

SCOTTSDALE ARIZONA

by Rich Rubin

As winter approaches, a traveler's mind naturally turns to Scottsdale Arizona, one of the premier destinations in the country for "snowbirds."

Always a great choice to escape the winter cold (well, really a great choice any time of year), Scottsdale's appeal is enhanced even further by a series of new openings, bringing the already enviable hotel and dining scene to new heights, as well as activities from upscale shopping to interesting exploration. Here, where tried-and-true meets new-and-innovative, there's a wealth of choices from your first breakfast of the day to your last drinks at night. If you haven't been to Scottsdale in a while (or, God forbid, have never been there), it's time for a visit.

First, let's check in, and there are marvelous new offerings here. Heading northeast from downtown Scottsdale, we arrive at the new **Adero Scottsdale** (13225 N. Eagle Ridge Dr., Scottsdale AZ. Tel: 480-333-1900 or 888-236-2427. www.aderoscottsdale.com), which opened in October 2020. The first thing you notice as you approach is the amazing mountain panorama. Sitting on seventeen acres in the middle of the McDowell Mountains, the hotel wisely keeps the colors muted to take advantage of the spectacular vistas through the many walls of windows. Every room has a mountain view, too, as well as a balcony or patio to admire it from, and a spacious, low-key comfort that might encourage you never to leave! With a great restaurant, Cielo, onsite, fitness classes, a nice spa, two swimming pools, and a variety of outdoor spaces, Adero is its own self-contained world of desert beauty. There's even a walking trail to take advantage of its desert scenery and mountainous setting. It's the Marriott Autograph Collection's only resort set in an official "dark sky" community, so nighttime star-gazing is prime. They even have local astronomers (whom they dub "the star dudes") come in for celestial events. Built with an appreciation of the awesome nature that surrounds the resort, it's a perfect choice for those who want to immerse themselves in the Southwest.



Photo: Eric Anthony Mischke

If you'd rather be right at the heart of town, the winning **Canopy Scottsdale Old Town** (7142 East 1st St., Scottsdale AZ. Tel: 480-590-3864 or 844-692-2667. www.scottsdaleoldtown.canopybyhilton.com), also opened in October, is the first new hotel build in downtown Scottsdale in ten years. A member of Hilton's boutique Canopy brand, it's right across the street from the **Museum of the American West**, and a two-minute walk from the heart of Scottsdale's **Marshall Way Arts District and Main Street** shopping. There's lots of lounge space, free bicycles for guests, a rooftop bar with bird's-eye vistas of downtown Scottsdale, Camelback Mountain, and the McDowell Mountains, and a lovely restaurant just off the lobby. Comfy rooms have a muted color palette and canopy-style headboards of carved wood inset with copper, which does a great job of bringing a Southwestern feel right into your room. Best of all is that between your own two feet and the Scottsdale trolley that stops nearby, you can explore the town without even having to get back in your car. Now that's convenience!

Looming on the horizon: the upcoming **Caesar's Republic Scottsdale** (4747 N. Goldwater Blvd., Scottsdale AZ. Tel: 888-293-2398. www.caesarsrepublicscottsdale.com),

the first non-gaming hotel by this company that's famous in Las Vegas and elsewhere, is planned for a prime spot adjacent to **Scottsdale Fashion Square**. The eleven-story glass structure will feature a restaurant by Giada de Laurentiis and a seventh-floor pool/lounge. Meanwhile, both **Adero Scottsdale** and **Canopy Scottsdale Old Town**, offer very different atmospheres (one grand and isolated, one boutique-y and right at the heart of things), but whichever one you choose, I promise you'll be happy with your stay.

