



ABOUT US | CONTACT US | SUBSCRIBE | NEWSLETTER | DINING GUIDE | MEDIA | ADVERTISERS | STORE | MY ACCOUNT

Search

53.0F

24 hours to Give where you live COLORED 12.08.10

Wednesday, December 8 online at Givingfirst.org The value of your donation will go further! Learn more

Home | Events Calendar | Eat + Drink | Arts + Entertainment | The Home | Business + Politics | Fashion | Party Pics | Sports | Travel + Outdoors

DENVER MAGAZINE / NOVEMBER 2010 / CHARGING AHEAD

SHARE EMAIL PRINT FEED

Charging Ahead

More than just another nicknamed neighborhood, RiNo emerges as downtown's final frontier.

BY ERIN SHAVER



The Ice Cube Gallery on Walnut Street offers works in several media.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF NELSON

To the casual observer, entering the neighborhood a few blocks north of Coors Field is still heading



www.Group

The Gre Theme

Spotligh Colorac

Home M

Get Yo

Glo Knc

Unwrap

Backst

Glo Knc

Kiddie I

1. Pura
2. Mattl Diffe
3. FAM
4. Cultt
5. Denv
6. Barn
7. Paris
8. X le

to the proverbial (and literal) other side of the tracks. You're only minutes from downtown, yet the landscape quickly turns from polished high-rises and trendy eateries to rugged, industrial, and slightly pastoral stretches — rundown warehouses and railyards wedged between two busy interstate highways.

- 8. [River North](#)
- 9. [100'](#)
- 10. [Deat](#)

The area is also one of the most creative, up-and-coming enclaves in Denver. The [River North Arts District](#) (RiNo), as it is known, is a close-knit community of roughly 50 small galleries, studios, and spaces stretching from the north end of Lower Downtown (LoDo) to Globeville. Its jagged expanse extends from roughly Park Avenue West to I-70, with I-25 and Lawrence Street as its west and east borders.

Of course, even a careful look doesn't reveal all, as some galleries and studios continue to work in relative anonymity. "If everybody had a sign out, I think people would be blown away by what is down here," says Lisa Heppner, co-owner of Heppner and Bourque, a restored warehouse-turned-visual arts studio at Walnut and 34th Street. "I mean, we don't even know everything that is here."

RiNo is the brainchild of local artists Tracy Weil and Jill Hadley Hooper. Five years ago, they decided to turn an otherwise dormant area — save for a few artists taking advantage of the cheap studio space — into an arts district. They didn't know what they were doing, Weil says, but somehow they have succeeded in creating a destination of sorts, featuring some of the brightest talents in local art.

A Neighborhood on the Brink

The now-official district's tagline, "Where Art is Made," is more than mere marketing speak. For example, a huge public installation is being created for the city of Reno, Nevada, by Donald Lipski (the man behind The Yearling sculpture at the Denver Public Library central branch). It's coming together in the unassuming backyard of Ironton Studios, a renovated garage and garden at 36th Street and Chestnut Place. And there are new sculptures going in this fall around the Broadway corridor — including Mike Whiting's pixelated steel Rhino at the corner of Larimer Street and Broadway — which perhaps will serve as a future welcome marquee.

For the most part, though, neighborhood aesthetics and infrastructure have not caught up with the high quality of the art being produced. Many RiNo blocks have no sidewalks and few streetlights — a potential turnoff for those used to comfortably making the First Friday rounds on the family-friendly Tennyson Street or in the established ArtDistrict on Santa Fe. Still, a lot has changed, even in a few short years.

"We used to shutter all the doors at night, and the next day, you would always be tagged. It was really just warehouses — a little shady," says Tom Diess, owner of Walnut Street's Mori Furniture Design, which has been operating in the area since 1993. "Today, the neighborhood still hasn't arrived, I don't think, but it's getting closer."

This year, the district participated in the city's Biennial of the Americas festivities — aptly naming its open studio tour "The Riennial" — and the Denver Modernism Show. Several other ideas are in the works, including helping to establish the first-ever Denver County Fair next summer at the National Western Complex, nearby. Several new cafes and condo developments have recently sprung up in the area as well.

Keeping the Cool

Weil says the local community is definitely pro-development but doesn't want the area's artistic roots to get lost as often happens in gentrified areas. "Artists make an area cool, then they can't afford it, and they have to move out," says Weil, who owns Weilworks, a studio and gallery in RiNo. "We don't want that to happen here."

One of the reasons RiNo may actually succeed in maintaining its gritty character while welcoming urban comforts is its timing. LoDo and other more-gentrified areas came of age in a different era, when construction was booming and eco-conscious building was not. With the economy down and sustainable living trending up, RiNo is working with developers to support the community, including attaining LEED certifications, giving a percentage of proceeds to the arts, hiring neighborhood artists to help with design, and setting aside areas for affordable studio spaces and urban

agriculture.

Several spaces — including Taxi, RedLine, and Green Spaces Denver — are already following the model of renting studio and workspace to artists and entrepreneurs at very affordable rates. Even local band the Flobots has a community space in RiNo, where group members host everything from poetry slams to charitable benefits. The artists also support each other, eschewing the competition and affectation that develops in some art circles. If you need, say, a forklift or a glue gun, you can probably find one within minutes either way down the block.

“First, we were just trying to get more people to come out here, so we could sell our art,” says Weil. “Now, we’ve almost created this small town. I think people pick up on that when they come to RiNo. It’s not a clique, and it’s not unapproachable. It’s all-inclusive, and that’s the way it should be.”

Get to Know RiNo

The majority of RiNo's 50+ studios and galleries will be open for First Friday (November 5 and December 3) and have openings and specials planned for Denver Arts Week (November 5–13). Several galleries will offer Arts Week specials on art for \$52.80. And perhaps best of all, the parking is still free.

Select showings include

Plus Gallery

2501 Larimer St.

Primitives, sculpture by Mike Whiting

Oct. 21–Nov. 27, timed around the installation of two public works by Whiting on the highly visible Broadway corridor.

Ironton Studios

3636 Chestnut Place

The Art of Saming, paintings by Sharon Feder

Oct. 29–Dec. 4

Hinterland

3254 Walnut St.

Monstrance, sculpture by Bradley Borthwick

Oct. 29–Nov. 26

Ice Cube Gallery

3320 Walnut St.

Rhythm and Hues, abstract art by Carol Browning and Karen Roehl, through Nov. 6

Untitled, mixed-media sculpture by Deborah Jang and clay art by Jean Smith, Nov. 12–Dec. 4

Weilworks

3611 Chestnut Place

Remodernism, abstract works by Tracy Weil

Nov. 5–Dec. 3

Heppner + Bourque Creative Studio

3370 Walnut St.

A demo of product photography and video using the Sorenson Zebra motion-controlled camera dolly (the only one in Denver), plus chocolate tastings by Chocolate Crisis Center on First Friday.

Mori Furniture Design

3440 Walnut St.

New pieces incorporating concrete and glass, including dining tables, coffee tables, and concrete countertops with built-in bowls.
