

Neighborhood to Watch

Cool Houston



The skyline

In sprawling, anonymous Houston, Montrose is intimate, historic, and defiantly eclectic. Sitting in the center of it all, between downtown's gleaming towers and River Oaks' leafy lanes, it was one of the city's first grand neighborhoods (Howard Hughes' childhood home is here), and today its tree-lined streets are a jumble of twenties mansions, modernist townhouses, and industrial warehouses. Though it can be a bit ramshackle—one reason that bohemians have come here to live and play for generations—it has one of the world's great museums (the Menil Collection), an important center for spirituality and art (the Rothko Chapel), and Houston's most elegant restaurant (Da Marco). Recently, a slew of openings have given the old neighborhood a new jolt of style. —WILLIAM MIDDLETON

1 MORTAR Sacha Nelson and Iris Siff could never find cool, casual men's clothes in Houston. So this spring they opened Mortar, a sparkling shop that's all polished concrete, custom-welded rolling racks, and relaxed masculine chic. Standouts include canvas duffel bags by Property Of... (\$325), washed-out T-shirts by Velvet (from \$55), raw denim jeans (from \$189) and burnished leather belts (\$225) from Gilded Age, as well as authentic U.S. military aviator glasses (\$100) from Randolph Engineering. At 1844 Westheimer Rd.; shopmortar.com.

2 DOMY BOOKS Housed in a craftsman-style bungalow, Domy carries a perfectly curated pop explosion: the *Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopedia*, a guide to contemporary art museums called *A Manual*, punchy Japanese toys. The entry hall hosts art exhibitions, and the back door opens onto the terrace of Brasil, Houston's coolest café. At 1709 Westheimer Rd.; domybookstore.com.



Mortar's Sacha Nelson and Iris Siff

A recent exhibit at Domy



3 LA COLOMBE D'OR Steve Zimmerman turned this 1923 oil baron's mansion into a hotel in 1980, and for the past year his sons Dan, 25, and Mark, 23, have worked with Dallas's Vision Design (the firm behind the redos of that city's Mansion on Turtle Creek and New York's 21 Club) to update and restore the five-guest room main house and nine garden villas. Of note: The Grand Ballroom's 18-foot-tall Louis XV oak paneling once belonged to the Countess Greffulhe, a muse of Marcel Proust. From \$295. At 3410 Montrose Blvd.; lacolombedor.com.

4 FEAST English chefs Richard Knight and James Silk, along with Silk's American wife, Meagan, preside over one of the most exciting restaurants in America, which Frank Bruni described in *The New York Times* as "a full-on, extended ode to offal" with "no real peer." The two-year-old spot's nose-to-tail menu includes conventional English plates like fish-and-scallop pie, but the real draws are more adventurously carnivorous: delicious roasted pork fat, the simply named Rabbit Skeleton, and the Bath Chaps, a deboned pig head that's been sliced and panfried. Dinner, \$70. At 219 Westheimer Rd.; feasthouston.com.

5 OCEAN'S Open since May in an elegant thirties Tudor-style home with a spacious garden, the loungey Ocean's is reinventing ceviche. The Oriental version (red snapper with soy sauce, cucumber, and ginger) and carpaccio-like scallops *rasurado* are particularly delicious. Dinner, \$75. At 819 W. Alabama St.; oceansceviche.com.

6 CANOPY Inspired by the clusters of trees throughout Houston, Claire Smith (the chef behind Shade, a six-year-old Houston staple) debuted her stylish new restaurant in December, pairing relaxed regional classics like grilled red snapper with artichokes and a potato galette with hot breads and rolls from the in-house



A Texas-style piece at Peel

bakery. Everything's served in a light-filled room, its walls displaying enormous photos of Houston's live oaks. Dinner, \$45. At 3939 Montrose Blvd.; canopyhouston.com.

7 PEEL Gallerist Steven Hempel scours the world for great contemporary art and design and stocks this spare, bunker-like space with his finds: little geometric stainless-steel rings from Mexico City jeweler Iker Ortiz (\$35-\$200), and a remarkable white latticework chair (\$7,600) and ottoman (\$5,000) made entirely of paper by Tokyo architect Ryuji Nakamura. At 4411 Montrose Blvd.; peelgallery.org.



La Colombe d'Or: the veal T-bone from the hotel's restaurant.