Speaking of **Scottsdale Fashion Square**, the new Luxury Wing, which was unveiled in December 2018, offers a series of high-end retailers. There's even a "concierge" to guide you through the dizzying array of stores. There's also a series of wonderful restaurants grouped together to make a true "restaurant row" in the middle of this shopping area. **Zinqué** (4712 N. Goldwater Blvd., Scottsdale AZ. Tel: 623-745-9616. www.lezinqué.com), the new Scottsdale location of this restaurant with branches throughout California, reopened in May 2020 with a wide-ranging, French-inspired

menu. Right across the courtyard is **Nobu** (7014 E. Camelback Rd., Scottsdale AZ. Tel: 480-581-0055. www.noburestaurants.com/scottsdale/home/), which in early 2020 became the first Arizona outpost of this renowned Japanese restaurant. You might also want to try **Toca Madera** (4736 N. Goldwater Blvd., Scottsdale AZ. Tel: 480-930-4357. www.tocamadera.com/location/scottsdale), the Scottsdale branch of this upscale Mexican restaurant based in West Hollywood. Whichever of these places you choose, you're bound to have a great meal.

My preferred spot in the Luxury Wing, though, is **Francine Restaurant** (4710 N. Goldwater Blvd., Scottsdale AZ. Tel: 480-690-6180. www.francinerestaurant.com), with cuisine based in the Provençal region of France and offering a variety of both familiar and new dishes by celebrity chef Laurent Halasz, who hails from the South of France. I start with an Endive Tatin, figuring if these people can make endive taste good, they've won my vote. Sure enough, it's a beautiful little pastry with caramelized walnuts and onions countering the bitterness of the endive. For a main, choose the best Salade Niçoise in history, fascinating crab ravioli, or (my choice) a perfectly cooked Mediterranean branzino with a sauce vierge that is somehow light and filling all at once, and bursting with flavor. Dessert? Lovely Francine apple tart (so classic), or perhaps a flourless chocolate cake. The high-ceilinged spot has a kind of rustic chic, with a nice patio outside and the most accommodating service you can imagine. Definitely top off your afternoon of shopping with a meal at this winning spot that debuted in August 2020 and somehow manages to be both upscale and down-home at the same time.

Another new favorite downtown is **Pizzeria Virtù** (6952 E. Main St., Scottsdale AZ. Tel: 480-663-9797. www.pizzeriavirtu.com), in the heart of Old Town and the latest offering (with a February 2020 premiere) from well-known local chef Gio Osso. With a black-and-white, laid-back feel, the restaurant's friendly service is matched by its remarkable food. It's all about the little touches here, such as the napkin that comes rolled up and adorned with a sprig of rosemary. Then there's the food, and nothing I say will prepare you for how good it is. The burrata is a piece of heaven, the silken cheese complemented by the sweetness of wine-soaked figs and salty chewiness of prosciutto. Pizzas, made in a wood-fired oven

