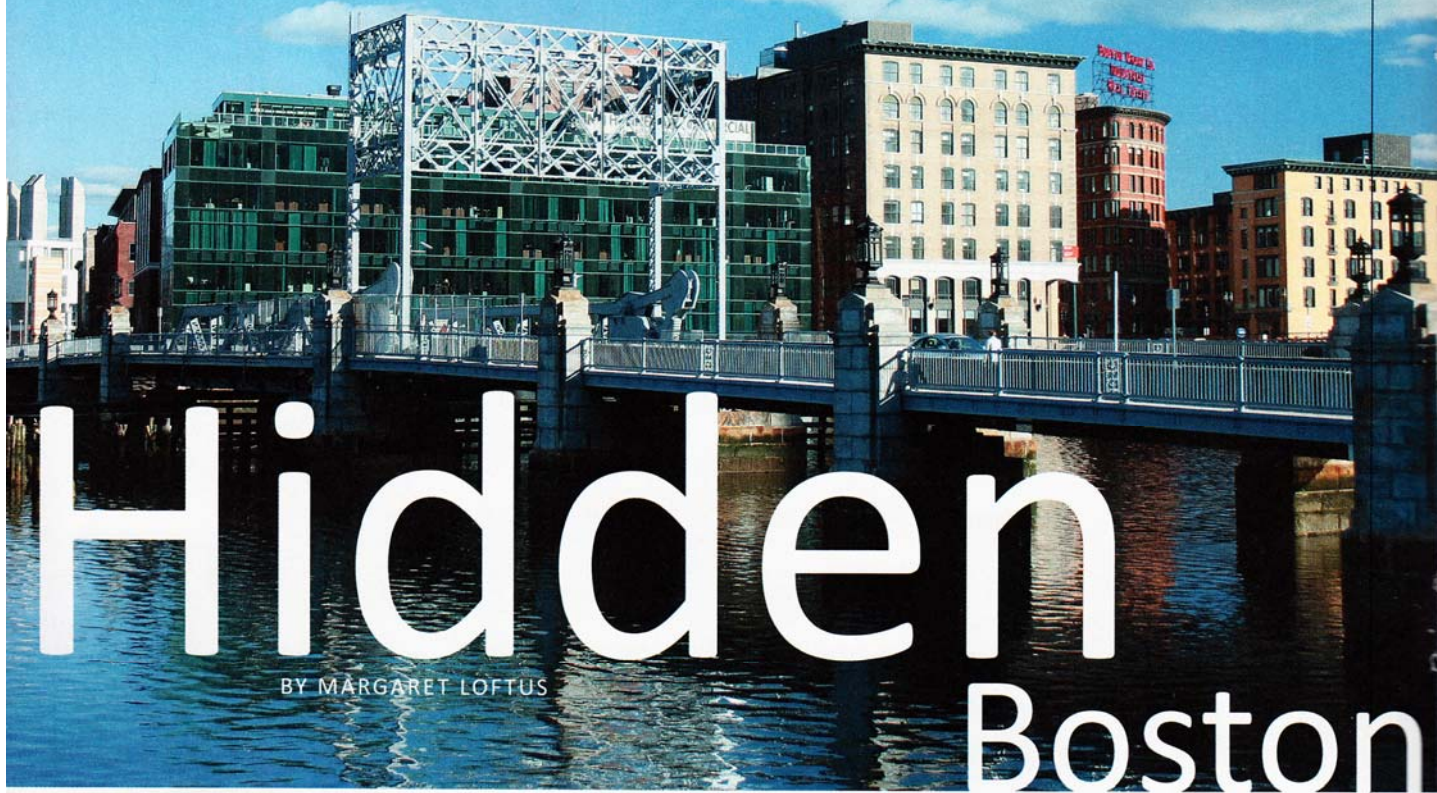


The **Fort Point** neighborhood is quickly hitting everyone's radar. Once gritty and industrial, these streets now bloom great dining and art enclaves.



Hidden Boston

BY MARGARET LOFTUS

Downtown is just across the channel, but you won't find many historical placards, Irish pubs or other tip-offs that you're in Boston in this corner of the city. With its warehouses-cum-art galleries and loft apartments, Fort Point feels more like freewheeling New York than buttoned-up Beantown. Which is why I love to come here, especially with Freedom Trail-weary out-of-town guests. Roaming these streets brings a whole new perspective to my adopted city.

The transformation from industrial wasteland to arty hot spot didn't happen overnight, but the neighborhood seems to be hitting its stride. The latest vote of confidence has come from local icon Legal Sea Foods, which opened a 20,000-square-foot flagship restaurant overlooking the harbor this spring. And next year, the \$25 million **Boston Tea Party Museum** (bostonteapartyship.com) is slated

to debut with replicas of the three ships colonists were aboard when they dumped tea into what some historians believe was the Fort Point Channel.

