

what's new in...

DENVER

by Lawrence Ferber

Rated as one of the country's fittest cities (there are numerous LGBT sport/activity organizations) and sunniest to boot (300 blue-skied days per year), the Mile High City's landscape is swelling with new museums, hotels, restaurants, lounges, shops, and calendar-marking worthy events. March-July 2012 will see the only North American exhibition of "Yves Saint Laurent - The Retrospective" and in 2015 Denver will be the host city for the **North America Outgames** (www.facebook.com/Denver2015).

Upon arrival, grab a copy or check out the web page of indie weekly **Westword** (www.westword.com), LGBT newspapers **OutFront Colorado** (www.outfrontcolorado.com), and **Gayzette** (www.gayzette.com) for the LGBT lowdown.

Passing through downtown's Theatre District, home to the **Denver Performing Arts Complex** (www.artscomplex.com), you'll notice a new, literal standout: the 45-story **Four Seasons Hotel Denver** (1111 14th St. Tel: 303-389-3000. www.fourseasons.com/denver). Opened in October 2010, it boasts 239 guest rooms and 102 residential units. Contemporary artwork by Colorado artists complements the earthy wood and stone interiors, while amenities are thoroughly modern. Some suites have stone fireplaces and city and Rocky Mountain views. The third floor's rooftop terrace, an urban resort within itself, features a heated swimming pool and whirlpool. The in-house spa is an incredible escape and carries a men's treatment menu and a line of Colorado spa products, Zents (created by openly gay Cord Coen). Ground level restaurant EDGE is a chic, locavore take on the American steakhouse and spotlights Colorado wines, as does its neighboring EDGE Bar.

Four-year-old indie property **The Curtis** (1405 Curtis St. Tel: 303-571-0300. www.thecurtis.com) partnered with chain Doubletree in 2010. This proved a win-win move. The Curtis retains its fun, boutique, and pop-culture quirk—each floor is themed, from sci-fi to one-hit wonders, with unique corresponding elevator recordings (e.g.: a Jack Nicholson *The Shining* sound-alike plays when arriving at the hor-



ror-movie floor), while gaining Doubletree's signature, complimentary warm chocolate chip cookies at the front desk. In-house restaurant **The Corner Office** (Tel: 303-825-6500. www.thecornerofficedenver.com) is excellent, retro-mod in décor, and its Sunday Disco Brunch is fun but not shrill. Staff dress in campy 70s attire (my waiter looked like Will Ferrell with a 'fro), the era's music is kept well below dance floor levels, and the food, including a coconut milk French toast and pork belly eggs Benedict, is both creative and solid. Of special note is the bottomless make-your-own Bloody Mary bar—a buffet table's worth of fresh, sinful condiments including crispy pork belly cubes, bacon, and five types of hot sauce.

The progressive Kimpton brand's **Hotel Monaco** (1717 Champa St. Tel: 303-296-1717. www.monaco-denver.com) unveiled a fresh, bold renovation of its 189 rooms by interior designer Susan Caruso in February 2011. Embodying Colorado's "urban yet adventurous lifestyle," Caruso mixes things up with texture and color—a white, faux-crocodile-skin-covered, mahogany bed bench, a silver and teal velvet guest chair and ottoman, chocolate and persimmon-toned geometric carpeting—to fun, yet urbane, effect

Speaking of mixing things up, a cocktail culture boom is in full swing, inspired by one first sparked off in nearby Boulder; indeed, many locals will bow in reverence to the town's foodie scene. A number of Colorado-based mixologists have been snagging prizes at international bouts: in September, the GQ Bombay Sapphire competition anointed

Bryan Dayton, of Boulder's **Oak at Fourteenth** bitter bar, "Most Inspired Bartender in America."

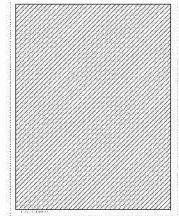
Helping to navigate and sample both cities' offerings is Boulder-based food blogger Megan Bucholz's **Local Table Tours** (Tel: 303-909-5747. www.localtabletours.com). Amicable, knowledgeable, and well connected with Colorado's culinary innovators; Bucholz launched a Denver Cocktail walking tour in November 2011. The 90-minute excursion (\$40) includes stops at three acclaimed Denver watering holes—neighborhoods and venues can vary from tour to tour—to meet the libationists and sample specialty concoctions.

