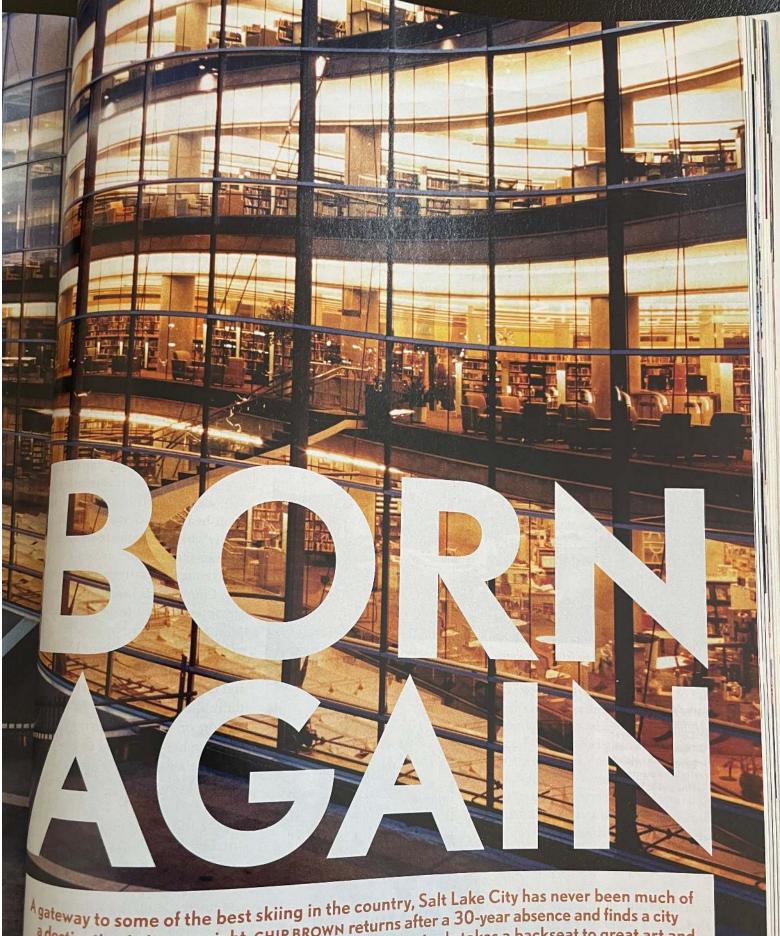
NOVEMBER 2005 ARIS **PLUS** WHERE TO GO FOR THE HOLIDAYS NEW ZEALAND MEXICO LOS ANGELES **AND MORE**

