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A photograph of an outdoor furniture set on a stone patio. The set includes a sectional sofa with light blue cushions and a dark frame, a matching armchair with a brown accent pillow, and a large ottoman. A dark coffee table with a tray of drinks is also visible. The background shows greenery and a stone wall.

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Wings of Change

In the golden age of aviation, Stapleton Airport was more than a transportation hub—it was a living, breathing chronicle of Denver's dreams. In the early 1990s, visionary leaders pushed forward an ambitious airport project, despite significant public opposition. We explore DIA's history—conspiracies and all.

By Lexi Marshall

ON THE COVER: Wings of Change, page 42

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PRESIDENT/GROUP PUBLISHER
Allen J. Walters

CONTENT DIRECTOR, *Colorado AvidGolfer*
Jim Bebbington

— ○ ○ —
SALES, MARKETING & ADVERTISING

VP OF SALES & MARKETING
Lori Perry

MARKETING DIRECTOR
Chris DeConna

DIRECTOR OF GOLF OPERATIONS
Michael T. Colander

DIGITAL STRATEGIST
Brendan O’Keeffe

— ○ ○ —
ART & EDITORIAL
EDITOR
Heather Shoning

ART DIRECTOR
Michelle M. Gutierrez

— ○ ○ —
PARTNER
Chris Phillips

— ○ ○ —
CONTRIBUTORS
Amanda Lacey
Lexi Marshall, Mark Samuelson
Rebecca Toy, Kastle Wasserman
Kristen West

— ○ ○ —
ADVERTISING INQUIRIES:
allen@coloradoavidgolfer.com

EDITORIAL INQUIRIES AND LETTERS:
heather@avidlifestyle.com

CUSTOMER SERVICE:
720.493.1729

MAILING ADDRESS:
9350 E. Arapahoe Road, #210
Greenwood Village, CO, 80112

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TALK OF THE TOWN

KNOW SOMEONE who should be featured in AvidLifestyle?

Tell me about them at heather@avidlifestyle.com



PHOTO: BY VANESSA MIRANDA

TIME TO TRAVEL

AS I WRITE THIS LETTER, I've just booked several trips over the next few months. I'm amazed at how much of my travel is driven by work and family obligations. I'm not complaining—I love both, and I love any travel, honestly. It seems like time slips away, and I don't prioritize travel for fun. I often take weekend getaways, but I want big trips. Multiple days. Several cities. Lots of steps logged.

Whether it's a short trip or a long one, I love, love, love the airport. I get there early for people-watching. I adore the symphony of languages when I fly internationally. I enjoy browsing the shops—I'm a sucker for buying magazines no matter what language they might be in. Go figure. I have an especially good time at our hometown airport, construction aside.

Writer Lexi Marshall explores the history of our local airport and its evolution from Stapleton to Denver International (Wings of Change, page 42). If you've been around long enough to remember Stapleton, like me, you might have fond memories of parking along Havana to see, hear and feel the roar of planes flying overhead. Although I feel nostalgic about that, the new DIA is a wonder in itself—it's the second-largest airport by land size and the sixth busiest in the world. Next time you travel, go a little early. Instead of rushing to your gate, make the airport your first destination to explore.

Next up, how about a river cruise through the gorgeous French countryside? Rebecca Toy takes us Cruising Provence (page 34) for a surprising way to enjoy the culture and cuisine—and, of course, the wine—along the Rhône River.

Even from our landlocked state, we can enjoy the bounties of the sea at Denver's Salt Water Social (Succulent Seafood & More, page 16), the newest concept from the Denver-based owners of STK Steakhouse.

Although much of this issue centers around travel, I want to call your attention to Running Toward the Fire on page 18. Kristen West introduces us to Lieutenant Pierce Jacoway of South Metro Fire Rescue. Jacoway is a decorated civil servant who goes above and beyond for his firehouse family while retaining strong ties at home. I salute you, Lieutenant Jacoway, for your service and sacrifice. In an effort to celebrate those unsung heroes like Jacoway, we'd like to feature more community members serving in these types of positions. Think: firefighters, police officers, 911 operators, teachers and more. If you know people in these roles who deserve a big, collective "thank you," please let me know.

There's something for everyone to enjoy in these pages, so sit, relax and enjoy the March issue!

Heather Shoning

AvidLifestyle strives to celebrate the best and brightest of our community. It's our mission to lift up the businesses and organizations that make our south metro communities so inviting. But it's the people who make everything about communities thrive. If you know someone who should be highlighted in these pages, please contact me at heather@avidlifestyle.com today. I can't wait for an introduction!

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The music of
singer-songwriter
SANDY KING

By Kastle Waserman





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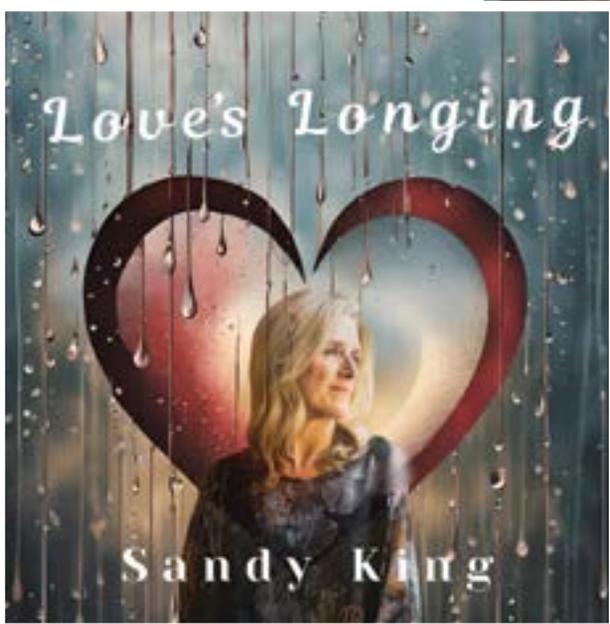
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TAKE A LITTLE BIT of smooth jazz, a touch of earthy blues, some pop and a hint of rock, and you have the sound that best describes local singer-songwriter Sandy King. From boppy good-time songs about summer vibes to more emotional songs about complicated relationships and self-reflection, King has been making music for decades in what she calls the “vibrant” Denver music scene.

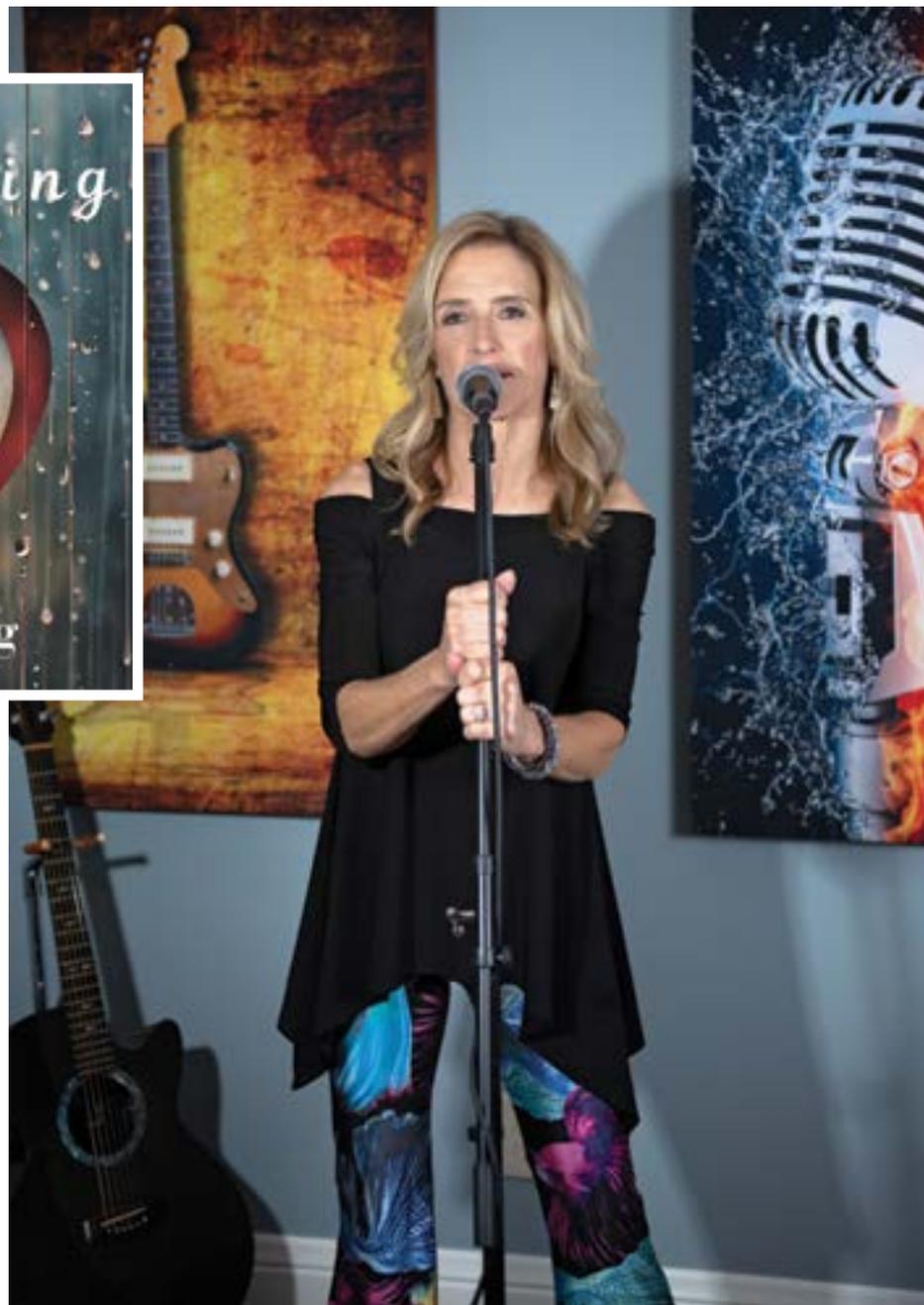
She knew early on she had a gift for music and was encouraged by her family. “I got a ukulele at four. My parents had a piano, and I started playing at seven. Then, I got a guitar at age thirteen. I think I wrote my first song at age fifteen,” King recalls. “From there, I played multiple instruments and sang through high school.”

