



# Paint the Town

ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA: AN ART-LOVER'S HAVEN

BY KAREN F. BUCHSBAUM

**ONCE A SLEEPY MOUNTAIN TOWN,** today's Asheville boasts an upbeat, creative vibe for every taste. Its highly acclaimed farm-to-table dining scene aside, the city's burgeoning artistic side is gaining attention on its own.

And that doesn't mean the kinds of crafts you can find in almost every hilly Southern town and village. In Asheville, the artistic community enjoys rich variety and robust diversity. While traditional artistic expression in such media as glass and clay remains an important component of its art culture, the city's River Arts District stands as proof of its growth and its depth.

Near Biltmore Estate and downtown, the district easily can be overlooked. For the last 20 years, it has been a work in progress, transforming abandoned and crumbling warehouses along a 1-mile stretch of the French Broad River into vibrant studio spaces and gallery showrooms. These days, more than 200 artists work in the district's 22 formerly industrial and historic buildings.

The district is organized into five areas (listed at [riverartsdistrict.com](http://riverartsdistrict.com) and in brochures found throughout the city), south of Interstate 26/240. Just about every art form can be found among delightful cafés, restaurants and craft breweries—pottery, jewelry, textiles, basketry,

bookbinding, glasswork, painting, mosaics, photography, sculpture and wood.

Cindy Walton, an artist from St. Petersburg, Florida, opened a workspace in the Wedge Studios building four years ago. She uses cold wax and oils on wood panels to create abstracts influenced by the emotional feel and colors found in natural landscapes. The Gulf Coast beaches of Walton's youth and the mountains she loves have significantly influenced the vibrant colors, metallics and textures in her unique paintings.

With a background in more traditional art, she says her chosen media have given her a "more purposeful relationship with painting." Walton adds, "This is what I

## Asheville Art Shows

Twice a year, the River Arts District sponsors a Studio Stroll, and downtown Asheville offers significant galleries to visit during the day or during the monthly evening Art Walks. The Southern Highlands Craft Guild holds major shows twice a year, in addition to the many other local festivals and shows held in town.



Opposite page:  
Artist Cindy  
Watson at her  
studio

Left: The River  
Arts District  
is known for  
its bustling  
creativity; Hannah  
McGehee, an  
apprentice at the  
Village Potters  
Teaching Center,  
builds her next  
piece.

Below: An art  
studio housed  
in a refurbished  
building

really want to do.”

Like many Asheville artists, Walton’s work can be found in galleries throughout North Carolina and around the country.

Near Walton’s studio, visitors can find former art teacher Bee Sieburg, whose colorful oils were recently featured on the cover of *The Laurel of Asheville* magazine. Her daughter Molly, also an accomplished artist, works nearby.

Experienced and would-be artists can take classes in the district as well. The Village Potters Teaching Center offers an array of clay classes. One course, Create Your Own Workshop, is a single session for artists of any skill level. Located near Riverview Station, the center also sponsors an apprentice program, giving up-and-coming potters a workspace and mentoring, along with master classes. The center is an extension of The Village Potters, a group of six female potters who, in addition to their studios, have three showrooms featuring their contemporary ceramics.

At Riverview Station, meanwhile, burgeoning painters can check out the wide variety of classes, workshops and private lessons available at River’s Edge Studio, offered by the 310 ART Gallery.

For a different look at the city’s arts scene, it’s

a good idea to book a tour. One company, Asheville Art Studio Tours ([ashevilleartstudiotours.com](http://ashevilleartstudiotours.com)) offers hands-on explorations as well as a two-hour walking overview of the district (adult tickets are \$32). The tours are limited to six people, with visits to at least six studios—some with multiple artists.

The district is constantly evolving and the city’s Riverfront Redevelopment Office, River Arts District Artists and River Arts District Business Association are working together to manage growth and keep the area’s artistic spirit. In 2017, transportation improvements will realign some streets, add green spaces and make it more pedestrian-friendly.

As it continues to evolve, Asheville’s art scene will still have something for everyone from the veteran gallery aficionado to the curious artist. ■