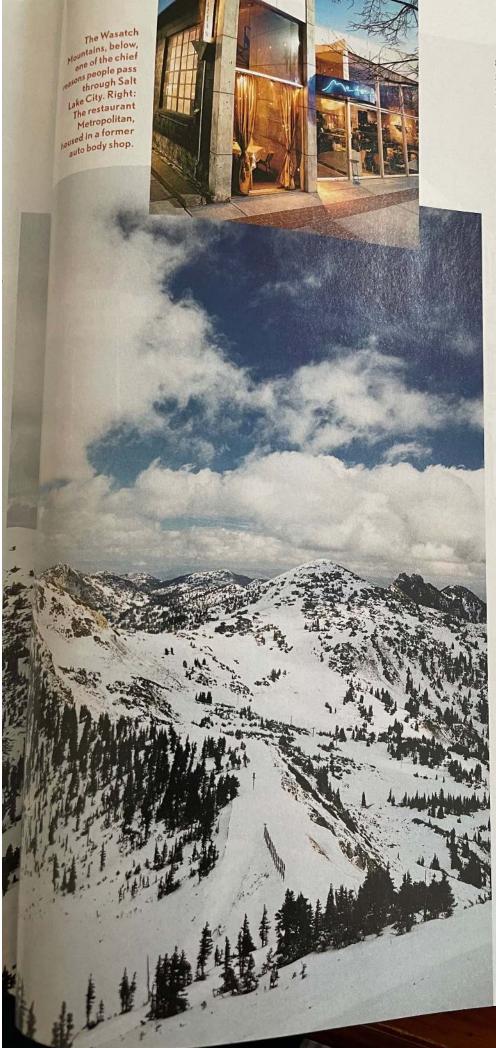


Agateway to some of the best skiing in the country, Salt Lake City has never been much of adestination in its own right. CHIP BROWN returns after a 30-year absence and finds a city adestination in its own right. CHIP BROWN returns after a 30-year absence and finds a city adestination in its own right. CHIP BROWN returns after a 30-year absence and finds a city adestination in its own right. CHIP BROWN returns after a 30-year absence and finds a city adestination in its own right. CHIP BROWN returns after a 30-year absence and finds a city adestination in its own right. CHIP BROWN returns after a 30-year absence and finds a city adestination in its own right. CHIP BROWN returns after a 30-year absence and finds a city adestination in its own right. CHIP BROWN returns after a 30-year absence and finds a city adestination in its own right. CHIP BROWN returns after a 30-year absence and finds a city adestination in its own right. CHIP BROWN returns after a 30-year absence and finds a city adestination in its own right. CHIP BROWN returns after a 30-year absence and finds a city adestination in its own right. CHIP BROWN returns after a 30-year absence and finds a city and a second returns after a 30-year absence and finds a city and a second return a second returns a second return a second returns a second returns a second return a second return a second returns a second return a second retu



HIRTY YEARS AGO, when I lived just outside Salt Lake, it seemed like a foreign city, not part of America, certainly not part of the America convulsed by civil rights, Vietnam, and environmentalism. Salt Lake was a white, sober, flag-waving backwater, not unfairly known for byzantine liquor laws, an airport close to peerless ski slopes, and a G-rated culture that reflected the influence of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Although social trends that were secularizing the Mormon capital had been entrenched for nearly a century, the theocracy that was established in the desert in 1847 still set the city's tone with the ready sorting of residents into gentiles or Saints.

Given the pervasiveness of the Mormon Church, Salt Lake in the seventies felt closer in spirit to Jerusalem than to Denver. In the same way New York made you think about money or Los Angeles made you think about selling a script and landing a starlet, Salt Lake made you think about faith. It was the realization of a dream wrested from the wilderness by phosphor-eyed prophets who brought their beliefs and polygamous families across a continent on what would become known as the Mormon Trail, one of the main thoroughfares of manifest destiny. So steeped was Salt Lake in supernatural history, religious observance, and arcane doctrine that to me there seemed something labyrinthine about its famously wide, teamster-friendly streets-streets addressed so that you always knew how far you were from the temple at the heart of things.



I confess it was not the Book of Mormon but the gospel of Utah snow that first drew me to the city. On a year off from college I got a job as a night watchman at one of the ski lodges in Alta; I shared a house with three friends on the outskirts of Salt Lake, in what was then the drowsy bedroom community of Sandy. Occasionally we ventured downtown to take in the sights of Temple Square or see a show. Still, we never got to know Salt Lake. With its empty lots, its freight yards, its mountain silhouettes, its paltry lights pressing indifferently against the darkness of the Western night, it felt more like a depot than a city, a way station where you might stop for a while en route to somewhere else.

I've always wanted to go back, to see what I missed in the snow blindness of youth, but also because so much of the character of a place is a function of time and context. If our household of secular skiers could never have envisioned that America 30 years later would be boiling with debate about the role of religion in public life, then maybe Salt Lake 30 years ago was never as "foreign" as outsiders like us were disposed to find it. Over and over during the time I spent there not long ago, I found myself wondering whether America had become more like Salt Lake or Salt Lake more like America. Or whether it was a bit of both. And it wasn't just the old tension between sacred doctrine and secular authority, or the city's perennial accent on the now widely fashionable idea of "family values." It was also new trends that ran counter to Salt Lake's native fundamentalism, such as the surprising heterogeneity of its populace, or the struggle of religious and civic leaders to revitalize the urban core and to manage growth without sacrificing natural beauty. Add them all up and you could make a case that this homegrown Zion, which for decades defined the outlandish fringe of American life, was suddenly the quintessential American place.