She started singing and performing with bands in her 20s, including the popular Denver party band The Legendary 4-Nikators. Now in her mid-60s and having played on stage for much of her life, she says she’s ready to leave regular live performances and touring behind.

“I’m married. I have kids and grandkids, so it’s difficult for me to commit to anything,” she says. “I don’t want to be gone on important days like New Year’s Eve.”

She says she might do shows a couple of times a year, but she’s more focused on having her music heard by people around the world, which means spending a lot of time marketing on the internet.

Her music has been heard from Brazil to India and Europe to New Zealand. “I work with music aggregators like CD Baby that put my songs on Spotify, Apple and Amazon,” she says. “And I make lyric videos that I put on YouTube.”



Managing online marketing and social media is a major effort, but King feels it’s worth it as she has complete control of her music career. “I don’t have a label. I’m self-published, so I own all the rights to everything I do.”

King also doesn’t have any industry stylists telling her how she should present herself, which in the music business often means sex sells. “I’m more conservative. I’m probably more like an Adele than a Dua Lipa,” she says. “I’m really into writing very thoughtful lyrics that people can relate to with music that’s aesthetically nice to listen to.”

While she best describes herself as soft rock, she’s also not afraid to do a cover and put her own spin on it. One was “Life Is a Highway,” and she enjoys sharing a story about meeting the song’s writer, Tom Cochrane.

“We were out to dinner, and a guy my husband knew was sitting across the restaurant. They started talking, and I realized this guy was having dinner with Tom Cochrane!” she says. “So, I got to meet him. I gave him my card and told him I had recorded a jazzy, bluesy version of his song, and it was so fun to do.” She doesn’t know if Cochrane ever listened to her version, but it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for her.

Ultimately, King feels grateful for having been able to pursue music her whole life. “Songwriting is a wonderful way to express yourself,” she says. “This is not a money-making proposition for me, but it’s a passion, and I’m lucky to have that gift.”

Learn more and hear her music at sandykingmusic.com





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Dough Counter

SALT WATER SOCIAL amps up the “surf” from the Denver-based owners of STK Steakhouse and other area restaurants

by Amanda Lacey

PHOTO: COURTESY SALT WATER SOCIAL



PHOTO: COURTESY SALT WATER SOCIAL

COLORADO MIGHT HAVE a long history as a steak state, but Salt Water Social is the hot new seafood restaurant concept from the Denver-based owners of STK Steakhouse. While there's plenty of "from the land" on the menu, the highlight here is ultra-fresh, creative "surf" dishes. And the ambiance plays to the underwater theme—fresh blues, fish-scale tiles, dangling light fixtures that conjure bubbles from the sea, plus mermaid art abounds. An in-house DJ mixes classic and current-day tunes, perfectly setting the mood and complementing the sleek nautical aesthetic.

Salt Water Social specializes in high-end surf and turf, but the deep dive doesn't stop there. The lunch and dinner menus feature an array of signature and unique fresh seafood items, complemented by the highest quality beef dishes and elegant, delicious cocktails. During happy hour, you'll find a vast menu of craveable bites and drinks at unbeatable prices. Brunch boasts scrambles, bagels, benedicts and more.

Start your experience with an on-theme cocktail (think Watermelon Wave, Mermaid's Brew or Coral Crush). The showstopper that will not only elicit all the *oohs* and *aahs* but also leave your tastebuds dancing is the Seven Seas, featuring Hendrick's gin, Pierre Ferrand Yuzu Curaçao and blue lemongrass. If you prefer a classic cocktail, opt for the Dirty Pearls, and don't forget to add a caviar bump to complement the blue cheese-stuffed olives. All featured cocktails can be made non-alcoholic, as well.

As you nestle in and continue to observe your

surroundings, you'll constantly turn your head at the fresh, vibrant and beautifully plated entrees passing by. The ever-changing selection of the finest seafood and shellfish is sourced to ensure the freshest flavors possible. The menu highlights the ocean's bounty in various mouthwatering preparations. Whether you're craving a classic seafood platter or a unique chef's special, Salt Water Social offers something to satisfy every seafood lover's taste.

There's no question about ordering seafood; instead, it's: "What seafood to order?" The Imperia Royal Ossetra Caviar is ideal for sharing. You won't want to miss out on the spicy yellowtail crispy rice with pickled Fresno chiles and unagi sauce. The Seafood Tower for Two is a must-have, featuring East and West Coast oysters, pickled jumbo shrimp, Maine lobster and more, rounded out with green goddess sauce, rice nori crackers and soy chili sauce.

The ultimate comfort dish is the San Francisco-style cioppino filled with all the seafood your heart desires in herbed tomato seafood soup. Don't overlook the rigatoni. This dish is rich and creamy with pecorino, braised mushrooms and shaved black truffle on top. One last tip: Get the crab fried rice whether you need it or not—this premium side pairs well with everything. 

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Pierce
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Running Toward the Fire

Lieutenant **PIERCE
JACOWAY** leads with
heart, affects many

By Kristen West

PHOTOS: COURTESY PIERCE JACOWAY



Pierce Jacoway, right



SEEING PEOPLE on their worst day is not a job for the faint of heart. It can be, however, a fulfilling challenge for those who face hardship with compassion, empathy and courage—those like Lieutenant Pierce Jacoway of South Metro Fire Rescue.

Jacoway knew he wanted to be a firefighter from a young age and credits his parents for instilling a compassionate leadership mindset. “My dad was on a lot of committees and always helping with different things in the community and the business world. It becomes who you are,” he says. “In the fire service, it led me to want to improve or do better, and by doing that, I found myself unofficially assuming some of those leadership roles. It was just kind of a natural transition to lieutenant.”

As a lieutenant and safety officer at South Metro, Jacoway thrives on training and developing crews while creating a strong team

environment. He also oversees incident safety during house or commercial fires, hazmat situations, dives, aircraft calls, tech calls, and large-scale road accidents that require cutting people out of cars. If that sounds intense, it’s because it is.

“Some of the calls are people on their absolute worst days,” Jacoway says. “They’ve lost their loved one, or they’ve experienced something traumatic. There are things that a lot of people probably should not see. But we understand what we signed up for; it’s part of our job.”

Jacoway says he’s grateful for the fire department team, which provides an unwavering support system for trauma associated with difficult calls. They also use therapy dogs and professional counseling when needed, and Jacoway has his own support team at home with his wife and two sons. “I don’t typically bring the bad calls home or talk about them with the boys,



Pierce Jacoway, center



PHOTOS: COURTESY PIERCE JACOWAY

but I talk to my wife. She gets it. It's always good to hear their voices and see them all when I come home from a shift," he says.

Jacoway also manages to squeeze in a few hobbies like fishing, skiing and hunting, though he says most of his spare time is devoted to his sons' busy sports schedules—a privilege he doesn't take lightly. "Firefighting is challenging, but kids ... it's an ever-evolving world of emotion and battling amongst the smiles and laughter," he says. "I want to see the best for them as they grow into young adults and hopefully have successful lives ahead of them."

