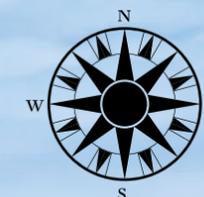


Asheville,  
North  
Carolina

# Come As You Are



*Packed with artists,  
the casual Smoky Mountain  
city is a mecca for  
craft connoisseurs.*

**STORY BY**  
*Monica Moses*

IT'S NOT EASY TO GET TO Asheville, North Carolina, yet many notable people have made their way here – presidents, financiers, legends of art, music, and literature. It's a charming city in a gorgeous setting, surrounded by thousands of miles of top-notch hiking trails. And it's got an active foodie scene – James Beard Award-winning chefs,

18 farmers' markets, and more breweries per capita than any other US city. What it doesn't have are the drawbacks of other centers of good taste – crowds, exorbitant prices, snootiness. It's been called the "Paris of the South," but it's as unpretentious as it is exceptional.

No wonder artists flock here. If western North Carolina is the hub of American craft, Asheville

is its heart. Perched in the Blue Ridge Mountains, the city has a population of just 88,000 – a ridiculous percentage of which seem to be artists. Today, craft lovers may be drawn, in particular, to downtown and the River Arts District. But there is history to be appreciated, too, much of it embodied in three storied places: the Grove Park Inn (since 2013, the Omni

Grove Park Inn); the Biltmore, a French Renaissance-style chateau built by art collector George Vanderbilt in 1895; and the defunct Black Mountain College.

Edwin Wiley Grove, called "the father of modern Asheville," built the Grove Park Inn on the north side of town in 1913. The inn's architecture was inspired by Yellowstone's Old Faithful Inn, which is evident in its

distinctive, craggy exterior. Ten presidents have stayed here, as have F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Edison, Harry Houdini, Amy Sedaris, and John Waters. Inside, the expansive lobby is flanked by stone fireplaces so large you can stand up in them. The hotel was outfitted with furnishings made by the Roycrofters, a community of artists and craftspeople

founded in upstate New York in 1895, and many of the items remain today. "Our arts and crafts are not on display," says director of public relations and community outreach Tracey Johnston-Crum; "they are to be used."

In the hotel, there's the compact Gallery of the Mountains. A short walk outside the hotel is the 9,000-square-foot

Groveswood Gallery, which represents more than 500 artists. You'll pass a small sculpture park on your way to Groveswood Studios, headquarters for 10 artists, including furniture makers Russell Gale and Brent Skidmore, book artist Daniel Essig, and wood sculptor Melissa Engler.

Next up is the Biltmore estate, due south from Grove

Park about 4 miles. The largest private residence ever built in the United States, it's set on 8,000 acres, 75 of those luxurious gardens. Encompassing a jaw-dropping 250 rooms and 135,000 square feet of living space, the home took six years and an entire community of craftspeople to build. Artisans remain important to the estate, still owned by the Vanderbilt

Photo: Michael Mauney



**ABOVE AND LEFT:** More than 100 years old, the Omni Grove Park Inn still has some of its original arts and crafts furnishings.

**OVERLEAF:** One of many spectacular overlooks on the Blue Ridge Parkway, west of Asheville.



**MIDDLE AND LEFT:** Built by art collector George Vanderbilt in 1895, the main house of the Biltmore estate encompasses 250 rooms, including the gorgeous Winter Garden space, with its dramatic domed glass ceiling.

family. Fiber artists restore, hand-dye, and embroider textiles. A blacksmith works on the property, refurbishing candleabras and other furnishings. Woodworkers make stands for decorative objects and flowers.

Vanderbilt is not the only big name in the area. Other cultural luminaries made their way here in the mid-20th century as students, teachers, or lecturers at nearby Black Mountain College, an educational experiment begun in 1933, based on the learn-by-doing principles of John Dewey. The list of people who came through in the 24 years of BMC's existence – some of them Bauhaus faculty fleeing Nazi Germany – is a who's who of midcentury creative intelligentsia: Peter Voulkos, Ruth Asawa, Willem de Kooning, Anni and Josef Albers, John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, Merce Cunningham, Buckminster Fuller, Marguerite Wildenhain, M.C. Richards, Jacob Lawrence – and on and on. Today, you can experience Lake Eden – the most important of

BMC's two campuses, about 12 miles from downtown Asheville – in two ways. One is to attend the Lake Eden Arts Festival (LEAF) in May and October. The other is to take part in the Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center's spring fundraiser, the {Re}Happening, which honors the original avant-garde "happenings" that started at BMC in the early '50s. You just might hear echoes of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, working through choreography in the rustic old dining hall.

BMC's heritage lives on among a handful of schools offering strong materials-based degree programs today, all within 90 minutes of Asheville: Warren Wilson College, Western Carolina University, Appalachian State University, University of North Carolina at Asheville, and Haywood Community College. And don't forget Penland School of Crafts, with its own community of artists, a mere hour away near the Pisgah National Forest.