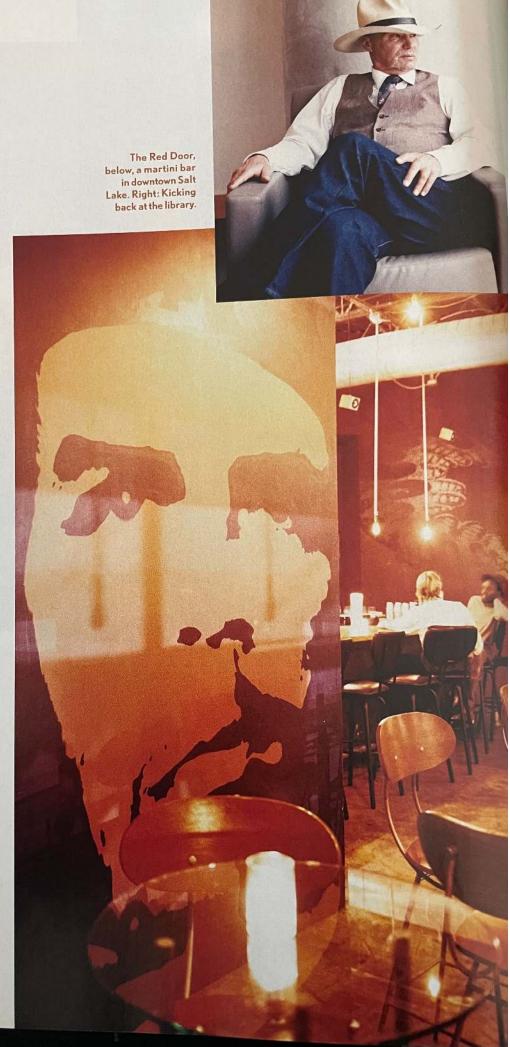
MUCH OF THE pride and excitement about Salt Lake's prospects when I visited was the afterglow lingering from the city's turn as the host of the Winter

Olympics in 2002. Miles of interstate highway had been rebuilt; a light-rail trolley now linked the suburbs to the city center. People were talking about first-rate restaurants and clubs, and even a few nice places to sleep.

On my first morning in the city, the air was crisp and clear, free from the smoggy inversions that often plague Salt Lake in winter. Although a storm had buried downtown in six inches of snow the week before, a few sunny days, dry desert air, and temperatures in the high forties had wicked the streets clean. You'd hardly know it was winter but for the snowbound mountains looming east, west, and south. They looked like giant white wedding tents. Skiing, of course, has traditionally been the only reason many people have the faintest idea what wintertime Salt Lake looks like, and my first appointment that morning was with the man leading the campaign to persuade people there is more to the city than an airport a hop and a skip from some of the best snow in the world.

I headed across State Street and into the City & County Building, a 19th-century Romanesque brownstone with magnificent archways, turrets, gargoyles, and statues, and a cupola crowned by an effigy of the goddess Columbia. It had nearly been torn down in the sixties but was saved, and in the eighties it became the first building in the country to be retrofitted with base isolators to prevent it from being damaged by earthquakes.

On the second floor is the office of Ross C. "Rocky" Anderson, a liberal Democrat who was elected mayor of Salt Lake in November 1999. The mayor, a handsome man with neatly cut gray hair and clear blue eyes, was raised Mormon but no longer practices, a status commonly referred to as Jack Mormon. Before he went to law school in Washington, D.C., he worked as a bartender in a famous dive called the Twilight Lounge. One of his first official acts was to sign a nondiscrimination ordinance mainly for the benefit of gay and lesbian city employees. When I asked him what the best example of the recent changes in