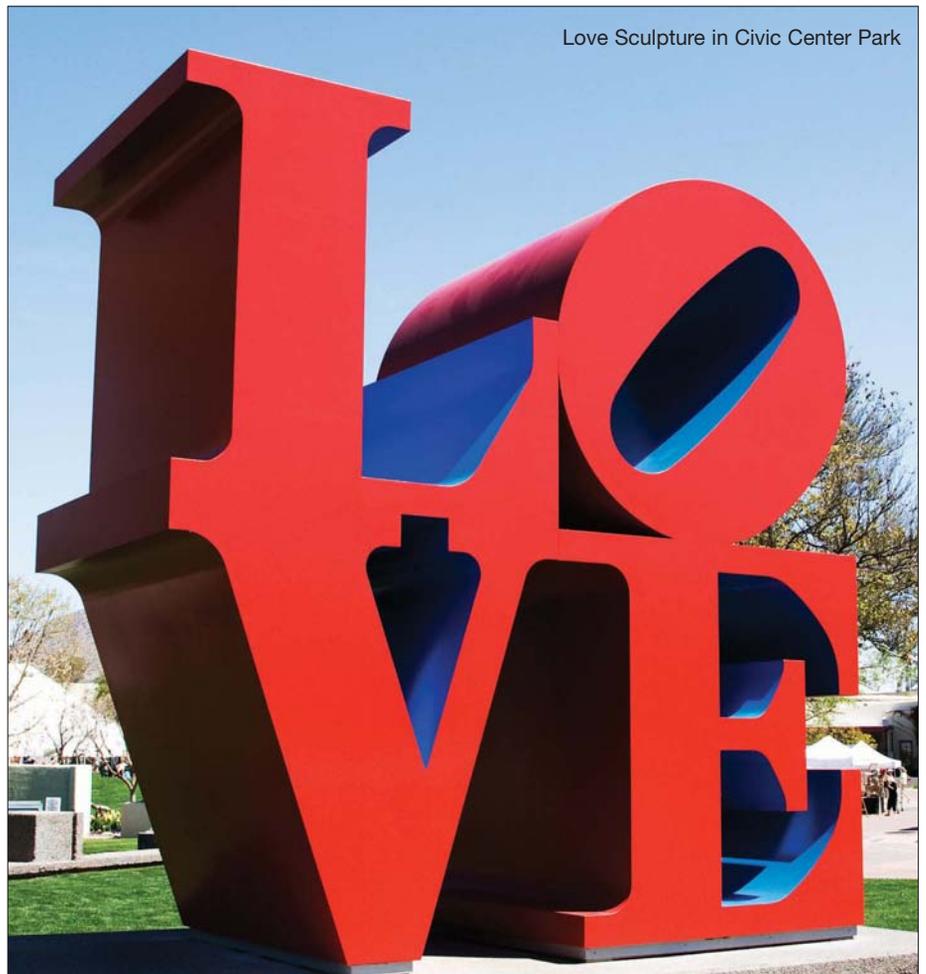
that you can see from your table, have a heavenly, thick crust and toppings ranging from the simple and sublime Affumicata (charred tomatoes, garlic, basil, smoked scamorza cheese) to a hearty Diamante (mozzarella, sausage, peperoncini, prosciutto). Don't neglect the pastas, either. On one visit, mine is simply but

elegantly tossed with garlic, olive oil, Calabrian chiles, and a scattering of mudicca (Italian breadcrumbs) to add texture and soak up all the goodness. Dessert? The Budino is Nutella pudding with vanilla crema and hazelnut praline: need I say more? Whatever else you do, be sure to stop in this brilliant new spot!