**Brent Skidmore**  
*13 Balls of Burning Healing*, 2014, burnt Honduran mahogany, maple, paint, mirror, 42 x 20 x 3 in.

*Craft has long been integral to life in western North Carolina, with Asheville as its center.*

Grove Park photos: The Omni Grove Park Inn / Biltmore photos: The Biltmore Co.

Downtown photo: exploreasheville.com / 13 Balls and Shadow photos: Steve Miann



If you're on the outskirts of Asheville, you might as well take a little detour on the scenic Blue Ridge Parkway and stop in at the Folk Art Center, where you can see work by members of the Southern Highland Craft Guild. If you're around in July or October, you can check out the Craft Fair of the Southern Highlands, where artists such as basketmaker Matt Tommey and ceramists Ed and Kate Coleman show their work.

Once downtown, you'll find a raft of galleries, museums, and boutiques within a few walkable blocks. There's the Center for Craft, Creativity & Design, which offers workshops, lectures, and exhibitions with

a cerebral bent, such as the recent "Made in WNC," featuring the work of locals such as fiber artist Nava Lubelski. Nearby is the recently expanded Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center, which honors the spirit and history of Black Mountain College through its library, lectures, and exhibitions. The 15,000-square-foot Blue Spiral 1 gallery, one of four galleries owned by arts patron John Cram, boasts work by regional standouts such as Hoss Haley, Rachel Meginnes, Michael Sherrill, and ACC trustee Stoney Lamar. Next door is sister gallery Bellagio Everyday, showcasing wearables. (The third and fourth

**ABOVE:** You'll come across buskers, drum circles, galleries, museums, and fine restaurants in Asheville's walkable downtown.

Cram galleries are New Morning and Bellagio Art to Wear, in Biltmore Village, 2 miles south of downtown.) Up the street a couple of blocks is Mora, owned by jewelry aficionado Marthe Le Van, who calls her place "a store, not a gallery"; Laura Wood is one of the stars there. Round out your downtown visit at Lexington Glassworks and the Asheville Art Museum, which periodically offers laid-back "Big Crafty" retail events.

Finally, you'll come to the bohemian River Arts District, a collection of 22 buildings, many of them former textile mills, housing some 200 artists. Clothing designer (and former punk-rock club owner) Pattiy Torno, who owns the three buildings that make up Curve Studios, has been here 26 years, since back when "civilization in this part of the world was hookers and drug dealers." Now the neighborhood is alive with cafés, breweries, promenades, and studios,



