

Weekend travel

Outpost to chic shopping

Westport has taken on life as a charming urban village with shops, restaurants and cool hangouts.

By CARLA WALDEMAR

Kansas City, Mo. — Westport has always been on the cutting edge. In fact, this historic quarter of Kansas City was a boom town long before K.C. itself was on the map.

It began life in the 1830s as a westernmost outpost, outfitting the likes of Kit Carson and James Sutter as they struck out for uncharted land. In recent years it gained a reputation as a rootin'-tootin' collegiate entertainment district that discouraged more mature folks from moseying around.

That has changed. Thanks to several committed business owners who established boutiques and night spots that would appeal to a more sophisticated crowd, Westport has taken on new life as a charming urban village, not unlike The Village in New York.

One-of-a-kind shops fill old brick facades on its tree-lined streets, midway between Crown Center and The Plaza. From its hub at Westport and Pennsylvania, the enterprises radiate in all four directions. For exact locations, consult the free map available from most merchants.

Leading the don't-miss list is Loma Vista Hardware, one-stop shopping at its most eclectic. The main floor is almost a museum of worn floorboards and old-fashioned scales to weigh the nuts and bolts stored in walls of wooden drawers.

Upstairs, in a vast salon fitted with vintage velvet sofas, theater seats, and lamps as forward as tomorrow, you'll find designer duds by the likes of Versace and Dolce & Gabbana, along with Dr. Martens platform heels. All things to all people, Loma Vista also sells skateboards in the basement.

For more affordable, accessible clothes, head to Natural Wear (women), Zuni (men) or Re-Runs, sporting a nifty line of re-run stuff. Midtown Hatter supplies the Panamas and fedoras for Scott and Zelda types. To complete the image, you'll find art-quality handmade jewelry at Accents and aromatic oils at Perfect Scents.

To dress your home, a brand-new store called Stuff is stuffed with collectibles that range from tastefully artsy to authentically antique. The place to outfit your kitchen is Pryde's, run for 37 years by John Perucci, who claims, "There's nothing half as comprehensive in L.A."

Servers offer complimentary coffee as you wind your way among its labyrinths. John Bull is another shop L.A. would be hard-put to eclipse. It sells upscale cigars and smoking paraphernalia, both antique and cutting-edge (excuse me), as well as a fine line of Martini shakers.

For a gift card, slip into Harry's.



Zola's restaurant fills its brick walls with art shows.

The pink neon triangle in the window is your signal they're a bit irreverent. Bet you can't read just one.

For kids' gifts, the City Zoo can help. It contains more stuffed animals than most zoos feature live. And the Reading Reptile is the kind of kids' book shop every neighborhood deserves — but only Westport is so lucky. Free story hours and movies, too.

Literate adults pass the word about Whistler's, a legendary multi-story book shop specializing in fiction, poetry and art books to peruse from its armchairs while sipping coffee, compliments of the house.

If it's a cappuccino you're after, head to the Broadway Cafe, local art and live music, too. Those who'd choose a brew instead will find four spunky variations from the street-side copper vats at Mill Creek Brewing Co. Just across the street, McCoy's Public House is a brand-new brew-pub hoping to draw a little more up-market crowd for its homemade brews and menu.

Its deck is tailor-made for people-watching; there's a cigar lounge, too, and it's hard to resist sticking your nose into Kelly's, celebrating its 50th anniversary as an anti-fancy saloon in Westport's oldest building. Stanford & Son, right next door, is the comedy club where Roseanne and Tom Arnold have played. So has Jerry Seinfeld.

But first, a bit of dinner. Zola's fills its brick walls with art shows and its contemporary tables with the city's cool and hip. So's the menu: wasabi chicken with green curry potatoes, couscous cakes with mascarpone, and peppercorn-laced shepherd's pie.

Harry's Bar & Tables provides K.C.'s yups and boomers with a classy place to puff their stogies or sip a single malt. Reminiscent of a British pub with dark wood and bevelled glass, it captures the best view of Westport from its French windows and leafy patio. It's British in its carvery theme, too — roast beef, corned beef and more — but the side dishes are blessedly un-London: baked apple with pecans and raisins, Cuban beans and rice or new-potato salad rife with Kalamata olives.

Metropolis is as snazzy as its name implies, a homage to Deco in black, teal and mirrors. The globe-spanning menu is just as avant, segueing from pumpkin gnocchi and mushroom strudel starters to swordfish Caribbean style or chicken dancing with Southwestern spices.

Californos is housed in Westport's historic trolley barn. Dine on the courtyard sidewalk, indoors aside the crackling fire, or on the four-level cedar deck at its backside.

The Classic Cup is where the Arts Institute crowd hangs out, as well as the neighborhood locals who've become extended family. It's deliciously Bohemian both in atmosphere and menu.

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KANSAS CITY
Quick
trek

If you go:

► Westport

Parking — Abundant and free, both street and lot.

Trolley — Several stops in Westport; connects with other city sites.

Festivals — Westport Ballet, free outdoor performance third weekend in July; Art Westport and Calistoga Days (two weekends in September); Antiques fairs spring and fall.

Accommodations — Quarterage Hotel, 500 Westport Road; (816) 931-0001.

For more information — Westport Merchants Association (816) 756-2789.