Old Town Scottsdale

Photo: Cre8 Design



Love Sculpture in Civic Center Park

Photo: Karoline Cullen

Marshall Way Arts District Sculpture



Photo: Barma Tanko

Taliesin West

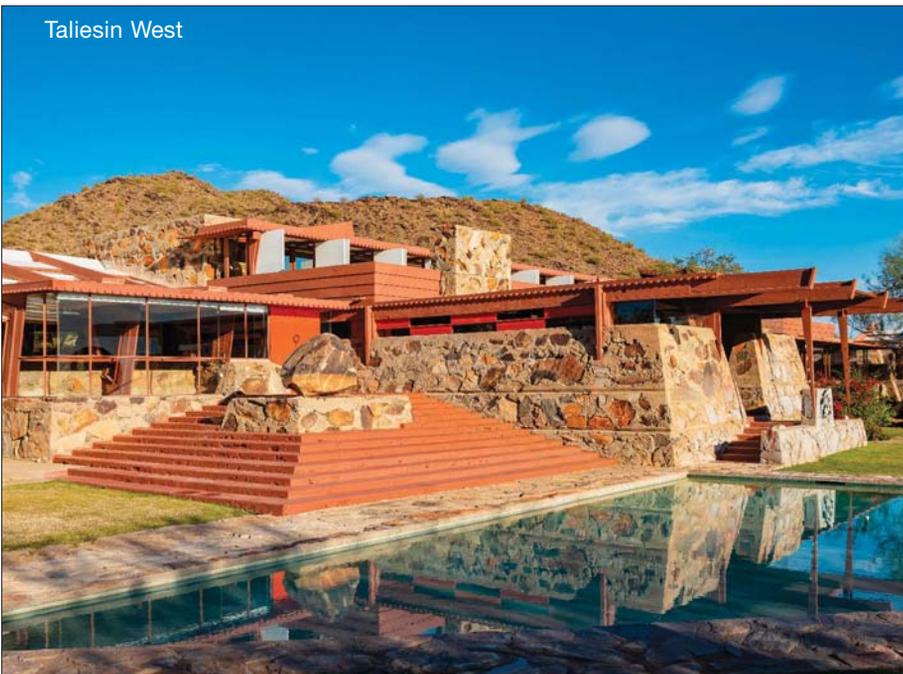


Photo: Kit Leong

Before or after dinner, a little wine might just hit the spot, and Old Town Scottsdale is quickly becoming wine tasting central. Did you know Arizona has a wine industry? Trust me, you'll be hearing more about it, as the state now boasts over 100 wineries. Settle into the comfy tasting room of **LDV Winery** (7134 E. Stetson Dr., Scottsdale AZ. Tel: 480-664-4822. www.ldvwinery.com/tasting-room.html) and you'll see why this is an up-and-coming wine region to be taken seriously. The room is lovely, with photos of vineyards and grapes, a nice patio, and comfortable seating inside. Settle yourself

under a photo of Lucy and Ethel stomping grapes, and get down to why you're here: tasting LDV's remarkable wines. I sample a beautiful full-bodied Viognier before moving on to a series of reds: a 2015 Grenache (jokingly referred to here as "the desert Pinot Noir"), and the wonderful Decade (a Petite Syrah/Syrah/Grenache blend) that's amazing, bold, smooth, and gorgeous. Their Signature Petite Syrah is similarly rich and flavorful, and whatever your taste in reds or whites, I suggest you visit LDV's tasting room, which reopened its doors this past April.

Just across the street, you'll also want to

check out the tasting room of **Merkin Vineyards** (7133 E. Stetson Dr., Scottsdale AZ. Tel: 480-912-1027. www.merkinoldtownscottsdale.com/), which reopened in May 2020 in a wide-open, commodious space. Helmed by rock singer MJ Keenan (how many Grammy-winning winemakers do you know?), Merkin is doing some wonderful wines, and I start with Dos Ladrones, a Chardonnay/Malvasia Bianca blend that's unoaked, light, and (in our wine guide Lindy's words) "pretty." Their 100% Malvasia Bianca (a grape that this region is doing much to popularize) is similarly light and fruity, while their Tarzan (Tempranillo/Grenache) is something I could drink all night. This hopping place ("not your mom's wine bar," smiles Lindy) has rock music, a large wooden bar surrounded by tables, and great food to accompany your tastings, whether it's local bread with strawberry/citrus butter and house-made mustard, tepary bean hummus, nice salads, or such inventive favorites as lasagna cupcakes. A new pizza oven is being installed as we speak, so you can see what's about to be served.

You might also want to check out **Benjamin's Upstairs** (7111 E. 5th Ave., Scottsdale AZ. Tel: 480-398-4208. www.benjaminsaz.com), located in the "hidden" speakeasy above the well-known **Citizen Public House Restaurant**. Open Thursday through Saturday evenings, this intimate space, which debuted in late summer 2020, offers an intriguing array of shareable plates, and an accompanying list of sparkling wines and classic cocktails. Helmed by chef Ben Graham of Citizen Public House, it has a nice private feel and, needless to say, good food and beverages.

Please, though, do take some time off from eating, drinking, and shopping (I know it's difficult) to get some culture.

One of my favorite sites in the area is **Taliesin West** (12621 N. Frank Lloyd Wright Blvd., Scottsdale AZ. Tel: 480-860-2700. www.franklloydwright.org/taliesin-west), Frank Lloyd Wright's Arizona residence and studio. I love one new addition to this must-see site: the self-guided audio tour. Download the app, put in your earbuds, and you're good to go at your own pace, stopping and starting the voice tour if you want to linger at Wright's design studio, on the "prow" (an outdoor promenade overlooking glorious views), or in the onsite cabaret theater. The narrator's voice is interspersed with Wright's own as he talks about the various

spaces and his love of the Southwest. I interact with my virtual tour guide as if she's a real companion, and boy can she talk! (To be perfectly honest, I occasionally fast forward through her spiel, but please don't tell.) "Did you see the fireplace?" she'll ask, or she'll deliver a lecture about compression of space and diffusion of light. She's earnest and full of information, whether it's about the design features of the various rooms, the use Wright put them to, or the art scattered around the property. Best of all, you can go at your own pace, lingering here, observing there, and it's a great way to see this important architectural wonder.