Although his career choice can take an emotional toll, Jacoway says that it's easy to go to work when it's something he loves to do, and he knows he will be making a difference in someone's life.

One of those lives is a young lifeguard named Lizzy, who was flown to Craig Hospital from Huntington Beach after a traumatic spinal injury. Knowing that Lizzy and her family would feel overwhelmed being far from home, Jacoway wanted to ensure they felt loved and supported. His team met Lizzy at the Centennial Airport to escort her to the hospital. Then he supported her family and a liaison from Huntington Beach with extra needs like a car and other resources during Lizzy's time in rehabilitation.



The team even opened their literal doors to Lizzy, inviting her to the fire station for dinners. "We wanted to get her around like-minded people with that servant's heart," Jacoway says. Thankfully, Lizzy made it through rehab with family support alongside a second South Metro family. For Jacoway's compassionate efforts beyond expectations, South Metro Fire Rescue awarded him the Distinguished Service Award. He has also received Firefighter of the

Year for both Larkspur and South Metro and says that while he feels grateful for the recognition, he insists it's a team effort.

"It's truly about developing people around you to create a strong, cohesive team that supports each other and allows for a good outcome," he says. "We take care of people and serve them like we would our family."





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By Heather Shoning

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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK / PIXELSHOT

HAVING PETS doesn't mean sacrificing interior design style. With the right choices, you can have an aesthetic space that accommodates your furry friends while maintaining a polished, sophisticated look.

Start at the bottom. Flooring plays a crucial role in a pet-friendly home. Opt for scratch-resistant, easy-to-clean materials such as luxury vinyl, tile or sealed hardwood. Luxury vinyl plank (LVP) mimics real wood while offering superior durability against claws and accidents. Porcelain or ceramic tiles are also excellent options, as they are resistant to moisture and stains. If you prefer rugs, choose machine-washable options with low pile to prevent trapping pet hair.

Furniture should be both stylish and resistant to pet wear and tear. Performance fabrics are a must—they're durable, easy to clean and resistant to stains and pet hair. Avoid delicate materials like silk or velvet, which claws can easily damage.

Designing designated pet areas can help keep your home tidy while ensuring your pet has a cozy retreat. A built-in pet nook under a

staircase or within custom cabinetry provides a stylish hideaway. Consider a pet-friendly mudroom with hooks for leashes, storage for cleaning supplies and an area for grooming.

Designer Sarah King Gallant with Inspire Kitchen Design Studio has designed mudrooms that include pet washing stations. "When looking to integrate dog wash stations, we prioritize function first and foremost," she says. It's critical to ensure both the pup and the owner have easy access to get in and out of the station. She's also careful to make sure the surrounding surfaces are easily cleanable and durable. "This is all about making everyone's experience as stress-free and low-maintenance as possible," she adds. Keeping dog shampoos, cleansers and towels within arm's reach is another fundamental design aspect.

Keeping pet supplies organized is key to maintaining a clutter-free space. Built-in storage benches, stylish woven baskets and discreet cabinets can store pet toys, food and grooming supplies. Gallant says she designs many kitchens that incorporate built-ins specifically for the pets: "Pets are part of families, too, so creating a dedicated space for food and water



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK / SWITLANA.SONVASHINA

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New legislation on **ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS** could be beneficial to you and your neighborhood, depending on how you look at it

By Mark Samuelson

AT A MOMENT WHEN an unprecedented number of Coloradans are searching for housing—not able to afford what they want or where they want it—the state legislature has delivered a law designed to create more places to live. And if you already own a home, they're offering you a way to provide affordable housing to others.



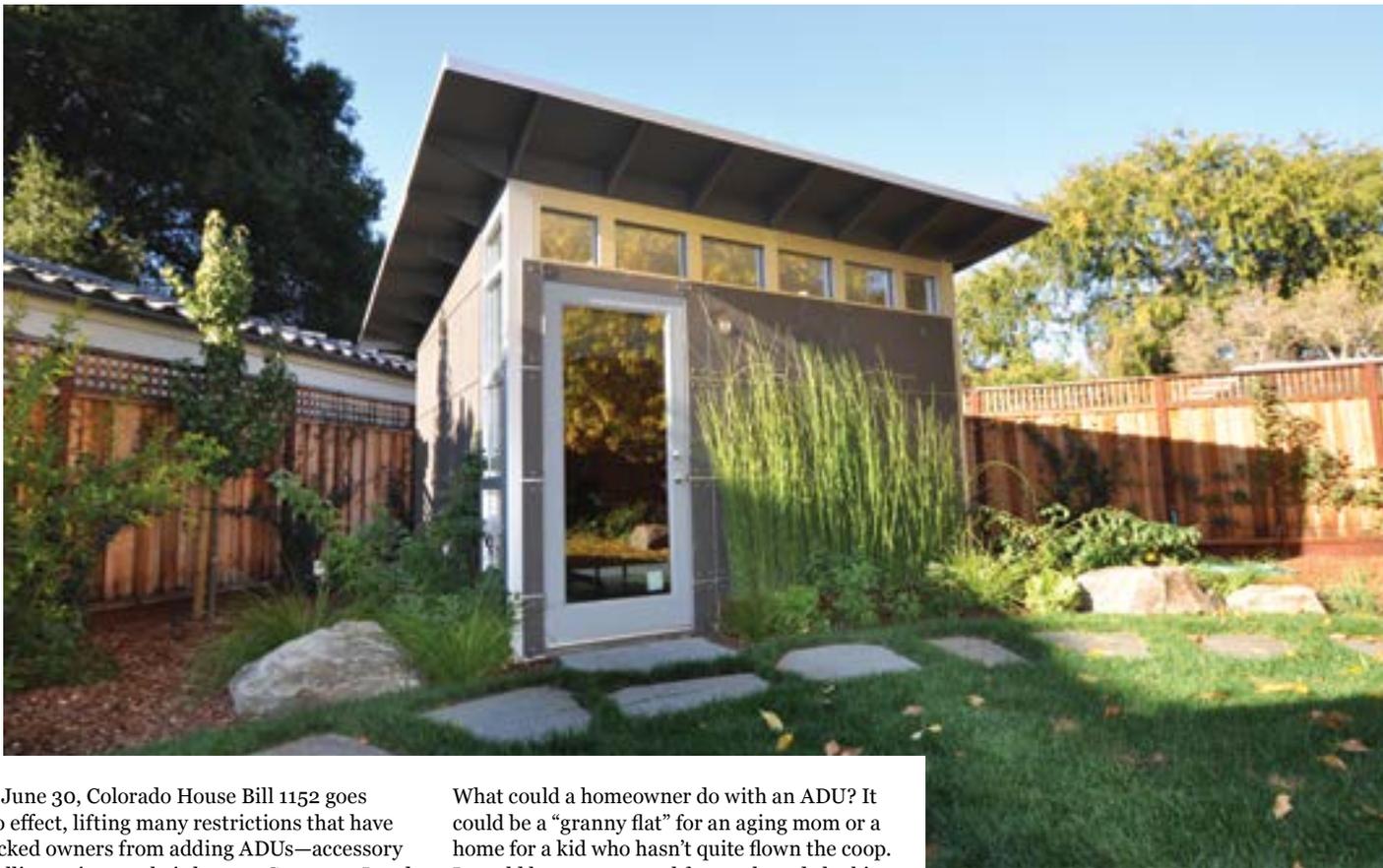


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On June 30, Colorado House Bill 1152 goes into effect, lifting many restrictions that have blocked owners from adding ADUs—accessory dwelling units—to their homes. Governor Jared Polis signed the law last May, and it's set to become one of the most proactive in the nation in boosting ADU construction.

“This legislation gives many Coloradans the freedom to build them on their property,” the governor said at the signing, “and [I] look forward to seeing Coloradans take advantage of this new freedom.”

What could a homeowner do with an ADU? It could be a “granny flat” for an aging mom or a home for a kid who hasn’t quite flown the coop. It could become a rental for newlyweds looking to rent something affordable or for young parents wanting to get a child into a better school.

Or, according to builders doing ADUs where they’re already legal, it might become a VRBO or an Airbnb. This rentable space could deliver extra cash without sacrificing your personal space. >>>



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The bill also includes some dollars toward creating incentives for potential ADU owners, with rebates, loans and down payment assistance programs being launched in neighboring cities, possibly coming to the south metro, too.

“We saw them happening on the West Coast,” says Mike Koenig of Studio Shed in Louisville. Since 2012, he has built some 600 ADUs, including some in south metro communities.

What might an ADU look like on your property? It could be an apartment built over the garage, an add-on to your home’s footprint, or a standalone unit like a studio if you have room on your lot.