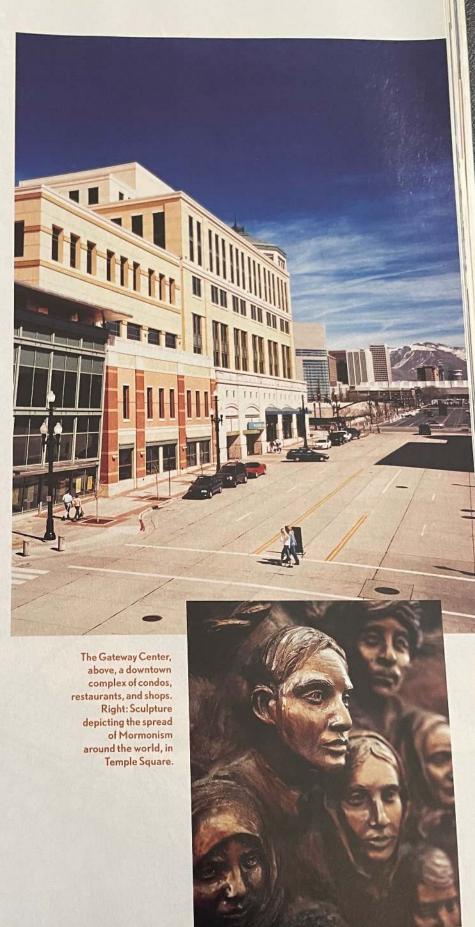


Salt Lake was, he laughed. "My election," he said. "Salt Lake is a far more progressive community now."

Anderson took office determined to revitalize the downtown, which had been losing population to the surrounding county since the late sixties. (The number of people living in Salt Lake County doubled from 1960 to 1990.) The city has finally stemmed the tide and people have been moving back downtown, drawn by new developments and condo conversions of old loft warehouses. It is now home to about 181,000 people, while the county has more than 850,000 and the extended metro area—the 20by-40-mile valley bounded by the Wasatch Mountains on the east and the Oquirrh Mountains on the west—has some 1.8 million.

"There are now more people living in the central business district of Salt Lake than at any time in the history of the city," Anderson said. He had successfully opposed what he called a 1.2 million-square-foot "sprawl mall" planned for the airport area. He was working to extend the light-rail system that opened in 1999, thus recouping some of the 154 miles of trolley tracks that the city ripped out a century ago. In hopes of bringing some life and intimacy into downtown streets configured by the Mormon pioneers not to enhance urban nightlife but to enable wagon teams to make U-turns, he pushed for the creation of parking spaces and median strips in the middle of a number of Salt Lake's streets. He put in bike racks and bike lanes. He rolled back ordinances that outlawed street performers; he made it legal to sell art on sidewalks. He relaxed regulations that hung heavy licensing fees on restaurants that wanted to put tables and chairs outside.

The Mormon Church is a big part of the downtown revival. It plans to pump hundreds of millions of dollars into reviving two antiquated malls, the ZCMI Center and the Crossroads Plaza. But the Church also sued to block the city's decision to license an establishment near Church property called the Dead Goat Saloon as a seminude (Continued on page 282)



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(Continued from page 255) dance club—part of the long-running moral skirmishing that defines Salt Lake. The mayor welcomes the Church's role in the city, Dead Goat Saloon notwithstanding. "I'm thrilled that there's an institution that wants to pour a half-billion dollars in any area of downtown," he said.

A tireless Salt Lake champion, Anderson started a jazz festival. During the city's bid for the Winter Olympics, he personally wrote some of the promotional copy touting the city's virtues. "The stereotype that's been built up over the years is that the city is all white, all Mormon, extremely conservative, and there's nothing to do here," he said. "Actually it's very much the opposite. Nonwhites were thirteen percent of Salt Lake's population in the 1990 census. Ten years later they were 39.4 percent. We have enormously rich arts and cultural offerings as well as really great nightlife-clubs, music, restaurants. It's absolutely unique that a city this size has a regular opera, a symphony, and a ballet. More people are settling here because you have all the advantages of a city and you're less than forty-five minutes from the greatest skiing in the world."

I wish he hadn't reminded me. One of the handicaps city promoters face is that Salt Lake is always showing you reasons to get out of the city—positive ones, to be sure. Most cities have a wild side, but most aren't literally wild. Round a corner in Salt Lake-say, on one of those new pedestrian-friendly, median-parking streets like 300 South, which is filled with antiques shopsand the mountains come billowing into view. Why visit the domed state capitol building when City Creek Canyon is a few blocks away and will give you an overview not just of the capitol but of the whole Wasatch Front and the ancient bed of Lake Bonneville, with its now waterless beaches stepping up the flanks of the mountains?

