family Italian joint that serves a bar full of regulars and leaves the frills for higher-priced trattorias. Make the rounds at the following: **Armando's** (www.armandosristorante.net) in Aurora is a family favorite and does a killer baked ziti (a second location in Parker opened recently). In Centennial, **Luigi's** (www.luigisitalian.net) plates savory comfort-food starters like handmade sausage and peppers and cheesy baked mushrooms sautéed in white wine. Lakewood's **Cafe Jordano** (www.cafejordano.com) churns out decadent Alfredo, and Westminster's **Enzo's** menu (12025 N. Pecos St.), chock full of traditional Italian comforts and tucked away in a strip mall, is the product of a creative team headed by "Mamma and Papa Enzo." What's more comfortable than that?

WORLDLY AFFAIRS

We love H Mart and Avanza, but there's always room to expand your horizons for specialty ingredients you can't find at your supermarket.

MEXICAN Thornton's **Mi Pueblo Market** (9171 Washington St.) does south of the border with the best of 'em. Find fresh produce for dollars cheaper than at your regular grocer, peruse the panadería for warm tortas, or snag fun kitchen goodies like tamale steamers.

ITALIAN From interesting olive oils and imported dried pasta to homemade cannoli and fresh mascarpone, **Vinnola's Italian** (www.vinnolasitalianmarket.com) in Wheat Ridge is your market for Italian favorites.

ASIAN Broomfield's **Pacific Ocean Market Place** (6600 W. 120th Ave., Unit A) is jam-packed with tasty and exotic treats. Noodles galore, an eclectic and fresh (so fresh it's sometimes still alive!) seafood selection, salted pork belly, scrumptious frozen dumplings, and plenty of items you can't pronounce, all for reasonable prices. Bonus: Scoot next door to **Pho Duy** (same plaza, Unit B) and fill up on an out-standing, hefty pho bowl to inspire your shopping.



Fresh-baked from Vinnola's.



LITTLETON
OLDE TOWN AT DUSK



MARATHON SHOPPING SPREE

When we're in need of serious retail therapy but can't handle the stress of the mall, we hightail it to Littleton for a fix. Kids underfoot? Try **Couture Kids Consignment Boutique** (www.couturekidsboutique.com) for the hippest duds in munchkinland. Bookworm in the family? The **Neighborhood Bookstore** (www.neighborhoodbookstore.com) is your spot—trade in your used reads for credit toward new purchases. Fashionistas, swing by **Details Boutique** (www.detailsboutique.com) for trendy wardrobe staples, accessories, and girly bath gifts, or the blue-painted **Blue Ruby Boutique** (www.bluerubydesignboutique.com) for a well-edited and accessible selection of designer looks. Got a thing for vintage? You'll spend hours in the **Pink Attic Cat** (www.pinkatticat.com) or the **Oh, So Charming Cottage** (www.ohsocharmingcottage.com) sorting through an eclectic assortment of back-to-your-childhood items that make the perfect repurposed home accessory or holiday decor accent. For professional help in the interior design department, hit **Seasons** (www.seasonslittleton.com) for home goodies, custom floral arrangements, and decor consultation.



High-Country Salute

Climbing the Rockies is a rite of passage for us Denverites. But even if you wouldn't call yourself extreme—heck, even if your mountain exposure consists of the view off your back porch—you'll appreciate the Bradford Washburn American Mountaineering Museum (www.mountaineeringmuseum.org), which occupies the old Golden High School. Check out one of the world's only scale models of Mt. Everest, learn about Colorado's 10th Mountain Division, or swing by every third Thursday for happy hour with local brews and bands. This isn't your average small-town museum: It partners with the Colorado Mountain and American Alpine clubs, and the National Geographic Society—we're talking legit adventure cred here. ▲



Bradford Washburn American Mountaineering Museum.

THE STALWARTS

We couldn't offer a list without a nod to the mainstays of the metro area. You know 'em, you love 'em—and so do we. Here, our go-tos for a good time in the 'burbs.

ROCKING OUT

1ST BANK CENTER /// [Broomfield www.1stbankcenter.com](http://www.1stbankcenter.com) /// **April 21** John Denver's Rocky Mountain High, an Earth Day Concert

RED ROCKS PARK AND AMPHITHEATRE /// [Morrison www.redrocksonline.com](http://www.redrocksonline.com) /// **April 24** Easter Sunrise Service, 6 a.m.

D NOTE /// [Arvada www.dnote.us](http://www.dnote.us) /// **Throughout April** Salsa lessons, bluegrass, Zumba, Baby Boogie, DJ Chonz and Friends

COMFORT DENTAL AMPHITHEATRE /// [Greenwood Village](http://www.greenwoodvillage.com) /// **Summer hours only**

INDULGING

OPUS RESTAURANT /// [Littleton www.opusdine.com](http://www.opusdine.com) Try the chef's six- or nine-course dinner (\$69 to \$195).

THE FORT /// [Morrison www.thefort.com](http://www.thefort.com) Order the Game Plate (\$44) for a taste of the Wild West.

COLTERRA /// [Niwot www.colterra.com](http://www.colterra.com) Take your pick from the locally sourced, seasonal menu.

COORS BREWERY TOUR /// [Golden www.millercoors.com](http://www.millercoors.com) It's Coors, it's Miller, it's Molson...who cares—it's free.

OSKAR BLUES HOME MADE LIQUIDS & SOLIDS /// [Longmont www.oskarblues.com](http://www.oskarblues.com) Pick a bluegrass night, grab a pint, and get your jam on.

LEARNING

FOOTHILLS ART CENTER /// [Golden www.foothillsartcenter.org](http://www.foothillsartcenter.org) /// **Through April 17** Colorado Watercolor Society 20th Annual State Exhibition /// **Through April 8** The Art of Charles Lovett

BUTTERFLY PAVILION /// [Westminster www.butterflies.org](http://www.butterflies.org) /// **April 13** Guided Sunset Stroll /// **April 23** Egg Hunt

ARVADA CENTER FOR THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES /// [Arvada www.arvadacenter.org](http://www.arvadacenter.org) /// **Through April 16** The Musical Adventures of Flat Stanley /// **Through April 17** Cabaret /// **April 26–May 22** The Lady with All the Answers

DENVER BOTANIC GARDENS AT CHATFIELD /// [Littleton www.botanicgardens.org](http://www.botanicgardens.org) /// **April 22** SCFD Free Day

THE WILDLIFE EXPERIENCE /// [Parker www.thewildlifeexperience.org](http://www.thewildlifeexperience.org) /// **April 2** Rocky Mountain Reptile Rescue /// **April 9** HawkQuest /// **April 14** Movie and a Martini

SHOPPING

Behold, our favorite retail playgrounds in the metro region.

FLATIRON CROSSING /// [Broomfield www.flatironcrossing.com](http://www.flatironcrossing.com)

BELMAR /// [Lakewood www.belmarcolorado.com](http://www.belmarcolorado.com)

THE STREETS AT SOUTHGLENN /// [Centennial www.shopsouthglenn.com](http://www.shopsouthglenn.com)

PARK MEADOWS /// [Lone Tree www.parkmeadows.com](http://www.parkmeadows.com)

OUTLETS AT CASTLE ROCK /// [Castle Rock www.outletsatcastlerock.com](http://www.outletsatcastlerock.com)

COLORADO MILLS /// [Lakewood www.simon.com/mall/?id=1237](http://www.simon.com/mall/?id=1237)