My tour took place in downtown's upscale, boutique-y **Larimer Square**. At Tag (1441 Larimer St. Tel: 303-996-9985. www.tag-restaurant.com), the "cocktail mechanic" was thorough in discussing the liquors (St. Germain is "a bartender's bacon," he noted) and techniques utilized in his creations. He also gave us a chance to taste a selection of inventive house-made bitters like chocolate mole.

Meanwhile, at **Euclid Hall Bar & Kitchen** (1317 14th St. Tel: 303-595-4255. www.euclid-hall.com) bartender Ryan Conklin, who specializes in beer-based cocktails, served us his Breakfast at Midnight: Colorado-produced Left-hand Milk Stout, expelled from a nitrogen tap which imparts a more frothy, light-mouth feel, maple syrup, and coffee. A favorite with the academic crowd, Euclid Hall is also well worth a visit for its high-end international pub fare.

Finally, we visited **Green Russell** (1422 Larimer St. Tel: 303-893-6505. www.greenrussell.com), a classy, dimly lit, Prohibition era-esque speakeasy tucked away in a basement-level space (behind a small pie shop called **Wednesday's Pies'** metal kitchen door). Restaurateur/owner Frank Bonnano named this venue after a 19th-century Colorado gold miner. Setting it apart from your typical bar (or modern-day speakeasy for that matter), reservations are a must, seating is mandatory (so nobody is looming over or bumping into you at the bar), and use of cell phones is strictly forbidden.

The space reeks of yesteryear, the bar top is lined with all manner of house-made ingredients/mixers, and, visible through a



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YSL EXHIBITION SPECIALS

Kicking off March 25 and running through July 8, 2012, **Yves Saint Laurent – The Retrospective**, first mounted to much ballyhoo at France's Le Petit Palais Musee des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, is making just one stop in the US, at the **Denver Art Museum** (www.denverartmuseum.org). Traversing the icon's 40-year career, the exhibition features 200 garments, illustrations, photos, films, and rare paraphernalia. Advance tickets (\$22 adults/\$18 seniors & students, includes audio guide and all museum galleries) can be purchased through DAM's website, while many Denver hotels, restaurants, and other businesses are offering package deals that tie into the exhibition. The Curtis' "Curtis Couture—Make it Work" (\$199-up) comes with Champagne, a fashion magazine, two VIP no-wait YSL tickets, breakfast for two at The Corner Office, and self or valet parking. Hotel Teatro's "YSL Pink Package" (\$244-up) features two YSL pink martinis, pink bubble bath turndown service, the YSL commemorative hardcover book, and transportation to and from DAM in the hotel's luxury Tahoe Hybrid. Hotel Monaco's "Find Your Fashionista" (\$159-up) includes pink Champagne and two VIP tickets. The über-decadent Ritz-Carlton's "Haute Heights" (\$399-up) entails two tickets, a fashion-themed spa treatment, brasserie-inspired 'Rive Gauche' breakfast for two, overnight valet parking, and choice of a YSL-inspired chocolate or cocktail. The gay-owned Capitol Hill Mansion B&B (\$144-up) offers Champagne and a fashion magazine upon arrival, private breakfast for two in your room, and free parking. Most of the above are listed as bookable through the dedicated **Visit Denver** website www.denver.org/ysl.



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glass window behind the bar, a fresh herb garden. Green Russell's vest-clad mixologists specialize in bespoke libations inspired by whatever flavors, or even concepts, customers wish to run by them.

Opened in October 2011, a third Bonnano venue, **Russell's Smokehouse** (1422 Larimer Square. Tel: 720-524-8050. (www.russellssmokehouse.com), shares the same address and house-made philosophy with Green Russell and Wednesday's Pies. Smoked slow over oak wood, the barbecued meats can be slathered with vinegar and sweet or spicy sauces, while the goat cheese creamed spinach is a revelation.

Another retro speakeasy, **Williams & Graham** (3160 N. Tejon St. Tel: 303-997-8886), in the trendy **LoHi** (**Low Highland**) neighborhood, opened this past November. Its front is made to look like a bookstore's, where inside you can actually peruse and purchase books about booze (and by renowned boozers), while the drinks menu is a treasure trove of incredible libations and anecdotes/facts about them. Atmosphere and décor is 1920s style, with rouge walls and cozy leather booths.