At least the city makes it easy to get around. Inside the central business district the trolley is free. I took it north a few stops toward Temple Square, then



got out and headed west on foot along 300 South, thinking inevitably about the last time I had walked this street, as a kid on a long holiday from college. In retrospect that ski interlude seemed like the premise of a sitcom: four iniquitously unmarried gentiles, sustained by spaghetti, gingersnaps, and near beer, grapple with the social mores and cultural values of one of America's fastest growing religions. Episode one: thanks to the subterfuge of the female leads who donned fake wedding rings and gushed about how responsible their "husbands" were, we rented a suburban bungalow with an asthmatic refrigerator and a sunset view. Our neighbors on Towncrest Drive seemed a fairly incurious lot. Were they preoccupied by their heavy diet of scripture? Did the premium on conformity bar fraternizing with infidels? Maybe they just didn't have much time for hedonistic ski bums with fake wedding rings. We got to know only one young mother, who had fallen out with the Church over a divorce or something. She was starved for company and invited us over for Thanksgiving.

In some sense all geography is psychological, a matter of perceptions and presuppositions as much as the intrinsic properties of a place. (When Colonel Patrick Edward Connor brought federal troops into Salt Lake in 1862, he found what he described as "a community of traitors, murderers, fanatics, and whores.") The city is still split along

religious lines by what a few years ago termed divide." It is still a span oriented around church airport you see pods o mon teenagers in dar nameplates, heading of sions to evangelize ab and the Book of Morm in West Jordan, you'r being pulled around dogs. Harmons super parking for pregnant;

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religious lines by what the Salt Lake Tribune a few years ago termed the "unspoken divide." It is still a sparkling clean place oriented around church and family. In the airport you see pods of rawboned Mormon teenagers in dark suits with lapel nameplates, heading off on two-year missions to evangelize about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. After a snowfall in West Jordan, you're liable to see kids being pulled around in sleds by their dogs. Harmons supermarket has special parking for pregnant mothers.

But the families aren't all white. The city now has a booming Hispanic community and substantial numbers of Tibetans, Bosnians, Croatians, and Somalians. It has become a major locale for the resettlement of displaced people-most recently several hundred from Hurricane Katrina. The liquor laws remain peculiar-receptions in the state capitol building are dry-but the brown-bag and mini-bottle regulations of the seventies have been revised, and now there are actually breweries in the state; the first opened in 1989. The Utah State Wine Store on 300 East has more than 30,000 bottles and 3,000 brands, including a bunch of first growth Bordeaux and grand cru Burgundies.

The new face of the city can be glimpsed in gay-pride parades. In articles about metrosexuals in Salt Lake Magazine. In a raft of new museums, including the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, the North American Museum of Ancient Life, and the Utah Museum of Art & History. In the Clark Planetarium. In a new public library designed by Moshe Safdie, which might be the country's most beautiful—a great crescent of light and glass with 500,000 books and hanging sculptures and spectacular rooftop views.

Beyond dramatic and obvious developments, there were little things that looked different or read differently to me because their contexts had been altered. For example, visitors used to find the Mormon-based proscriptions against tobacco an irritating example of killjoy religiosity. Now antismoking ordinances have been adopted all over the country, even in anything-goes Manhattan.

I stopped in at a place called Cup of Joe on the ground floor of the old Firestone Tire & Rubber building, a two-story warehouse and service station that had been built in 1925 and was converted to commercial space and condominiums in 1998. The coffeehouse was founded by a New York City actor who migrated to Salt Lake when downtown district lofts could be had for a song. Farther west down Broadway is the old depot of the Denver & Rio Grande Railway, which houses the Utah State Historical Society. A mile or so north along the tracks is the old Union Pacific Depot, now a Virgin record store. In between is the Gateway, an elaborate development of condominiums, restaurants, movie theaters, and shops strung along pedestrian promenades and alleyways. Stock quotes rip by on the façade of a Morgan Stanley outpost.

