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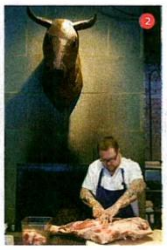

BOSTON

CULTURE POP

OLD BOSTON IS IN—in Hollywood, at least. The city's grittier side is having a wicked good run in movies, and actors who covet the "serious" stamp are being coached not to speak like a 19th-century Brit, but in Southie's dropped R's and broad A's.

But there's far fresher stuff afoot in this brainy New England metropolis. After a $500 million expansion, last month the Museum of Fine Arts unveiled its Art of the Americas wing, with an impressive 53 additional galleries. Stargazers have a fancier forum now that the Hayden Planetarium at the Museum of Science has been renovated.

The $22 billion Big Dig took nearly 20 years and faced plenty of public scrutiny, but it has radically (and positively) transformed the city's landscape. Now you can stroll the immaculate Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway, a mile-long promenade dotted with fountains, public art and parks that stretches from South Station to near the base of the stylish Leonard P. Zakim Bunker Hill bridge. And Fort Point—the neighborhood that may most exemplify Boston's new face—is more accessible than ever. A slew of hot spots run by chef Barbara Lynch and the presence of two major taste-makers, the Institute of Contemporary Art and Louis Boston, have helped redefine it as more than just the site of an infamous tea dump.

Yes, some things have been lost in the shuffle of modernization—it's hard not to long for the Kenmore Square of yore, when seminal music venue the Rathskeller, a mecca for Boston's hard-core scene, and Deli Haus, a late-night favorite for Guinness floats and potato pancakes, were the biggest draws. The only vestige of that past is the famed Citgo sign, which still hovers over the area.

Yet while reinvention is in the air, some things about Boston will likely never change. The city still feels much like a town, and exploring its varied corners is an entirely accomplishable feat. The Back Bay beckons with its grand-scale brownstones, manicured Common gardens and the shops along Newbury Street. In Beacon Hill, the epicenter of Boston's Brahmin culture, rambling cobblestone streets, brick-laid sidewalks and elegant row houses appear eerily unaffected by the passage of time. Neon-lit red sauce joints and the home of a certain midnight rider continue to lure visitors to the North End.

Just be prepared to call it a night early—most everything in Boston still shutters by a Puritanical 2 a.m. After all, every box office star needs its beauty rest.

—*Florella Valdesolo*

Photographs by Eirik Johnson for The Wall Street Journal (9); The Liberty Hotel (lobby)

PLUS, DON'T MISS...

- **Boston Common:** 3 Hop the Freedom Trail in the country's oldest park. *cityofboston.gov/freedomtrail*
- **Faneuil Hall Marketplace:** The the open-air produce mart offers endless browsing. *faneuilhallmarketplace.com*
- **Union Oyster House:** 6 A boisterous institution since the 1800s. *unionoysterhouse.com*
- **Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum:** 5 Home to masterpieces by John Singer Sargent, Giotto and Rubens. *gardnermuseum.org*
- **Liberty Hotel:** 7 If jail is bad, why does this prison-turned-luxury hotel look so good? *libertyhotel.com*

▶ See more photos of Boston hot spots at **WSJ.com/Travel.**

The Restaurateur
Barbara Lynch
Owner/chef of restaurants including No. 9 Park, B&G Oysters, The Butcher Shop; owner of cocktail bar Drink

Top Tapas: 2 Toro. A great spot in the South End with unusual tapas, big on pig. It has a super wine list and a really fun vibe. I take guests for lunch and spend the afternoon grazing. *1704 Washington St., toro-restaurant.com*

Turkish Delights: Sofra. I'll go for the Turkish breakfast, and at lunch, for lamb shawarma, beet tzatziki and the homemade hummus and pita. I can never resist leaving without a few sweets. *7 Belmont St., Cambridge, sofrabakery.com*

Housing Works: E.R. Butler & Co. They're known for making custom hardware for doors and windows, but the furnishings selection has so many treasures, like Ted Muehling's super-sexy candlesticks, incredible glassware, vases and china. *38 Charles St., erbutler.com*