Just down the block is Root Down Chef Justin Cucci's latest, and most playfully subversive venture, **Linger** (2030 W. 30th Ave. Tel: (303) 993-3120. www.lingerdenver.com). Opened in June 2011, the three-level venue

occupies a former mortuary and plays up the gallows humor: a happy hour and dessert menu is printed on a toe tag. The cuisine concept is street food from around the world—the menu is broken into regions including Asia, Africa, Middle East, and Eurasia—utilizing local product. Meant for sharing, portions are quite generous, and as with the excellent Root Down, there are numerous meat-free options to satisfy vegetarians. The décor is incredible and fun, blending both retro and ultra-contemporary (the upstairs bar is made out of Lite-Brite pieces). Reservations are a must.

Besides LoHi, neighborhoods and strips garnering trendy, up-and-comer status as of late, include North Denver's **Tennyson Street** which is dotted with over a dozen small galleries and comes alive during **First Fridays** (www.denverartwalk.square-space.com). **Santa Fe Drive** (www.artdistrictonsantafe.com), another art district and First Friday destination; and **SoBo**, aka **South Broadway**, which has transformed into Denver's indisputable hipster central.

SoBo's **Beatrice & Woodsley** (38 South Broadway. Tel: 303-777-3505. www.beatriceandwoodsley.com) restaurant is still a best-kept secret and gay bruncher's favorite (it's ranked as one of *Bon Appetit's* "Top 10 Brunch Spots," too). Contained within a sign-

free, tinted-glass storefront, the interior is eye-popping, a stunning fusion of outdoor and urban. Dominated by wood and wood tones, actual trees serve as support posts, while chainsaws, partly embedded in the concrete and brick walls, hold up the half-log bar shelves. Executive Chef Pete List's seasonal, "old-world rustic" cuisine, like the smoldering onion tortellini and brunch item *Senor Biscuit* (spicy house chorizo-stuffed masa biscuit with soft scrambled eggs and green chili), is made with local, sustainable product.

Another popular brunch spot is **Jelly** (600 E. 13th St. Tel: 303-831-6301. www.eatmore-jelly.com) located in the very LGBT **Capitol Hill** district. Open for breakfast and lunch, colorful kitsch rules the interior, while the made-to-order doughnut holes with various fillings are a huge draw, although everything on the menu is superb. No reservations, so expect a wait. But it's worth it.

If you're looking for a place to stay in the area, this neighborhood is also home to the gay-owned B&B **Capitol Hill Mansion** (1207 Pennsylvania St. Tel: 303-839-5221. www.capitolhillmansion.com).

SoBo is also home to Denver's most unique, sassy gay lounge, **Black Crown** (1446 S. Broadway. Tel: 720-353-4701. www.blackcrownlounge.com), which doubles as an antique/home furnishing/art store. Opened in May 2011, the homey, two-level, 3,000-square-foot space has been likened to "a rich queen's house" in the Hamptons. There's a piano as well as plenty of spots to park and sip wine and cocktails.

Opened in November 2010, **X Bar** (629 East Colfax Ave. Tel: 303-832-2687. www.xbardenver.com) is located right next to the legendary Tom's Diner. X Bar features a mixed-age crowd of party-ready gays and lesbians as well as a popular weekend drag queen brunch.

Beyond DAM's YSL exhibition, events worth scheduling a 2012 visit for include mid-June's **Denver PrideFest** and 3rd annual **LGBT SportsFest** (www.glbtcOLORADO.org); the uniquely multi-disciplinary, highly competitive **Cherry Creek Arts Festival** (www.cherryarts.org), celebrating the visual, culinary, and performing arts July 6-8; the Colorado Gay Rodeo Association's **Rocky Mountain Regional Rodeo** (www.cgra.ws) from July 13-15 at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds; the 2012 LGBT flag football **Gay Bowl** (www.facebook.com/2012DenverGayBowl); and Fall's **33rd Starz Denver Film Festival** (www.denverfilm.org), which highlights LGBT films in a dedicated "Cinema Q" sidebar. Check the city's official tourism website, **Visit Denver** (www.denver.org), for updates and further details. ■