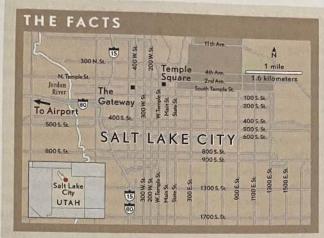
It's possible the culture shock I was experiencing about Salt Lake began the moment I arrived under a porte cochère at the Grand America Hotel and was ushered into the lobby by a liveried eagerbeaver doorman. "This is the right place," Brigham Young is said to have declaimed on July 24, 1847, when he looked over the scrubby sage and grassland of the Salt Lake Valley from a hilltop near the mouth of Emigration Canyon. God knows what he, his 27 wives, or his 57 children would have made of the Grand America had it been waiting for them. Maybe they would have continued on to California, or maybe they would have stayed, thinking they'd never find anything in Zion to match the hotel's marble portals and flower-scented air, not to mention the prizewinning brunch at its Garden Café restaurant. The whole party of Mormon pioneers-148 people with 72 wagons, 93 horses, 66 oxen, 52 mules, and assorted cows, dogs, and chickens—could have easily fit in the main ballrooms without disturbing the chandeliers.

The Grand America, which opened in March 2001, is probably the most spectacular, incongruous, over-the-top addition to the city skyline since the erection of the Salt Lake Temple. It was built by Earl Holding, who grew up in Salt Lake, and whose many interests include the Sinclair

Oil Corporation, the Sun Valley ski resort, and the Little America hotel chain. Its 775 rooms and ballrooms and courtyards are spread across nearly all of a 10-acre city block formerly occupied by pawnshops and warehouses.

It's the kind of place where after you finish admiring the giant vases of flowers in the lobby, and the English woolen carpets, and how carefully the grain of the Carrara marble has been matched from panel to panel, the elevator whisks you up to the 17th floor, where a plate of fruit that can actually be eaten is waiting in your outsized room. And where after you have unpacked, and taken the hand of the Italian silk comforter on the bed, and spent 10 minutes staring appreciatively at the perfectly mortised baseboard in the bathroom, you find yourself wondering: What the hell is a place like this doing here? The hotel is crème brûlée for people who grew up accustomed, as one cook confided, to having green Jell-O for dessert. Small wonder locals wandering in for the first time look as if they need to be retrofitted with base isolators.

One morning, downstairs, over breakfast in the self-conscious European ambience of the lobby lounge, where later in the day guests will be positioning themselves on overstuffed chairs to sip tea and nibble crustless watercress-and-bay shrimp sandwiches while a harpist plays, a family of skiers was clomping around in ski boots, Gore-Tex jumpsuits, and Patagonia hats. They were having a bite of banana bread and scones with their coffee before their short trip to the mountains. Galumphing about the chambers of the Grand America in ski boots seemed analogous to traversing the ridge to High Rustler at Alta in Manolo Blahniks. I was almost sorry to see the pretension of the room undermined so thoroughly, though I don't think the hotel was, given how few people were in residence that week-"a shoulder week," a concierge told me apologetically. Although during the Olympics the hotel was booked solid with IOC delegation members, NBC television crews, and sundry grandees, one wonders if the investment will ever pay off in less feverish times. Like the city whose as->>



WHERE TO STAY **Grand America Hotel**

DOUBLES FROM \$259 555 S. MAIN ST. 800/621-4505 OR 801/258-6000 www.grandamerica.com

Hotel Monaco An Art Deco-inspired

hotel housed in a 1924 bank. DOUBLES FROM \$159 15 W. 200 SOUTH; 877/294-9710 OR 801/595-0000; www.monacosaltlakecity.com

WHERE TO EAT Bambara

Good lunch spot in the Hotel Monaco that serves Cajun-influenced cuisine. LUNCH FOR TWO \$28 201 S. MAIN ST.; 801/363-5454

Fresco Italian Café

Northern Italian food in a romantic setting DINNER FOR TWO \$80 1513 S. 1500 EAST; 801/486-1300