While some south metro towns have pushed back on ADUs, Koenig says orders surged during the pandemic, and a sizable number have already been built here. “A good chunk of those projects are parents moving in with kids and vice versa,” Koenig adds. >>>



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However, as the law enactment approaches, much of the interest is specifically in creating rental properties—an aspect with upsides and downsides, according to agent Jennifer Markus with Kentwood Company Real Estate in the Denver Tech Center.

“We like them, and we don’t like them,” says Markus, who has already been involved in several home sales involving potential ADUs—some to buyers using the possible rental income to qualify for a mortgage that otherwise might be harder to handle.

“ADUs solve a big problem, which is

affordability,” Markus says. “Adding an ADU onto a home is much less expensive than building a new home.”

All major south metro communities—Centennial, Greenwood Village, Cherry Hills Village, Littleton, Castle Rock—are required to allow construction of units if they’re 750 square feet or smaller. HOAs are forbidden to restrict them beyond how they would treat a primary unit.

Moreover, the law prohibits requiring off-street parking to serve the added occupants. In south metro areas where residents value their

views and sense of space, there are few protections on how an ADU might be placed on a lot.

“You could put a unit within five feet of the back of your property,” Markus says. “You could bulldoze a patio and put in an ADU. That’s almost unrestricted.”

Greenwood Village is one of several communities that have pushed back against the law in concert with the Colorado Municipal League.

“We’re jumping and reaching at things without giving them the full thought they deserve,” says Greenwood Village city manager John Jackson. “You have parking, services and public safety to consider before you start talking about building units behind units,” Jackson adds. “You want to make sure you can get fire service to it.”

Jackson and other leaders are concerned the law undermines home rule authority—something they say is enshrined in the state’s constitution. Possible encroachments include whether local parking laws can be enforced or whether an owner must occupy the primary residence after renting out an ADU. (The new law says owners need to occupy only during the start of construction.)

Markus says she and other agents also worry about whether prefab-type units—the easiest to build and that are encouraged by the bill’s specifics—have the potential to downgrade the architectural quality of some neighborhoods.

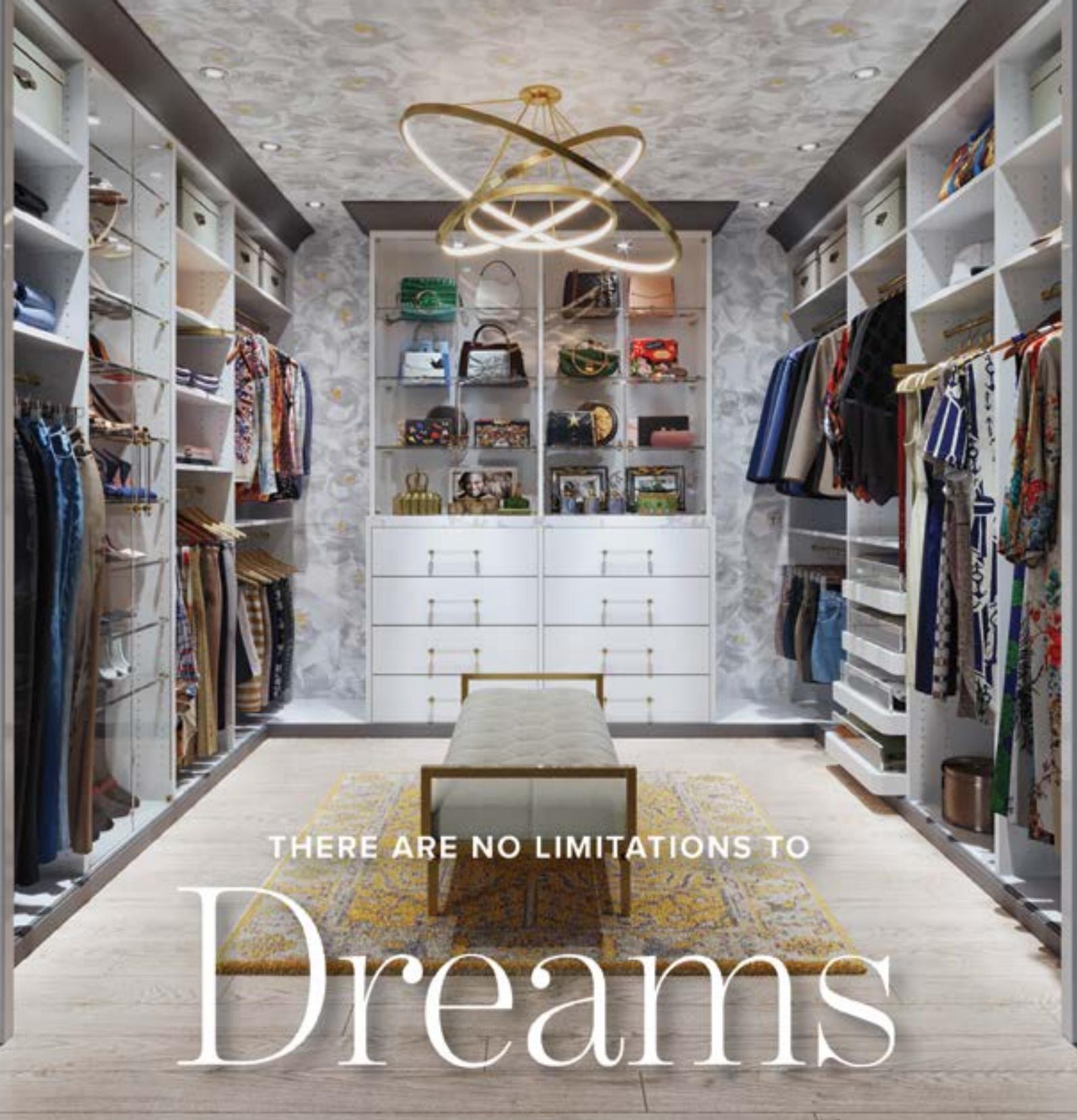
City planners, who like the idea of adding affordable housing options, are unsure how issues like those will play out after the law takes effect. Even in communities where ADUs are already allowed by law, concerns are being expressed about how local regulations will blend in and whether conflicts could end up in court. That includes the city of Denver, where the current law has a tighter setback restriction than the new law allows.

“We will certainly talk more about the pros and cons,” says Donna Ferguson, community development director for the City of Castle Pines. She says she and other city councils are now focusing on the law’s approach and are wary of weighing in on the merits just yet.

Meanwhile, if you’re toying with how an ADU would fit your family’s picture, Studio Shed’s Koenig says you could pencil in \$250 to \$300 per square foot as a typical construction cost in the under-750-foot range. He expects many owners to push for larger units in a 1,200 to 1,400-square-foot range, requiring a local exemption.

Along with building permits, don’t forget to include a possible impact fee, which some municipalities already require to cover added water, sewer, electricity, parks and other infrastructure.