**Alex Gabriel Bernstein**  
*Aqua Steel Shadow*, 2015, cast and cut glass, fused steel, 21 x 21 x 3 in.

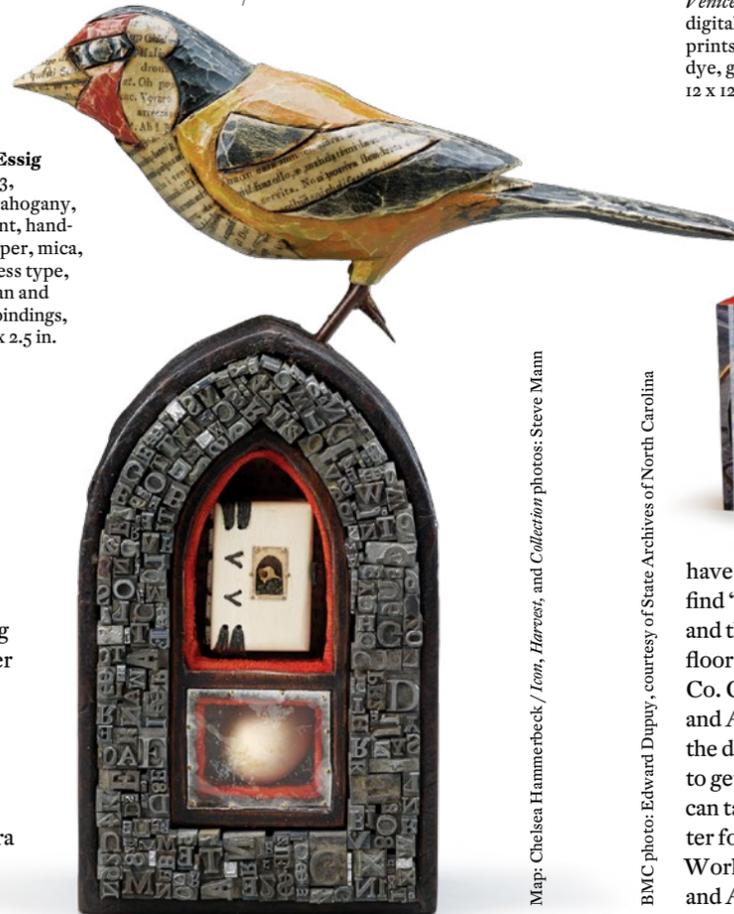
# ASHEVILLE



- 1. Omni Grove Park Inn**  
290 Macon Ave.  
[omnihotels.com/hotels/asheville-grove-park](http://omnihotels.com/hotels/asheville-grove-park)
- 2. Center for Craft, Creativity & Design**  
67 Broadway St.  
[craftcreativitydesign.org](http://craftcreativitydesign.org)
- 3. Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center**  
56 Broadway St.  
[blackmountaincollege.org](http://blackmountaincollege.org)
- 4. Mora Contemporary Jewelry**  
9 W. Walnut St., Ste. 2A  
[moracollection.com](http://moracollection.com)
- 5. Asheville Art Museum**  
2 S. Pack Square  
[ashevilleart.org](http://ashevilleart.org)
- 6. Blue Spiral 1**  
38 Biltmore Ave.  
[bluespiral1.com](http://bluespiral1.com)
- 7. Bellagio Everyday**  
40 Biltmore Ave.  
[bellagioeveryday.com](http://bellagioeveryday.com)
- 8. Lexington Glassworks**  
81 S. Lexington Ave.  
[lexingtonglassworks.com](http://lexingtonglassworks.com)
- 9. Cloth Fiber Workshop**  
122 Riverside Dr., Studio D  
[clothfiberworkshop.com](http://clothfiberworkshop.com)
- 10. Clayspace Co-op**  
119 Roberts St.
- 11. Asheville Glass Center**  
140C Roberts St.  
[ashevilleglass.com](http://ashevilleglass.com)
- 12. Odyssey Center for Ceramic Arts**  
236 Clingman Ave.  
[odysseyceramicarts.com](http://odysseyceramicarts.com)
- 13. Curve Studios**  
6-12 Riverside Dr.  
[curvestudiosnc.com](http://curvestudiosnc.com)
- 14. Village Potters**  
191 Lyman St., #180  
[thevillagepotters.com](http://thevillagepotters.com)
- 15. New Morning Gallery**  
7 Boston Way  
[newmoringallerync.com](http://newmoringallerync.com)
- 16. Bellagio Art to Wear**  
5 Biltmore Plaza  
[bellagioarttowear.com](http://bellagioarttowear.com)
- 17. Biltmore**  
1 Lodge St.  
[biltmore.com](http://biltmore.com)
- 18. Southern Highland Craft Guild Folk Art Center**  
Milepost 382  
Blue Ridge Pkwy.  
[southernhighlandguild.org](http://southernhighlandguild.org)

nestled beside the winding French Broad River. In the Curve Studios building next to Torno's shop is the Silver River Center for Chair Caning, the only place of its kind in the US, where fourth-generation caner Brandy Clements, along with Dave Klingler, carries on the tradition. Fiber artist Barbara Zaretsky and reclaimed-wood furniture maker Darren Green

**Daniel Essig**  
*Icon*, 2013,  
holly, mahogany,  
milk paint, hand-  
made paper, mica,  
letterpress type,  
Ethiopian and  
Coptic bindings,  
9.25 x 7 x 2.5 in.



Map: Chelsea Hammerbeck / *Icon, Harvest*, and *Collection* photos: Steve Mann

BMC photo: Edward Dupuy, courtesy of State Archives of North Carolina



exploreasheville.com



## WIDE WORLD OF CRAFT

LEFT:  
Robert Gardner works  
out of the Asheville  
Glass Center in the  
River Arts District.

BELOW:  
**Melissa Engler**  
*Harvest*, 2013,  
poplar, milk paint,  
acrylic paint,  
25 x 28 x 2 in.

LEFT:  
The Center for Craft,  
Creativity & Design is  
among the architectural  
beauties in the downtown  
historic district.

LEFT AND BELOW:  
Patty Torno is a  
clothing designer  
who also makes  
“Fotopiecing” out of  
digital photographs,  
from her studio in the  
River Arts District.

BELOW:  
**Patty Torno**  
*Fotopiecing Collection*,  
2012, digital pigment  
prints, birch plywood,  
lacquer, 8 x 16 x 2 in. each



Patty Torno

ABOVE:  
**Patty Torno**  
*Venice Salute*, 2015,  
digital pigment  
prints, basswood,  
dye, glue, lacquer,  
12 x 12 x 2 in.



BELOW:  
Ceramists David  
Weinrib and Karen  
Karnes at historic  
Black Mountain  
College in 1954.



*Some 200  
artists work  
in the lively –  
and growing –  
River Arts  
District.*

have their studios nearby. You'll find “wild clay” lover Josh Copus and the Clayspace Co-op on the floor above the Wedge Brewing Co. Ceramists Heather Knight and Akira Satake have space in the district, too. And if you'd like to get your own hands dirty, you can take classes at Odyssey Center for Ceramic Arts, Cloth Fiber Workshop, the Village Potters, and Asheville Glass Center.

To take in the neighborhood in one sweep, hop aboard a trolley during the weekend Studio Stroll events, held spring and fall. Or call Sherry Masters, former Grovewood Gallery manager, who runs Art Connections tours. Either way, you'll find out why the area has become a magnet for art-loving tourists in just a couple of decades.



Wherever you go in Asheville, you can't miss the way the city comes together, around food, the outdoors, and history – but also around its artists. Here, “every artist is championed,” says the Grove Park Inn's Johnston-Crum. “If you do what you do well, people will appreciate it.”  
+  
*Monica Moses is American Craft's editor in chief.*