

# Travel

EDITOR: SARAH MacWHIRTER

## MASSACHUSETTS

# In Boston's Combat Zone revival, ballet bumps strip clubs

JUDITH RITTER BOSTON

It was once known for strip clubs and prostitutes, and the mix of sailors, thugs and just-plain curious that potent brew attracted. Now, except for a few holdouts, Boston's Combat Zone — a neighbourhood between Washington and Tremont streets — has morphed into a different kind of entertainment hot spot.

Restorations of iconic theatres (spearheaded by two of Boston's universities), plus new posh restaurants, a Ritz and a W hotel are harbingers of dramatic change. Here are the highlights:

### THE PLAY'S THE THING

Boston's run-down, turn-of-the-century movie, vaudeville and opera theatres have been gloriously renovated down to the last gilded, plump-cheeked putti. The latest theatre-house dowager to emerge from cosmetic surgery, thanks to Boston's performance-oriented Emerson College, is The Paramount, an art deco movie theatre that first opened in 1932. The interior with its trompe l'oeil mural, grand fixtures and little museum of vaudeville memorabilia offers productions from legends such as Peter Brook and Robert Lepage to Montreal's cutting-edge Les 7 doigts de la main, and the oddly mystical Rude Mechs. A visit is worth the time, but the showstopper is the theatre's glorious marquee and its 7,000 bulbs. 560 Washington St.; 617-824-8000; artsemerson.org

### ON YOUR TOES

The Boston Ballet moved to the magnificently restored Opera House in the old Combat Zone. In the 1920s, the Opera House was a palace of vaudeville, its opulence unrivalled in the city. The dance company's residence in this exactly restored confection has been a thrill. "It creates a great intimacy between the performers and the audience," says Toronto-born dancer Rachel Cossar. 539 Washington St.; 617-695-6955; bostonballet.org



The revamped Paramount pays homage to its past with a museum of vaudeville memorabilia. PETER VANDERWARKER

### FOOD MAESTRO

The flowering of this once seedy and boarded-up neighbourhood has attracted restaurateurs hoping to lure people from the city's hip South End. One of the front-runners is the Milan-esque BINA Osteria. A visit to BINA is de rigueur not just for its private-label pinot grigio or its fresh pappardelle with spicy tuna, raisins, toasted pine nuts and fresh ricotta. BINA is also a destination for its award-winning design: picture lounge tables of recycled railway ties, exposed structural columns, oddly shaped banquettes in red Tuscan silk, and an asymmetrical canopy-like ceiling. Inspired to recreate your meal at home? Duck into the adjoining BINA Alimentari, a European-style gourmet shop, and you'll find all the ingredients. 581 Washington St.; 617-956-0888; binaboston.com

### ALL THAT GLITTERS

Part of a project to put Iraqi refugees — many of whom are goldsmiths — back to work, Gold Power isn't your typical gold exchange. Yes it deals in flash, with both delicate jewellery and hockey-puck-size crosses and eagles. But the real draw is the jewellers, including Iraqi-born Wisam Breegi, who hold court in this gold market modelled on the old Baghdad tradition. 495 Washington St.; 617-426-0508

### AFTER DARK

An insider place to chill, snack and hear cool jazz from the Berklee talent pool is Kingston Station. This hip watering hole (also a bistro) has a 10 metre-long zinc bar and a Fidel Castro cocktail, a potion of fresh sugar cane, Brugal rum and passion fruit. If it's a good enough hangout for Red Sox honcho Theo Epstein and hip hop's Gnarls Barkley, it's good enough for us. 25 Kingston St.; 617-482-6282; kingstonstation.com

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