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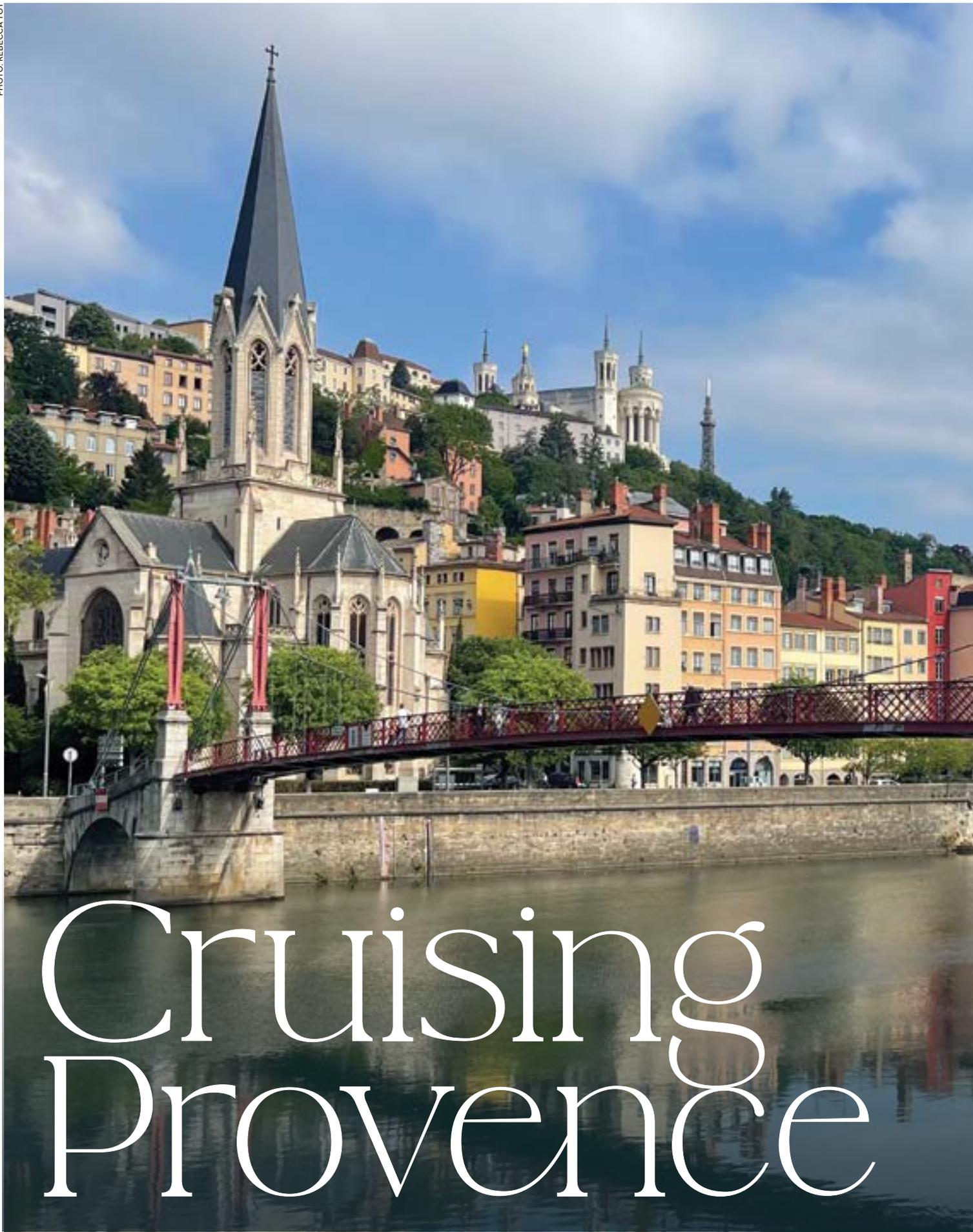
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Cruising Provence



A RIVER CRUISE is a luxurious, relaxing way to experience centuries of history and gastronomic excellence

By Rebecca Toy



WHILE MOST travelers picture Paris when they think of France, cruising the southern Rhône River through Provence is the best way to experience the famous culinary region that has won travelers' hearts for millennia. A river cruise trip makes everything easy with flights directly into Lyon, the northern port for this 8-day journey. Fares include transit, meals and many excursions as the ship sails towards the Mediterranean, ending in Avignon with transit to nearby Marseille for flights home.

Yet, this is not just about ease. Cruising a European river is an elegant adventure. Luxurious, elongated ships rarely host more than 200 guests throughout spacious suites with expansive windows, sunny terrace bars and an observation deck providing panoramic views. Passengers step off the ship directly into the heart of a historic city and enjoy curated small-group tours, concierge-organized private experiences or the freedom to wander. The sights never stop while navigating locks, spotting castles and châteaux, and waving to excited school children.

The Rhône route serves up surprises beyond its celebrated food and wine. From the Alps to the Mediterranean, Provence has Renaissance villages, Roman amphitheaters, Gothic cathedrals, lavender fields and rugged national parks. The best excursions get intimate with the ancient history and agrarian landscape. For the complete French vacation, add a few days in Paris—arranged by your cruise line—before or after your sail. >>>



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THE ILON OF FRANCE

Surrounded by two famous wine regions and home to some of the country’s best chefs, Lyon is quintessential France without the frenzy of Paris. This city is easy to explore, and its splendid architecture ranges from Renaissance homes to Baroque neighborhoods. Let cruise lines’ complimentary excursions serve as a sampler introduction, then step out to explore on your own.

Vieux Lyon—the largest Renaissance district in the city—is perfect for a splendid stroll. Take the funicular to the Basilica de Notre Dame, which dominates the skyline. Stroll to the Roman theater and reflect on those who

have done the same since the first century. A curving path down through city gardens ends in the warrens of *traboules*—once used to move people and weapons around the city and to escape from the Nazis—of the Old City. Step through one of the unassuming wooden doors and watch with wonder as a hidden neighborhood of covered alleys and arches unfolds. These medieval paths kept expensive silk in transit to the port dry. Admire modern silk shops and eat at a cozy *bouchon*, the traditional eateries that savvy culinary experts flock to in France.

Add a jaunt north into Beaujolais with the additional time most cruise lines spend here.

Viking Cruise’s truffle hunting experience has you tromping after a playful pup on the prowl, followed by fresh fare for lunch straight from the estate. The region is often known for its young wine, but tastings will prove Beaujolais has the same robust pours as its neighbors.

VAILEYS AND VINES

As you sail south, steep slopes rise from the banks, giving the clinging vineyards that cover the region the adversity they need to create world-class wine. The middle of the itinerary is leisurely, admiring châteaux and ducking under bridges as cars honk hello. Yet these vales also have historic treasures and natural wonders for plenty of action. >>>

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Decision-making starts in Tournon-sur-Rhône. Many travelers climb aboard the historic steam train through a protected gorge, but a guided hike through internationally renowned vineyards with unwavering views of the river delights wine lovers. Finish with a tasting of local varietals like syrah (shiraz) or marsanne and then a stop at the famous Valrhona Chocolate.

“We are more farmers here than businessmen,” explains vineyard guide Solene Boussand. “Any time you can go and see where our famous food and wines start.”

Most lines also offer an adventure into the more rugged Ardèche Valley, considered the “Grand Canyon of Europe.” Lavender fields, cliffside villages and a preserved Roman aqueduct leave travelers regaling fellow guests with details over dinner.

MEETING THE MEDITERRANEAN

As the Rhône runs to the Mediterranean Sea, the winds warm as slopes flatten. In the south, Avignon and Arles are ancient cities founded by the Gauls and Phoenicians before the Roman Empire arrived. For medieval might, Avignon centers around the rebellious Palais des Pape, resulting from the Pope temporarily leaving Rome in the 14th century. Arles showcases Roman remains, including a two-story arched arena, theater, baths and crypts.

Arles was also the temporary home of Vincent Van Gogh, who sought sunshine and refuge from Paris. An Avalon Waterways cruise adds a bespoke experience with a small art group, touring the town from Van Gogh’s perspective before painting for several hours. Travel expert Meena Thiruvengadam remembers the outing fondly: “[This] sparked a love of painting while traveling for me that I probably wouldn’t have slowed down for otherwise.”

South of Arles, at the mouth of the sea, a national park excursion defies stereotypical French landscapes. The marshlands of Camargue are home to migratory flamingos and wild horses. In Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, streetside vendors sell paella out of massive pans while the region’s traditional *gardians* shepherd bulls down the city streets. Don’t miss the village of Aigues-Mortes—its imposing walls separate the town from the pink salt flats stretching to the sea.

Late spring and early autumn are the best months to cruise, with mild weather and fewer crowds. Yet, whenever you go and whatever you explore—genuine delights await you on the Rhône.

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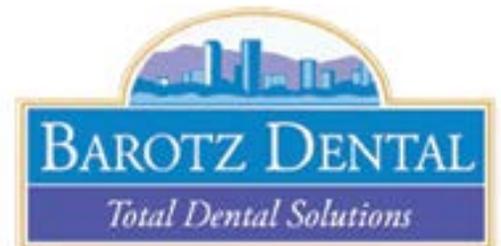
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WINGS *of* CHANGE

*The evolution of
Denver's international airport -
conspiracies and all*

By Lexi Marshall



In the golden age of aviation, Stapleton Airport was more than a transportation hub—it was a living, breathing chronicle of Denver’s dreams. Nestled just miles from the city’s heart, the airport was a magnetic force that drew families, aviation enthusiasts and wandering souls to its fence lines.

Along Havana Road, generations of Denverites would gather, their eyes fixed skyward. Fathers like Steve Lee would bring their kids, pointing out unique aircraft—transforming an ordinary afternoon into an extraordinary memory.

“It was cheap entertainment,” says Lee, who has 36 years of airport operations experience with the City and County of Denver. “It was almost like a drive-in movie theater with people lining the fence, watching airplanes fly over them to land.”

The airport’s runways were arteries pumping economic life, its terminals a crossroads of human stories. But something was changing. The airport that had served Denver so faithfully was straining at its seams. Runways congested, terminals overwhelmed, traffic snarling into impossible knots—Stapleton was struggling.

Why, then, would a city abandon an airport so profoundly woven into its cultural fabric? What forces could compel Denver to leave behind this beloved landmark and venture east into unknown territory?