Garden Café at the **Grand America Hotel**

BRUNCH FOR TWO \$70 555 S. MAIN ST.; 801/258-6708

Mazza

Authentic Middle Eastern cuisine DINNER FOR TWO \$24 1515 S. 1500 EAST; 801/484-9259

Metropolitan

DINNER FOR TWO \$100 173 W. BROADWAY; 801/364-3472

The Paris

Modern French fare in a bistro setting. DINNER FOR TWO \$70 1500 S. 1500 EAST; 801/486-5585

Park Café

Great breakfast place. BREAKFAST FOR TWO \$16 604 E. 1300 SOUTH; 801/487-1670

WHERE TO DRINK Cup of Joe

A relaxed hangout for coffee. 353 W. 200 SOUTH; 801/363-8322

Red Door

One of Salt Lake's coolest bars, next to the Hotel Monaco. 57 W. 200 SOUTH; 801/363-6030

Squatter's Pub Brewery

Ten homemade brews and classic pub food

LUNCH FOR TWO \$45 147 W. 300 SOUTH; 801/363-2739

WHERE TO SHOP

Anthony's Antiques

One of the better shops in an antiques district just east of downtown.

401 E. 200 SOUTH: 801/328-2231

King's English Bookshop

Good readings and recommendations; also check out its newsletter, The Inkslinger. 1511 S. 1500 EAST; 801/484-9100

Sam Weller's Books

A selection of new, used, and rare books, manned by a very helpful staff. 254 S. MAIN ST.; 800/333-7249

Utah State Wine Store 255 S. 300 EAST; 801/533-6444

WHAT TO SEE

Clark Planetarium

Science exhibits and an IMAX theater. 110 S. 400 WEST; 801/456-7827 www.clarkplanetarium.org

The Gateway

Vast entertainment, dining, and shopping complex in a former railroad depot. 400 W. 100 SOUTH; 801/456-0000

Gilgal Sculpture Garden

Stone sculptures that are a celebration of the spirit by a devoted Mormon. 749 E. 500 SOUTH; 801/972-7800

North American Museum of Ancient Life

Dinosaurs and fossils come to life in innovative displays (many hands-on) and on screen in a 3-D theater.

Great for families. 2929 N. THANKSGIVING WAY, LEHI; 801/766-5000 www.thanksgivingpoint.com

Salt Lake City Public

Don't miss the rooftop garden with 360-degree views of the Salt Lake Valley. 210 E. 400 SOUTH; 801/524-8200 www.slcpl.lib.ut.us

Sundance Film Festival

Although based in Park City, the festival opens in Salt Lake, and screenings are held downtown throughout. Next year's event runs January 19 through 29. festival.sundance.org

Temple Square

No visit would be complete without taking in Salt Lake Temple, Brigham Young's former residence, the Lion House, and the Mormon Tabernacle, all here. The choir performs Sunday mornings for the public, and there are daily organ concerts (www. mormontabernaclechoir.org).

Utah Museum of Art & History

State archives and paintings from Utah artists. 125 S. MAIN ST.; 801/355-5554 www.muahnet.org

Utah Museum of Fine Arts

Excellent permanent collection of art from around the world, plus traveling exhibitions.

410 CAMPUS CENTER DR. 801/581-7332 www.umfa.utah.edu

pirations it symbolizes, the Grand America seems to have been built on faith, the glorious quixotic faith of if-you-build-itthey-will-come—but it's a long trip in a covered wagon from Patagonia outerwear to Yves Saint Laurent ball gowns.

That night around midnight I stepped onto the small balcony of my room. A chilly wind out of the west brought the fresh scent of sage. I could hear the faint snort of tractor-trailer traffic out on I-15

and the ineffably lonesome whistle of freight trains trundling through the yards of the Union Pacific. The snowy peaks to the east and south were chalked with moonlight. Red warning lights blinked on one of the tall downtown banks. The ghostly air that haunts many Western cities at night is especially keen in Salt Lake. It's that sense that the wilderness is waiting to come back—that the ground here has been settled only temporarily and the

common dream of the people and all their trivial commotion could be blown away at any moment, that life is just a little short-lived pageant against the abiding silence of mountains and sky. I shivered and hurried back inside.

