

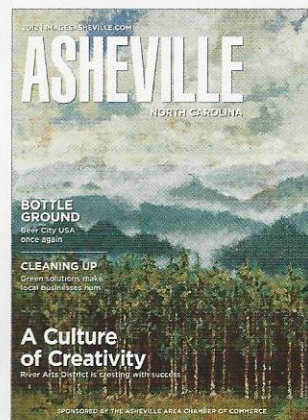
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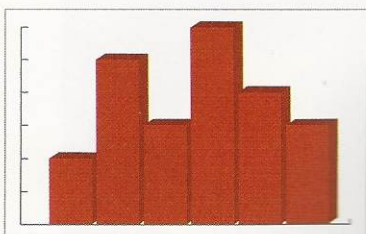
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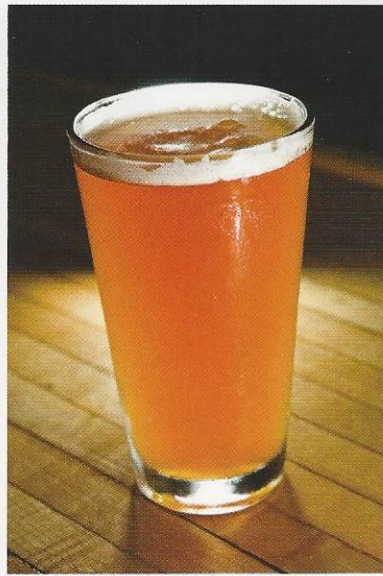


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Down By the River

ASHEVILLE'S RIVER ARTS DISTRICT
IS CRESTING WITH SUCCESS

STORY BY **BETSY WILLIAMS**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JEFF ADKINS & BRIAN McCORD**

Throughout its history, Asheville's riverfront has seen an economic ebb and flow of abundance and hardship along the waters of the city's French Broad River.

Today, abundance is flowing again, as a riverfront renaissance is riding a crest in Asheville's flourishing and eclectic River Arts District (RAD).

Setting the Stage

It started in 1985 with Brian and Gail McCarthy's Highwater Clays, the first arts-based business, followed by Porge and Lewis Buck, who in 1987 transformed a former feed store into Warehouse Studios.

"They unknowingly set the stage for what is today's River Arts District," says landscape painter Wendy Whitson, owner of Northlight Studios and president-elect of the River Arts District Artists. "On any given day there are 65 artists, studios and businesses open for business,

and it's growing every day as more people discover this great area and the energy we are generating."

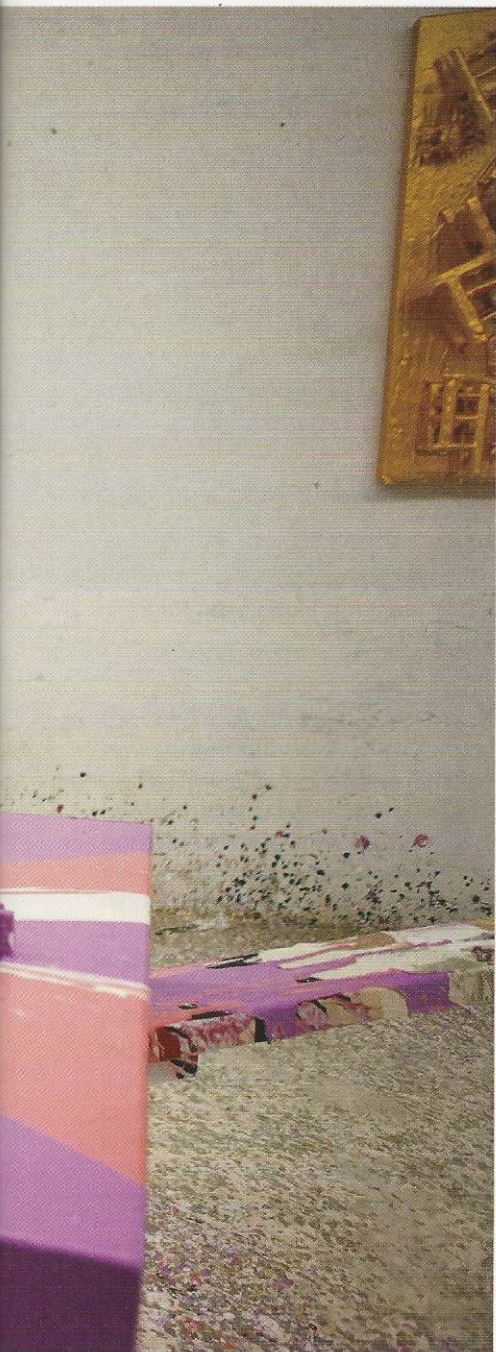
When RAD pioneer and leader Pattiy Torno was seeking a new location for a nightclub in 1989, she spotted the neglected area and saw potential.