In the early 1990s, visionary leaders such as former Denver Mayor and U.S. Secretary of Transportation Federico Peña, Denver’s first African American Mayor Wellington Webb and the 39th Governor of Colorado Roy Romer pushed forward an ambitious airport project, despite significant public opposition.

A CONTROVERSIAL TRANSITION

When plans for Denver International Airport were first proposed, the reception was far from welcoming. “People were very strongly opinionated about the new airport, and a lot of people just hated us,” Lee says.

Lee notes that the disagreement stemmed from people questioning whether they needed a new airport or should simply expand the existing Stapleton facility. “We had maxed out on the number of airplanes we could have arrive and take off,” Lee explains. The new airport was set to provide critical expansion capabilities, including room for additional runways.

The traffic flow would also dramatically improve. At Stapleton, holiday season traffic would become so congested that passengers would abandon their rental cars and walk to the terminal. Lee describes how, at the old airport, “every time it would get to be a busy season, it was a nightmare.”

As the plans for the new Denver International Airport began to take shape, so did a web of whispers, rumors and conspiracy theories



PHOTOS: COURTESY HISTORY COLORADO



that would become as integral to the airport’s identity as its runways and terminals. The construction delays, the massive scale of the project and the airport’s unusual design became fertile ground for speculation. The lengthy and problematic construction process, plus DIA’s large, isolated location, led to rumors of secret underground networks. When it opened, murals—some with seemingly cryptic imagery—quickly became fodder for discussion of coded messages hinting at a sinister agenda, further fueling speculation about a hidden “New World Order” connection.

Take the 32-foot-tall Blue Mustang sculpture—dubbed “Blucifer” by locals—for example,

which has become an emblem of the airport’s infamous conspiracy lore. With glowing red eyes and a strikingly muscular design, the statue has fueled speculation that it represents something more sinister than public art. Adding to its eerie reputation is the tragic death of its creator, Luis Jiménez, who was killed in 2006 when a piece of the sculpture fell on him during its construction. Though airport officials maintain that Blue Mustang is a tribute to the spirit of the American West, conspiracy theories link it to everything from occult symbolism to apocalyptic warnings, tying it to a broader narrative of DIA as a hub for shadowy, secretive activities. >>>



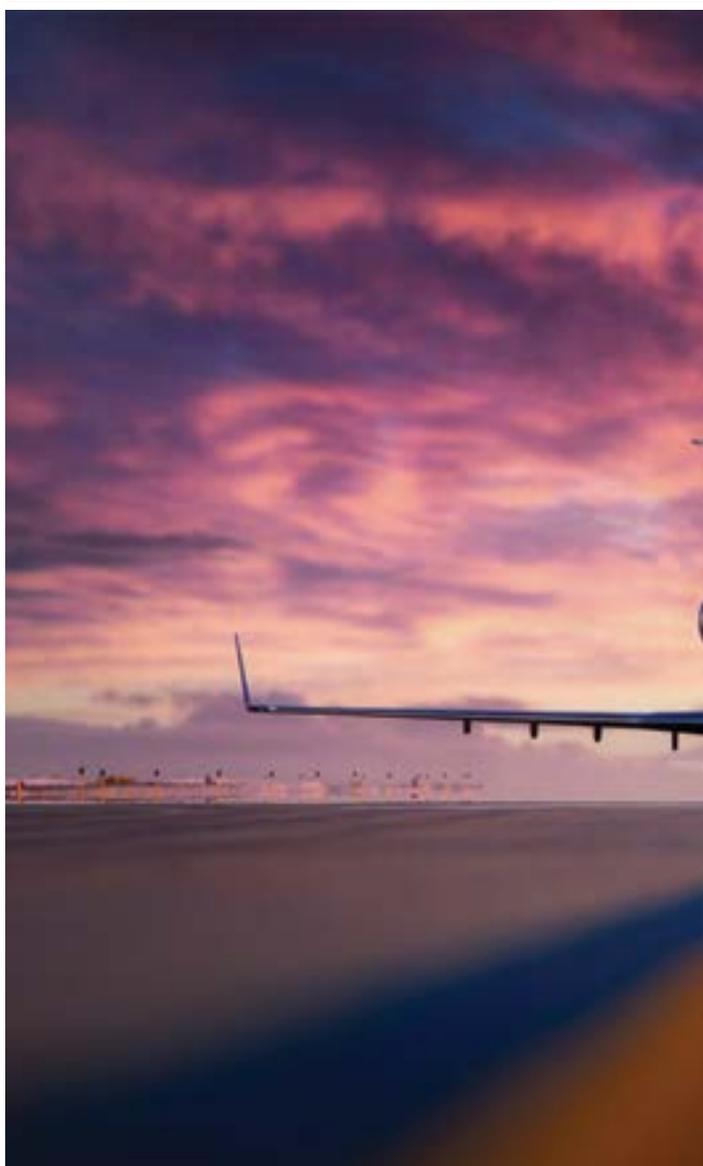
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EMBRACING ITS REPUTATION

Stacey Stegman, senior vice president of global communications and marketing, has become intimately familiar with these legendary tales. “Instead of just fighting those, we were like, ‘you know what? Let’s just embrace it,’” she says.

While most airports stick to straightforward “pardon our dust” signs during construction, Denver International Airport embraces its reputation for conspiracy theories. The airport leans into the intrigue surrounding its renovations with tongue-in-cheek marketing like “Construction or cover-up?” and “Are we the world’s greatest airport or preparing for the end of the world?”

They even featured a cat in a tinfoil hat, referencing alien conspiracy theories. “We weren’t trying to cause harm or negativity to anyone,” Stegman shares. “We were really poking fun at ourselves more than anything, but some people take it seriously.”

Lee says the conspiracy theories began before the airport opened. Even small construction details fueled speculation. For instance, when workers installed chain-link fencing with barbed wire in the tunnels, the orientation of the wire sparked wild imaginations. “People would see that and think, ‘Why would you put a barbed wire fence in the tunnel unless you’re trying to keep people contained in there?’” Lee recalls. These mysterious glimpses and unexplained moments quickly transformed into elaborate narratives of secret underground facilities, hidden agendas and mysterious purposes.

“Sometimes I think it might have been some of those people who opposed the new airport,” Lee believes. “So, anything related to it was just not a good thing, and they’d start twisting them into those conspiracy theories.”

But not all the airport’s quirks are looked down upon. Everyone who’s ridden the train cars has encountered the whimsical touch of Jim Green, the artist behind the train’s chimes and cheerful announcements. Commissioned before the airport’s 1995 opening, Green’s “Train Call” project brought life to the otherwise routine journey between terminals. The iconic “ding-ding-ding” tones, crafted from plumbing pipes and synthesizers, draw inspiration from folk classics like “She’ll Be Coming’ Round the Mountain.” Green also enlisted local voices to deliver the now-famous messages, including radio personality Alan Roach and TV anchors like Adele Arakawa, creating a uniquely Denver experience.