FRIDAY NIGHT SOME FRIENDS avid to ski flew into Salt Lake. Blaine came from Seattle, Tom from New York, and Bill from Boston. We met at Metropolitan, the most

award-draped of the city's restaurants. When I first worked at Alta, washing dishes the summer before ski season, lodges in Little Cottonwood Canyon did a big business serving dinner to people who didn't think twice about driving up and down the winding canyon road for a decent meal. Salt Lake City was not only 45 minutes from the best skiing in North America, it was 45 minutes from a decent restaurant, too. But that canyon dinner trade was killed in the nineties by the upsurge of first-rate restaurants in town. Metropolitan was opened in 1995 by Christophe Olson in what at the time was a frowsy neighborhood of vagrants and drug dealers. Metropolitan has been run for the last nine years by Olson's sister Karen, who gave up a clinical psychology practice in southern California to manage the place.

We stepped through a curtain into a sophisticated atmosphere of pin spots and banquettes set along the stark cement walls of a former automobile body shop. Our table was in the back by a fireplace. The waitress bore a faint resemblance to Gwyneth Paltrow, which grew more pronounced as a California Pinot took effect. Per state liquor regulations she wore a dog tag around her neck, identifying her as number 88. Miss 88 started us off with an amuse-bouche, a delicious yellowfin tuna tartare in a dainty brioche. "Feel free to use your fingers, guys," she said, and then winked at Bill, which was about the point he began planning to move to Salt Lake. "I'll be more geographically desirable," he said. "I think you might be more geographically desirable if you promise to stay in Boston," Blaine said.

Everything about Metropolitan, from Bill's bootless fantasies to the entrées Miss 88 brought out, was a revelation. Roasted elk with rhubarb, toasted farro, and hazelnut; wild king salmon with English peas and a carrot-ginger reduction; coffeedusted pork tenderloin with citrus-braised fennel and dried fig. It all raised the question: What the hell is a place like this doing here? And never mind how our waitress happened to wash up among the Saints: if she winked at Bill again, he was liable to order a cup of pork-dusted coffee.

Having been knocking around the city for several days, I realized I had only scratched the surface, and I felt I ought to make the case to my out-of-town friends that their time would be just as well spent exploring Salt Lake as it would be skiing. I had recommendations from various informants, including Terry Tempest Williams, the Salt Lake writer and author of Refuge. She had rhapsodized about the Gilgal Sculpture Garden, for example, which had been created by an eccentric Mormon bishop behind the Wonder Bread factory on 400 South. Others were prepossessed by the Avenues district, where the cozy blocks depart from Mormon orthodoxy, or by various micro-neighborhoods: the Nines, at 900 East and 900 South, where there's an indie coffee shop, a record store, a handful of boutiques, and a great lunch spot called Guru; the Fifteens, at 1500 East and 1500 South, where you can find a fantastic bookstore (the King's English Bookshop) and a trio of first-rate restaurants (the Paris, Mazza, and Fresco); Sugarhouse, at 1100 East and

2100 South, a nexus of vintage-clothing stores, a yoga studio, pubs...

"This is a very difficult choice," Tom said. "On one hand we have vintage-clothing stores and a yoga studio, and on the other, we have the best skiing in North America."

Sobered up, we headed to Alta in the morning. We skied all day with my old friend Barbara Dunlea, who has worked for the Alta Lodge for many years. Since I'd been away she'd married. Her husband, John, a former ski patrolman, is a pilot for a renta-jet company. They're both demonically fast skiers, of course, and they whisked all over the mountain. Lifts now connect Alta with its neighbor Snowbird, and you can buy one pass for both areas-a phenomenally vast landscape of bowls and chutes and sweeping groomed trails. But other than the new link, Alta is a resort where the more things change elsewhere, the more they stay the same. No snowboards. No frilly facilities. And no crowds. Just the best snow in the country. And it took us only 45 minutes to get back to the city. +

