

DEPARTURES

JULY ♦ AUGUST 2016



The AMERICA ISSUE

Rafting in Idaho • Golfing in Martha's Vineyard
Dining in Austin • Big-Deal Turquoise • Jay McInerney's New Novel
A Jazz Portfolio in Black and White
PLUS The MOST Incredible Picnic EVER!

DOWNTOWN CROSSING

BOSTON IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The historic area just east of Boston Common is on the radar once again.

In all old cities, neighborhood fortunes rise and fall. Nowhere is this truer than in the Downtown Crossing district of Boston. A shopping, literary, and publishing center in the late 1800s, it suffered in the years after World War II. The burlesque shows and porno shops moved in and stayed until the early 1990s, when former mayor Tom Menino helped lead a redevelopment push that eventually purged the trade from the area. It's been a long time coming, but thanks to some preservation of historic landmarks; early, visionary developments that now anchor both ends of the neighborhood; and the influx of new restaurants, bars, and theater renovations, it has arrived.



The library bar at Yvonne's restaurant, where the scene matters as much as the food



1 Where to Eat Now

When **Yvonne's** (2 Winter Pl.; 617-267-0047) opened last year, it established a new high-water mark for dining in Downtown Crossing (or DTX, as the locals now call it). The interiors are rich—gold-marble flooring, chandeliers, heather-gray tufted booths—and the menu focuses on small plates with Middle Eastern, Asian, and Latin twists (like tuna crudo with jalapeño vinaigrette and seared Halloumi cheese with charred eggplant). For something more casual, the **Merchant Kitchen and Drinks** (60 Franklin St.; 617-482-6060) has an

extensive beer list (organized by flavor profile), locavore cuisine, and inventive cocktails. Try the poached sea trout with pea greens (left) and the Saber Tooth, a savory-spicy gin cocktail.

JM Curley, named after one of Boston's longest-serving and most criminal mayors, James Michael Curley, has one of the best hamburgers in the city. What's new is the 20-seat speakeasy/steak joint in the rear of the eatery, **Bogie's Place** (21 Temple Pl.; 617-338-5333).

2 The Old Standard

Local favorite **Silvertone Bar & Grill** (69 Bromfield St.; 617-338-7887) has been serving up some of the best comfort food in the neighborhood for the past 19 years. Try the mac and cheese or the meat loaf, which are as legendary as the Red Sox.



3 The New Hotel

Opened in February, the **Godfrey Hotel** (rooms from \$200; 505 Washington St.; 617-804-2000) is the first boutique hotel in the heart of DTX. While not quite luxurious, its rooms (above) are large, elegant, and simple, with neutral colors and thick, sound-proof windows (a plus given the bustle of Washington Street). The flat-screen TVs let you download shows from any personal streaming-video account or smart device. This fall, Yvonne's owners will open the hotel's restaurant, **Ruka**, serving Peruvian-Asian fusion. Stay at **Nine Zero** (rooms

from \$300; 90 Tremont St.; 617-772-5800) for a more upscale, welcoming experience.

4 Shop for Diamonds

Small, independent diamond brokers and jewelers have set up shop in the buildings at 333 and 387 Washington Street since the turn of the 20th century. Take a few hours to browse the spaces; most companies operate from a single, very impressive room. Don't miss **Barmakian Jewelers** (333 Washington St.; 617-227-3724); one of the first tenants of its building in 1910, the boutique sells some of the highest-quality stones found in New England.

5 The Classic Hotel

Omni Parker House (rooms from \$339; 60 School St.; 617-227-8600) contains more history than most museums. The oldest

continuously operating hotel in America, it's where John F. Kennedy proposed to Jacqueline Bouvier (in **Parker's Restaurant** off the enormous, ornate lobby) and where John Wilkes Booth stayed a few days before assassinating President Lincoln. The rooms are clean and casually appointed but tend to be small, so book at least an executive-class grade. The more modern **Ritz-Carlton Boston Common** (rooms from \$445; 10 Avery St.; 617-574-7100), built in 2000, was one of the bellwethers of the DTX renaissance. Take in the view from its restaurant **Blu**.



6 Literary Boston

Books have been the long constant in this part of town: DTX was once the home of Ticknor and Fields, publisher of Thoreau, Dickens, and Twain. Today, bibliophiles head to **Brattle Book Shop** (9 West St.; 617-542-0210), which dates to 1825 and has three comprehensive floors of books (above). **Commonwealth**

Books (9 Spring Ln.; 617-338-6328) and the appointment-only **Peter L. Stern and Co.** (15 Court Sq.; 617-542-2376) can also be counted on for that perfect Sunday read or a first-edition Hawthorne.

7 Take In a Show

The 500 block of Washington Street offers more entertainment than perhaps any other block in the U.S. The **Boston Opera House** (539 Washington St.; 617-259-3400), built in 1928 and now also home to the Boston Ballet, reopened in 2004 after a two-year restoration and helped launch the area's resurgence. **Paramount**

Center (559 Washington St.; 617-824-8400), which shows art films and smaller theater productions, and **Modern Theatre** (525 Washington St.; 866-811-4111), known for independent theater, followed suit.

8 Refuge in a City

A five-minute walk from DTX is the **Boston Public Gardens** (Charles St. between Boylston and Beacon). It is an oasis at the literal center of Boston's oldest neighborhoods. Find a bench under the willows near the lagoon, or stroll through the manicured rose gardens. —*Kris Frieswick*