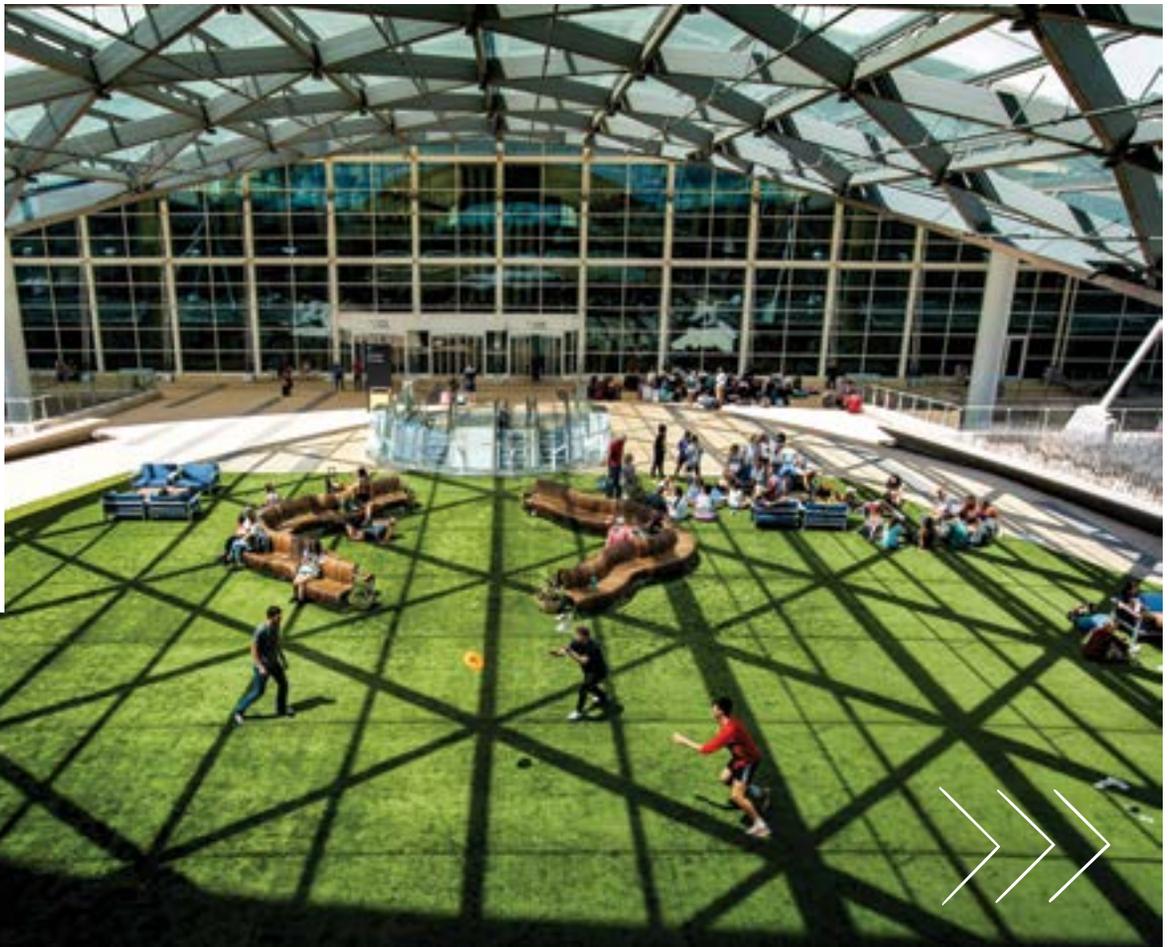
A GLOBAL AVIATION HUB

Today, DIA has become a critical transportation center. In 2024, the airport served 82.3 million passengers, making it the sixth busiest airport in the world. “The better this airport does, the better it is for our state and our community,” Stegman says. >>>



FLYTECO TOWER

offers a nostalgic nod to Denver's aviation history, standing at the heart of the former Stapleton International Airport—the predecessor to Denver International Airport's current location. The 164-foot air traffic control tower, a remnant of Stapleton's bustling heyday, now serves as a unique destination for locals and visitors alike. While Denver International Airport took over as the city's central hub in 1995, the repurposed tower keeps Stapleton's legacy alive with a modern twist. FlyteCo Brewing, which opened its doors at the base of the tower in 2022, celebrates this rich aviation heritage through its decor, beer names and community-centric space. They also offer tours to the top of the tower for stunning views of the city and mountains—and on a clear day, you can catch a glimpse of distant DIA. For those interested in Denver's aviation roots, a visit to FlyteCo Tower provides a compelling connection between the city's past and present.



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The airport's overall expansion strategy has been methodical and forward-thinking. Stegman explains they're constantly planning, knowing that "construction is frustrating when you're going through that, and it feels like it's taking forever." However, the airport is operating in a 24/7 environment, which means they can't simply shut down and rebuild.

Current expansion plans include extending Concourse C to the west adding 11 new gates. They're also planning a north terminal expansion that could add another 50 gates, making the new area walkable and not dependent on the airport train. The ultimate long-term goal is adding a seventh runway. "If you wait until you really, really need it, it's too late," Lee warns.

The Peña Boulevard access road is another key focus. While they don't have a definitive solution yet, they're conducting a comprehensive environmental study to analyze potential improvements that will serve both the airport's 40,000 employees and the surrounding community.

As DIA celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, the airport's team continues to embrace the quirks that make it a uniquely Denver icon. While conspiracy theories surrounding the airport—from secret underground bunkers to lizard people—continue to spark curiosity, they've turned what could have been a PR



nightmare into an unexpected asset. "What sets us apart is the mystery and the weird, strange things that come with it," Stegman says. "You just don't see that at other airports."

It's clear that addressing these rumors head-on with humor and transparency was critical from the start. "When people didn't have an answer that was legitimate right off the bat, they'd start talking about it," Lee says. "It would spread around." By getting ahead of

the chatter, they diffused potential negativity and created a branding opportunity that set DIA apart.

Today, that playful yet transparent approach has become a hallmark of DIA's identity, blending urban legend with a sense of humor that resonates with both locals and travelers from around the world. Decades later, Denver's airport has proven that embracing the unusual can sometimes pave the way to building something extraordinary.





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By Amanda Lacey

Photography courtesy
of Canvelle

YOUR TRIP is planned, flights are booked. Now ready, set, pack! Finding the right travel bags to support your itinerary is key. From zippers to compartments to expandability, we often need it all. But let's be honest, this isn't always offered in the most aesthetically pleasing way.

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washable but minimalist and refined. They're all super hardy and made with customized outer and lining fabrics that can withstand wear and tear," says Rachel Kistner, founder and designer. "I design the bags myself and they're usually a combination of what I want in a dream bag and what I'm seeing while I'm out and about."

The bags are also made from recycled plastics and performance fabrics that are stain and moisture resistant. They feature a specially formulated lining (free of PFAS, PVC and BPA) with a double coating of water-resistant barrier material making the end result stronger, safer and softer. And did we mention the attention to detail—inner pockets, a rear phone slip pocket to allow for easy and secure access, tech sleeves, adjustable crossbody straps and more?

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MARCH

Through March

WINTER SNOWSHOE TOURS

Head up to Vail—not for skiing, but for snowshoeing. Every Wednesday in March, these easygoing, one-hour tours include a naturalist guide, snowshoe and pole rental, and a warming cup of hot chocolate at the end. Learn about the incredible adaptations of alpine plants and animals and how you can help protect this fragile ecosystem. Guided tours start at 10:30 a.m. and if you can't make in on Wednesdays, self-guided snowshoeing can take place any day of the week. Intermediate-level tour available on Thursdays. **BETTY FORD ALPINE GARDENS**, bettyfordalpinegardens.org

Ongoing

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH ART TOUR

In recognition of Women's History Month and International Women's Day (March 8), take a self-guided tour of Denver Public Art pieces by and about women. The collection features original works by many talented sculptors, painters, muralists and designers. The oldest piece in the collection is by a woman—Elsie Ward Hering's "The Boy and a Frog" (1898). The Denver Public Art website has a list and map of nearly 40 works so you can create your own unique tour. **DENVER**, denverpublicart.org



PHOTO: AMY ENGLE

March 7-9

CRANE FESTIVAL

Witness thousands of cranes, ducks and geese fly sky-high in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. Every March these magnificent birds migrate to the San Luis Valley just in time for the Monte Vista Crane Festival. Festival-goers enjoy a range of activities, including photography workshops, sandhill crane tours, guest speakers and guided visits to local parks and canyons. Events at the Monte Vista Crane Festival take place at a number of locations around the valley. Updates and info available online. **MONTE VISTA**, mvraneifest.org

March 7-16

ALICE (IN WONDERLAND)

Follow Colorado Ballet down the rabbit hole for Septime Webre's acclaimed ballet, "ALICE (in wonderland)." Infused with humor, whimsy and athleticism, "ALICE (in wonderland)" promises an extraordinary journey that reimagines Lewis Carroll's classic tale in a way that is as enchanting as it is exhilarating—complete with composer Matthew Pierce's buoyant score, larger-than-

life sets and costumes, and a host of magical characters. **ELLIE CAULKINS OPERA HOUSE**, coloradoballet.org

March 7-16

DENVER RESTAURANT WEEK

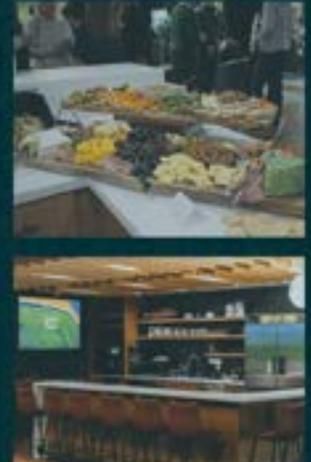
With an ever-growing number of food and beverage awards to its name (including several from the uber-prestigious James Beard Foundation and MICHELIN Guide), Denver has quickly become a dining destination

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for foodies. You'll find plenty of fine dining options at chef-owned eateries, along with cuisine from around the globe at gourmet food halls and markets, and fresh, local ingredients like green chiles and Colorado beef and lamb. Denver Restaurant Week will showcase the creative, exciting menus that diners have come to expect, with both to-go and in-person options and will include four price points: \$25, \$35, \$45 and \$55 for a multi-course meal. **DENVER**, denverrestaurantweek.com

