

# Asheville's River Arts District: Wander amid art and artists

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ASHEVILLE, N.C. — Many cities have transformed their old industrial zones into attractive neighborhoods for recreation, shopping and new small businesses. Nowhere has this trend come to life more gloriously than in the River Arts District in Asheville, N.C.

The River Arts District is a sprawling section of town along Asheville's French Broad River that manages to be charming and historic, gritty and trendy all at once.

Unlike other tourist-friendly shopping districts in so many destinations that are just a few blocks long and way too cutesy to feel authentic, this one is for real.

In the River Arts District, you'll meet artists and see them at work, wander around old brick buildings, and shop for unique souvenirs – from handmade clothing to upcycled lighting fixtures.

More than 180 artists work in 22 buildings that date as far back as the 1880s and early 1900s.

The large, light-filled spaces – once home to a tanning factory, an oil distribution facility and companies that made biscuits, flour, cotton and concrete blocks – are home today to galleries, potter's wheels and towering vats of craft beer. You'll see artists sewing, painting, woodworking, basket-making and more.

Jonas Gerard's colorful art ranges from small tiles starting at \$55 to grand works for \$12,500, including his luminous *Majestic Skies* painting, which changes color with the light. He has two galleries, 240 Clingman Ave., and 191 Lyman St., with work spaces onsite.

Splurge, 37 Paynes Way, sells unique upcycled wares: a comfy easy chair and stool made from old tires; one-of-a-kind lighting fixtures created from wooden tobacco stackers, old metal turbines and other cast-offs, and thick volumes of vintage *Reader's Digest Condensed Books* carved into large, decorative alphabet letter blocks.

At Curve Studios, 6 Riverside Drive, Pattiy Torno makes her designs at a sewing machine right in the shop, with wraps starting at \$30 and beautiful flowing sweaters, skirts and other apparel ranging from \$60 to \$170.

Because Asheville gets visitors from around the world, Torno – unlike most clothing stores – sells all her designs year-round.

A visitor from Hawaii might want a sweater in Asheville's sometimes chilly spring air, while visitors from Florida and Australia shop for opposite summer and winter seasons back home.

Antiques at Riverview Station, 191 Lyman St., is a wonderful jumble of collectibles such as a manual typewriter, old policeman's notebook and vintage wooden spools of thread.

A few blocks away, you might find Stephen Lange at work on "sticker art" with his 10-year-old daughter Esme at The Wedge Studios, 129 Roberts St.

"Everything is made of tape," Lange says, as he carefully places small, bright pieces of tape in intricate geometric patterns on birch wood. The works sell for \$250-\$1,000.

For a bite to eat, choices range from 12 Bones Smokehouse, 5 Riverside Drive, a barbecue joint visited by President Obama, to 37 Paynes Way, where you'll find the upscale Bull & Beggar restaurant and a large selection of craft beer from vats at Wedge Brewing.

New Belgium Brewing will open a \$175 million, 133,000-square-foot state-of-the-art East Coast operation on the waterfront this year.

Other redevelopment projects in the River Arts District include greenway connectors, a climbing center, and a riverside restaurant, the Smoky Park Supper Club.

**WHAT:** River Arts District, Asheville, N.C.

**DETAILS:** Some studios and shops open daily; some closed Sunday-Monday. Street parking. Main areas include Clingman Avenue, Lyman Street, Riverside Drive, Depot Street

**LEARN MORE:** [riverartsdistrict.com](http://riverartsdistrict.com)

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