Fashion Mecca: 4 Louis Boston. I've been shopping at this local department store for years. It was founded in the 1800s, but the new location is gorgeous and carries all the best designers. Great shoe department. *60 Northern Ave., louisboston.com*

Pig-Out: Craigie On Main. Food & Wine magazine named Tony Maws one of the best new chefs in America, and his burger one of the country's top 25. I love just sitting at the bar, which has an incredible cocktail menu and appetizers like rabbit porchetta and crispy fried pig's tails. *853 Main St., Cambridge, craigieonmain.com*

The Novelist
Dennis Lehane
Author of "Gone, Baby, Gone," "Mystic River," "Shutter Island"; Boston resident

Vinyl Frontier: Newbury Comics. The first thing I do when I return from a trip is head to this record shop that carries old and new. They also have rock posters and T-shirts. There's something about going into a record store that's almost getting quaint...a way of touching the past. *332 Newbury St., and other locations, newburycomics.com.*

Mall Muse: 1 The Prado (Paul Revere Mall). This beautiful urban mall—in the old sense of the word "mall"—feels very European. I tried having a scene there in "The Given Day," but it hadn't actually been built at the time. I thought it had been there forever. *416 Hanover St.*

Cutting Room: Bunker Hill Barbershop. A famous storefront haircuttery, and I live right beside it. Locals call it Pat's Place, after owner Pat Owens. *26 Common St., bunkerhillbarbershop.com*

Mystic Park: Doherty Playground. A really old-school playground up on Bunker Hill, overlooking an exceptionally urban stretch of the Mystic River. I've always had this strange, inexplicable attraction to that river. *Bunker Hill and St. Martin St.*

Hole-in-One: Dunkin' Donuts. I'm obsessed with the original location. I get shivers when I drive by it. My regular order is two regulars instead of a large because I like the cardboard cups. I could care less about the doughnuts, but that coffee is crack. *543 Southern Artery, Quincy, dunkindonuts.com*

The Curator
Jill Medvedow
Director of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston

Nautical Chic: 11 Community Rowing. This sculling boathouse was just redesigned by Anmahian Winton Architects, and is rightfully winning all sorts of awards. Its look is a contemporary take on old New England barns and covered bridges. It puts a public face on a Boston tradition—owned by the universities—along the Charles River. *20 Nonantum Rd., communityrowing.org*

Second-Hand Brands: The Closet. Some of my favorite clothing and accessories have come from this brownstone-spaced, high-end consignment store between Dartmouth and Exeter. They have everything from Alexander Wang to Vera Wang, LV bags and Chanel wellies. I get a secret pleasure from wearing couture at consignment prices. *175 Newbury St., closetboston.com*

Fish and Ships: Scup's. This no-frills, two-story lunch standby on the edge of the East Boston shipyard is one of the few places you can take a water taxi to for your meal, from crab cakes to baked tilapia. (Reopens in April.) *256 Marginal St., scupsintheharbour.com*

Sweet Bitters: 8 Coppa Enoteca. At this South End spot, they make the best Italian Greyhound. And from orange to rhubarb, I love all the bitters this small-plate Italian spot uses. The drink made with Punt e Mes is my current favorite. *253 Shawmut Ave., coppaboston.com*

Rocking Rolls: O
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the best of the raw
taurantboston.com

Crafty Cocktails: Drink. There's no cocktail menu here. You concoct your own drink with the bartender. It's personalized drinking. *348 Congress St., drinkfortpaint.com*

Cheese Cave: Formaggio Kitchen. The most interesting, well-curated cheese selection in the city, it now has three locations and they ship overnight anywhere. *244 Huron Ave., Cambridge, formaggiokitchen.com*

Art Smarts: 9 The ICA. My absolute favorite museum; the curators here are so intuitive in their selection of new contemporary artists. They keep all the other gallery venues in Boston guessing, they're that ahead of the curve. *100 Northern Ave., icaboston.org*

Greenhouse Effects: The Arnold Arboretum. It's so beautiful and peaceful. You can go there at different times of the year and will always be in awe of what you see. That it's right in the city and accessible to everybody makes it more amazing. *125 Arborway, arboretum.harvard.edu*