March 8

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

International Women's Day (IWD) is celebrated annually across the world and WorldDenver is proud to host one of the largest IWD celebrations in the country. Join more than 700 community and business leaders, elected officials, students and supporters to celebrate women and girls' success around the world. Consider this your invitation to be part of this growing movement. **GLENDALE**, worlddenver.org

March 8

FAMILY DISCOVERY SERIES: "HANSEL AND GRETEL" BY OPERA COLORADO

Follow the trail of breadcrumbs to Opera Colorado's production of the beloved fairytale, "Hansel & Gretel." When they become stranded in the Magic Forest, things look grim indeed for Gretel and her brother Hansel. What follows is an enchanted

odyssey through the forest and into a house made of gingerbread. Sung in English and staged traditionally, this enchanting opera-performance is sure to entertain. A unique and creative way to incorporate classical literature and fairytales into your family's entertainment. 10 a.m. and 12 p.m. at **THE SCHOOLHOUSE**, parkerarts.org

March 9

A CELTIC AFTERNOON WITH PIPES & DRUM

This matinee performance will have you immersed in the sound of Colorado's deep Celtic roots, ancient threads that connect us all and echo from the walls of Cherokee Castle. This is an awaited return of the award-winning and beloved Denver Brass Quintet (DB5). In honor of upcoming St. Patrick's celebrations, the DB5 is joined by Celtic pipers for iconic favorites including "Amazing Grace," "Scotland the Brave," "Highland Cathedral" and much more. Make sure to bring your camera for stellar photo ops as you explore the Castle with the friendly docents before the concert. Reserved seating for your comfort. A cash bar will be available and afternoon refreshments are provided at intermission. **CHEROKEE RANCH & CASTLE**, cherokeeranch.org

March 12

YAMATO: THE DRUMMERS OF JAPAN

Expect remarkable athleticism, high energy

spectacle and drums that explode with energy. Passion meets tradition in a show that drums up the spirit of Japan. Taiko drumming is a centuries-old tradition in Japanese culture, and the drummers of YAMATO continue to challenge the boundaries of what it can be. They push themselves to their absolute limits and leave audiences breathless in the process. **LONE TREE**, lonetreeartscenter.org

March 13-15

BOULDER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Who's ready for a trip to Boulder? Film fanatics won't want to miss the 21st year of the Boulder International Film Festival. Quickly becoming an internationally acknowledged talent hub for theater, this yearly soiree is proof that the arts are alive and well in Colorado. The event features a wide variety of films from local, national, and international filmmakers, including many that have gone on to significant box-office success and multiple Oscar nominations. Adding to the BIFF experience are events featuring nationally renowned chefs, filmmaker happy hours, multiple opening night galas, talented musicians and much more. Passes on sale now. **BOULDER**, biff1.com

March 15

DENVER ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE

Don't miss the largest St. Patrick's Day parade west of the Mississippi. The route starts on Wynkoop at 9:30 a.m., turns down 17th Street

Hapa Connections!

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ON THE AGENDA // can't-miss events

in front of Union Station, then turns down Blake and proceeds past Coors Field all the way to 27th. Arrive early to stake out your favorite spot and check online for the parade lineup, a map and parking information. **DOWNTOWN DENVER**, denverstpatricksdayparade.com

March 15

SHAMROCK STAMPEDE

This annual family-friendly walk/run in Castle Rock raises awareness and funds for organizations helping veterans, first responders and others to break free from PTSD and find mental wellness. The event includes a state-championship 10K, the flagship 5K, a free kids' Sham-Scream Family Fun Run/Walk and an Irish-themed festival with beer (for adults), bagels, live music and vendor booths. **DOUGLAS COUNTY EVENT CENTER**, runtochangelives.org

March 15

ST. PATRICK'S DAY BAR CRAWL

Calling all Irish jig leprechauns, four-leaf clover wearers, Irish lovers, those with green clothes and anyone who love green beer. Six hours might not be long enough to experience all of the fun at this popular event that celebrates the luck of the Irish. It includes a self-guided bar crawl to a variety of venues with food and drink specials, plus a scavenger hunt for prizes, live music and more. 4–10 p.m. in **DOWNTOWN DENVER**, stpatrickscrawls.com

March 19

TOTS & TUNES

Tots & Tunes is a fun and engaging music program designed for young kids and their families to enjoy together. Look forward to live music, interactive activities and plenty of opportunities to mix, mingle and make memories. This year will feature the award-winning children's musicians Farmer Dave and Animal Farm for an interactive blend of music, movement and educational comedy. Their original songs explore themes of social-emotional learning, community, self-expression and the environment through the eyes of our furry, feathered, scaly and shell-dwelling friends. **SOUTH RIDGE RECREATION CENTER**, hrcaonline.org

March 21–23

DENVER HOME SHOW

The Denver Home Show returns featuring design and renovation experts, interactive exhibits and exclusive deals for all your home improvement needs. Get inspired with home and design tips from Craig Conover from Bravo's "Southern Charm." Discover the artistry of four talented local landscapers as they transform outdoor spaces into breathtaking havens. Step into a world of creativity and ambition as Denver's Children's Entrepreneur Market hosts more than 50 young innovators eager to share their creations. Plus, support local small businesses in the Made in Colorado Marketplace and be sure to visit the annual

Sogetsu Ikebana Flower Display. This is the ideal place to find great deals, fresh ideas and practical advice from trusted local professionals to make your dream home a reality. **NATIONAL WESTERN COMPLEX**, denverhomeshow.com

March 27

GAME SHOW NIGHT

Time for Game Show Night at HRCA. Host Rion Evans will lead the audience through favorite TV game shows like Family Feud, Wheel of Fortune, Jeopardy and Press Your Luck for chances to win exciting prizes. This event is great for the whole family. Attendees can expect questions answerable by ages 15+ (but not inappropriate for those younger) and audience participation. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. and a cash bar will be available. **SOUTH RIDGE RECREATION CENTER**, hrcaonline.org

March 30

DRAGONS AND MYTHICAL BEASTS LIVE

Enter into a magical world of myths and legends in this fantastical new interactive show for all the family. Unveil myriad dark secrets and come face-to-face with some of the most magnificent monsters and terrifying beasts ever to walk the earth. Discover the colossal Stone Troll, the mysterious Indrik and Japanese Baku, the Tooth Fairy (not as sweet as you'd think), an adorable Unicorn, and a majestic Griffin. Take your place among legendary heroes, just don't wake the Dragon. **PACE CENTER**, parkerarts.org

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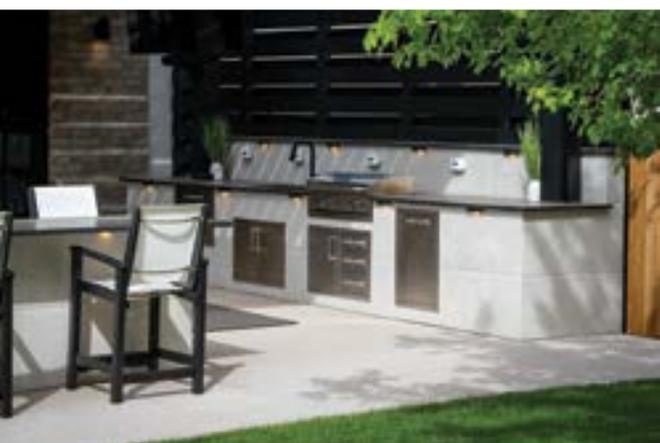
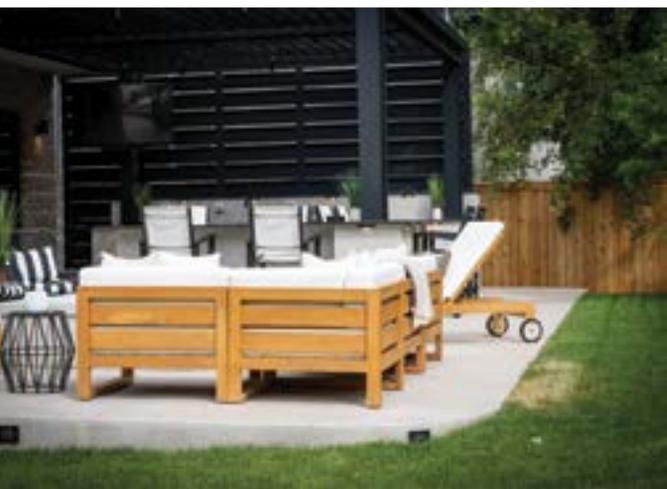
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