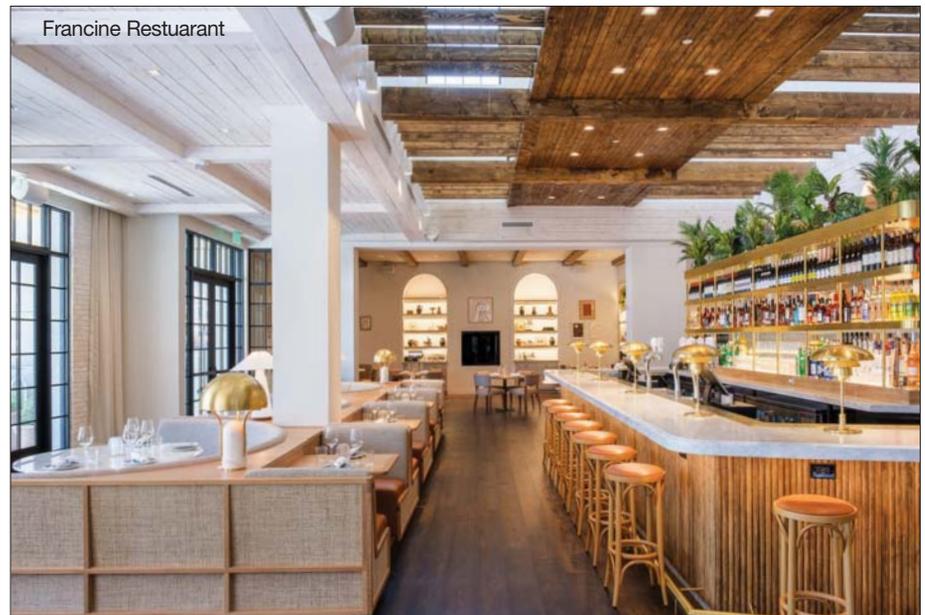
Another don't-miss spot is **Wonder-spaces** (7014 E. Camelback Rd., Scottsdale AZ. Tel: 480-718-2156. www.arizona.wonderspaces.com), an astonishing new museum that opened in 2019 in Scottsdale Fashion Square, just a few steps off the Luxury Wing. Well, the word "museum" doesn't quite suffice for this spot, which expands the boundaries of what we think of as art, with a varying series of installations, from light and sound explosions to participatory experiences in which you're an essential part of the artwork. When I visit, I walk into an igloo-like dome and find myself at the center of an ever changing pattern of light and color. I watch a woman sit for a machine-created portrait that joins the series of portraits on the wall. I don a headpiece to take a virtual trip down a fantasy river. I relax in a "Rainbow Room," and I watch the constantly-shifting light on Mount Fuji. I stand entranced by the detonations of light and sound that play across the walls of the "Light Leaks" installation, and just when I try to move on, the patterns change, the sound intensifies, and I can't drag myself away. I don't know if any of these exhibits will still be running by the time you visit, but there's bound to be something challenging and exciting.

Challenging and exciting: that could describe Scottsdale. It might surprise you to hear that, but as someone who's been coming here for years, I find that just when I think I know it like the back of my hand, I discover something I've never seen before. Just when I think that maybe it's finally "done," that it will never change, all kinds of new things pop up to prove me wrong. There's so much going on in this city, perfectly located in the long-reaching shadow of the desert and mountains, that every new visit brings a fresh set of revelations. That combination of time-honored and brand-new is what I most love about Scottsdale. ■



LDV Winery

Photo: Rich Rubin



Francine Restuarant

Photo: David Blakeman