



ON FOOT

Streets of Philadelphia

Find local life and the pursuit of happiness in the indie-loving Northern Liberties neighborhood. By CAROLINE TIGER

Northern Liberties, a Philadelphia neighborhood north of Center City along the Delaware River, has been touted as “emerging” for more than a decade, but it finally seems to have arrived. Recently unveiled Piazza at Schmidt’s, a local developer’s one-acre interpretation of a Roman piazza, has strengthened No Libs’ pulse against all economic odds. Not one chain store sullies its 100,000 square feet of retail space. Sample the indie flavors in this 1.6-mile walking tour, but don’t

hesitate to stray off the path and look up and around. No Libs’ 17th-century origins as a country retreat overlap with its more recent industrial heritage and current artsy vibe to make for a kind of architectural Wild West. “We have metal houses. We have a log cabin,” says Matt Ruben, president of the Northern Liberties Neighbors Association. “Stuff gets built here that wouldn’t get built anywhere else.” Like a Roman piazza, for instance. (Unless otherwise noted, the area code is 215.)

Start at **1** **Edgar Allan Poe House** (532 N. 7th St.; 597-8780), marking its famous owner’s bicentennial through 2009. Autumn and Halloween are high season at the House; the Third International Poe Conference takes place in Philly from October 8 to 11. Venture to the basement, setting for a burial in “The Black Cat.”

Left to right: Open-air plaza Piazza at Schmidt’s hosts year-round free events; Delicious sells corsets and fun bloomers; Brown Betty Dessert Boutique is sweet on chocolate cupcakes.

(Poe wrote that story and “The Tell-Tale Heart” here.) Head north on Seventh, then east on Brown, for lunch at Jewish-Southern fusion joint **2** **Honey’s Sit N Eat** (800 N. 4th St.; 925-1150). On weekends, the line will be out the door, but it’s worth waiting for the pumpkin pancakes or for Bubbe’s Brisket Sandwich, a gutbuster that you can order with sweet potato fries on the side.

At the corner of Third and Willey Streets, **3** **Liberty Lands** acts as No Libs’ unofficial town square. Residents reclaimed the former tannery site and made it into a leafy oasis with community garden plots. Crowds swarm its two acres every June and September for the Northern Liberties Music Festival. **4** **Liberties Walk**, a groovy pedestrian strip mall with residences up

above, stretches from Third to Second Street. Corset zealots fly in from Chicago or drive from Maine for custom fittings at **Delicious Boutique and Corseterie** (1040 N. American St.; 413-0375). A few doors down, **Brown Betty Dessert Boutique** (1000 N. 2nd St.; 629-0999)—one of many women-owned businesses endemic to the neighborhood—is known to have busted a few corsets as a result of its irresistible Jean’s Road Trip (a red velvet cake with cream-cheese icing). Enjoy a nibble while sitting on the bakery’s antique couch or alfresco with a cuppa joe from **One Shot Coffee** (1040 N. 2nd St.; 627-1620) across the walk. The coffee shop’s mini library stocks, among its 50 or so titles, local celebrity Pat Croce’s memoir, *I Feel Great and You Will Too*.

At N. Second Street, the **5** **Piazza at Schmidt’s** sprawls on the former site of Schmidt’s Brewery. Philly architect firm Erdy McHenry wrangled developer Bart Blatstein’s vision of a Disneyfied Rome into something even the most feared



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architecture critic can get behind. Cross Second and turn right into the Piazza—where you’ll find 35 boutiques, galleries, restaurants, and bars. **Bambi Gallery** (1001-13 N. 2nd St., #7) moved here to take advantage of buzz and foot traffic. “I wanted to be part of a community where I can wave to the guys across the way and say, ‘Hey! We’re all in this together,’” says bartender turned curator Candace Karch. Her shows change monthly, but she always carries functional art pieces made from recycled skateboards by local Victor Navez.

Continue south on Second Street to the beloved gastropub **6 Standard Tap** (901 N. 2nd St.; 238-0630), the neighborhood’s de facto living room. The fried oysters and Bloody Marys are much touted but so is the menu of local microbrews, including Yards, crafted just down the street. Also along this street, eco-aware clothing shop **7 Arcadia Boutique** (819 N. 2nd St.; 667-8099) sells T-shirts made from bamboo fibers. Two Tyler School of Art grads run retail shop and gallery **8 Art Star** (623 N. 2nd St.; 238-1557), carrying all things indie-designed, from baby clothes to pendants and stationery.

For dinner or just a slice of pie head to **9 Silk City Diner Bar & Lounge** (435 Spring Garden St.; 592-8838). Hospitality entrepreneur Mark Bee salvaged and spruced up this 1950s stainless steel dining car in 2007 and introduced a menu of ambitious comfort food. If you feel like dancing, linger until the lounge/club next door starts thumping with a mix of hip-hop, jazz, house, and neo-soul.



Find colorful, handmade wares at Art Star.

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