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it's spring!

Atlanta

Good manners and glamour too—
Atlanta is on a roll, with a building boom, award-winning
chefs, and some of the
best shopping in the South
By Nancy Staab

Atlanta is no stranger to the spotlight. After all, the Georgia capital was the site of the 1939 movie premiere of *Gone With the Wind*, a major station of the civil-rights movement, and the host of the 1996 summer Olympics. But this storied Southern city has never quite received its due from the nation's custodians of cool. At least not until now.

Swank hotel chains have recently cottoned to Atlanta's status as one of America's fastest-growing metro areas: The Mansion on Peachtree, a jaw-dropping spire designed by Robert A.M. Stern and owned by Rosewood Hotels, opens this month. Three new W Hotels will be catering to urban hipsters, including the W Atlanta Midtown, which

debuted this spring. Also hanging up their shingles are a St. Regis, a Kimpton, and a Hard Rock.

The city's cultural stock is surging as fast as the luxury suites. Deep-pocket philanthropists are funding gems such as the stunning aquarium (the world's largest) and its much-ballyhooed beluga whales. The resplendently bohemian Savannah College of Art and Design—think RISD with a Southern accent—opened a campus here three years ago, giving every local would-be designer hope for the future. The Atlanta Opera luxuriates in its new home in the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre, and the Grammy-winning Atlanta Symphony Orchestra is raising funds for a Santiago Calatrava–designed ▷

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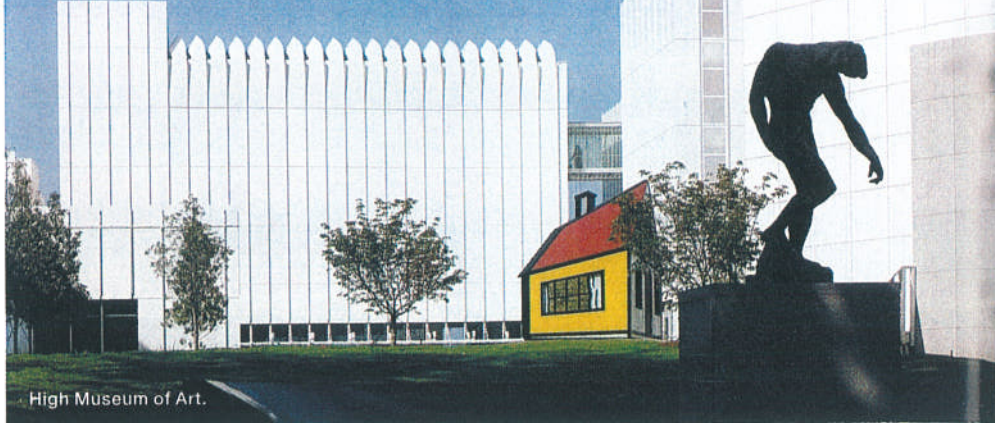
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atlanta



High Museum of Art.

performance hall that will resemble an ethereal UFO. One of the biggest pride boosts came in 2006, when Mayor Shirley Franklin and a group of city leaders brought Martin Luther King Jr.'s personal papers home, saving them from being sold piecemeal at auction; now they are displayed at the civil-rights leader's alma mater, Morehouse College.

Atlanta is relatively young—though settled in 1833, it was largely burned to the ground by General Sherman during the Civil War and spent decades getting back on its feet—but "its aspirations and energy offer an unparalleled cultural scene, from art to music and theater," says Michael E. Shapiro, the director of the High Museum of Art. "Our profile is rising quickly, both nationally and internationally." A Richard Meier building with Renzo Piano additions, the High has been tireless in promoting Atlanta's potential. Most prominently, it negotiated an exclusive three-year loan of rotating treasures from the Louvre. Move fast: It's in year two.

After soaking up the scene at the museum, art aficionados will want to tap into the go-go gallery scene. Dealer Fay Gold made her reputation some 20 years ago championing then-risky artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe; now her eponymous gallery pairs stars like Tina Barney with emerging talents like Christopher Parrott. A favorite of part-time Atlantan Elton John, Jackson Fine Art is another well-regarded destination, offering photographs by luminaries such as Annie Leibovitz (celebrities and more celebrities) and Lalla Essaydi (mesmerizing C-prints of veiled Muslim women). Bill Lowe Gallery just moved its roster of edgy modern artists into a

sexy new midtown space two blocks from the High, and for works with a decidedly urban vibe, Vaknin Gallery is where the cognoscenti line up for hip-hop-themed photography exhibitions and the like.

Los Angeles and New York City may get the lion's share of the press when it comes to trends in interior design, but regional style groupies have anointed Atlanta an alternative mecca. Though the celebrated 550,000-square-foot Atlanta Decorative Arts Center (ADAC) is open to the trade only, the wildly popular Scott Antique Market is a public venue—and a good reason to schedule a trip with an eye to the calendar, because this extravaganza of dealers only happens the second weekend (text continues on page 150) ▶



The Fox Theatre.