"There was no arts district at the time; it was just an abandoned part of town," she says. "The buildings are so amazing in their construction, with high ceilings and big banks of glass windows."

Today, Torno's CURVE Studios & Garden, located in three renovated Riverside Drive buildings, houses 13 working artists specializing in a wide variety of media, including her own quilts and eclectic clothing.

Arts Studios, Restaurants Find a Home

Pink Dog Creative, taking over an expanse of buildings on Depot Street, recently opened its doors to more than a dozen artists and The



Clockwise from left: The River Arts District includes a variety of businesses such as Hofman Studios, which specializes in handbuilt porcelain; Wedge Brewing Company; and Pink Dog Creative, where founder and creative director Randy Shull paints in his studio.



Clockwise from above: Artist Wendy Whitson's gallery is located at Northlight Studios; Ian Whitt blows glass for a crowd of spectators in the River Arts District; Acrylic paints; Pink Dog Creative on Depot Street

Junction restaurant, while Glen Rock Depot has debuted with 60 affordable residential units and commercial space, including The Magnetic Field Performance House & Café and West One Salon. Wedge Brewing Company, 12 Bones Smokehouse, Clingman Café and Hatchery Studio's White Duck Taco Shop are just a few of the restaurants creating the river scene.

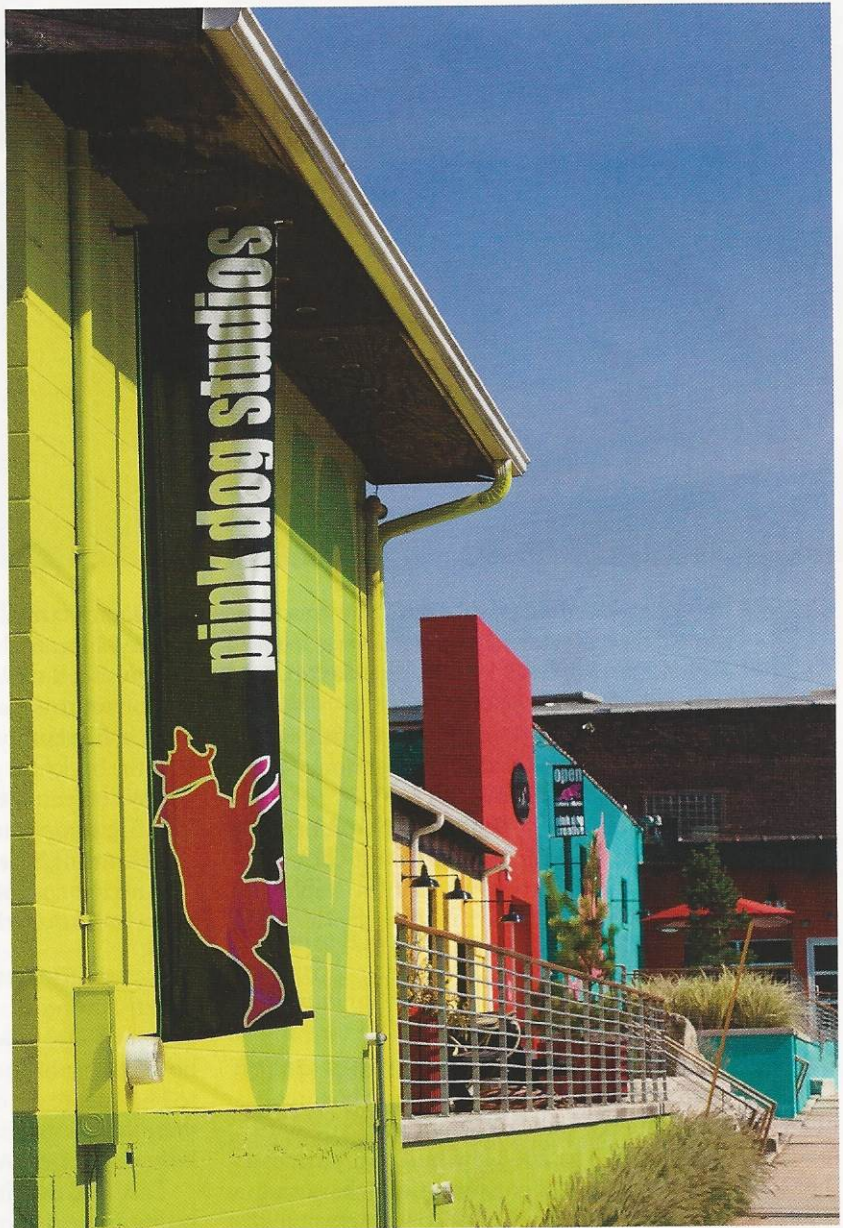
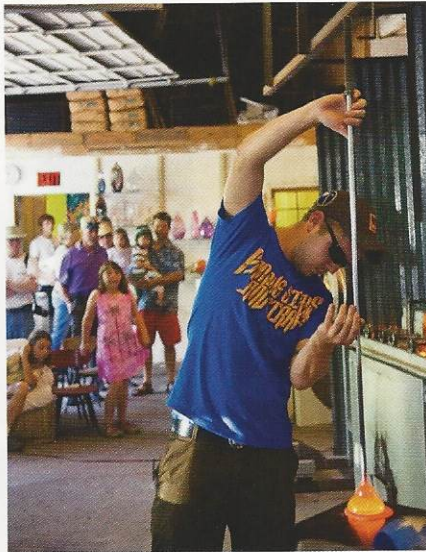
"The River Arts District has flourished amazingly well in the last five years," says Torno, who serves on the Asheville Area Riverfront Redevelopment Commission. "It's continuing

to grow; people are purchasing buildings and investing in this area." New construction, building renovation and an influx of restaurants, new businesses and full-time residents have created a hip urban feel down by the river. Events spaces, framing shops, health- and pet-care providers, landscape architects, building suppliers and nonprofit organizations are all adding to the vibe that is the River Arts District.

New Streetscape, Wayfinding in Place

A \$1.2 million streetscape

improvement project, funded by the city of Asheville and the North Carolina Department of Transportation, is bringing a real sense of place to the RAD, with sidewalks, bike lanes, landscaping and parking improvements. A recent wayfinding project, spearheaded by the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, is helping residents and tourists alike better find their way to an array of glassblowers, weavers, sculptors, painters, and ceramic and furniture craftsmen, including one furniture maker whose goal is to resurrect North



Carolina's furniture industry, says Torno.

Twice-yearly Studio Strolls, outdoor movies, live theater productions and concerts lure people unfamiliar with the RAD who then return on a regular basis to enjoy the offerings of art, food and entertainment.

"It's succeeding because of collaborative efforts," Northlight's Whitson maintains. "The artists who are here are very serious and passionate about their art form. They love what they're doing, and that passion makes this neighborhood have a real heartbeat." ■