Some of the city's top tastemakers have set up shop here, including baker extraordinaire Joanne Chang, who opened an outpost of her **Flour Bakery** (flourbakery.com) on Farnsworth Street. Chang is renowned for her sticky buns—they trumped Bobby Flay's version on a Food Network "Throwdown" episode—and the competition for one on weekend mornings is especially steep. "We sell out of them before they're even out of the oven," marvels the cashier as she eyes the line behind me that extends to the door. It's true, they're amazing, but so is everything else, such as the egg sandwich with bacon, arugula, cheddar and dijonaise that my husband and I share before striking out to explore on a recent rainy Saturday morning.

The bakery buzzes with the stroller set, who fortify themselves before heading into the nearby **Boston Children's Museum** (bostonchildrensmuseum.org) to let their tots loose



Most visitors (and even locals) adore the tucked-away quality of Fort Point, a city within a city.



Yes, even kitsch design feels at home here.

on the three-story climbing structure made up of curved platforms while they soak up the panoramic view of downtown Boston in the glass lobby. But we make a beeline across the street to the **Grand Circle Gallery** (gct.com/grandcirclegallery) to peruse vintage travel posters collected by the owners of the travel company based upstairs. The posters rotate quarterly with special exhibitions throughout the year, and we catch the tail end of a sports show. (If only skiing were as glamorous as it seems in the Cortina poster!) An all-Africa exhibition will hang throughout the summer.

As we stroll toward the waterfront, **Louis** (louisboston.com), Boston's swank clothing store that moved from Back Bay to mod digs on Fan Pier last year, calls my name. There's a restaurant on the top floor with a deck where

you can watch planes take off and land at Logan. Alas, my vinyl-crazy husband is itching to see the latest exhibition at the **Institute of Contemporary Art** (icaboston.org) on how artists have used records as inspiration or as their medium (through Sept. 5). I'm drawn to David Byrne's original cover art for the Talking Heads' "More Songs About Buildings and Food," a collage of 529 Polaroids. We wind around a corridor that looks out across the harbor to find the small permanent collection in the East Gallery, whose highlight is a wall of Shepard Fairey posters. Even cooler, however, is spotting the street artist's signature Obey Giant on the wall of a warehouse on the way back toward Congress Street (visible from the corner of Thompson Place).

Late afternoon finds us at **Drink** (drinkfortpoint.com), a living-cocktail museum

where suspended mixologists quiz you on your poison: What flavors do you like? How do you feel about whiskey?—and *voila*, the bespoke cocktail. My Maimie Taylor (house-made ginger beer and freshly squeezed lime juice spiked with Scotch) was delicious, but my husband's Trinidad Sour, a deep-red blend of bitters, orgeat, lemon juice and rye, is a revelation.

We mull another round—the bartender nearly talked me into a rhubarb-infused concoction with celery bitters—but our dinner reservations, upstairs at **Sportello** (sportelloboston.com), beckon. Like Drink and the highly acclaimed fine-dining spot **Menton** (mentonboston.com) next door, this neo-Italian lunch counter is part of local celeb chef Barbara Lynch's restaurant mini-empire. There's nothing fussy about it; the kitchen is open, and customers sit on stools around two U-shaped counters with the neighboring red-brick turn-of-the-century warehouses looming outside the huge plate-glass window. A starter of lamb tartare is terrific, as is a bowl of gnudi with brown butter and black truffles, and a thick slice of roasted suckling pig.

Sportello is a total find, just like the rest of the neighborhood. ☺

Getting There

Daily nonstop flights to Boston on JetBlue and United Airlines from Dulles International and on Delta, JetBlue and US Airways from Reagan National.

Sky Guide

Portland, Ore. The last call will be bliss at the just-opened **McMenamins Crystal Hotel** (mcmenamins.com/crystalhotel; rates from \$85). For the uninitiated, McMenamins perfected the microbrewery in the Pacific Northwest, and the brandmeisters have branched out to sweet sleeps. Nice move, especially since the hotel is adjacent to the legendary rock venue, the Crystal Ballroom.

San Francisco. As Sonoma County gears up for the harvest, it's a good time to plan a late-summer visit. Perfect excuse: **Wine Country Weekend**, (sonomawinecountryweekend.com), Sept. 2–4, hosted this year at MacMurray Ranch with wine-maker dinners and barbecues under the stars.

Providence, R.I. A short drive from the airport to the Nantucket-like village of Watch Hill delivers you to the 49-room **Ocean House** (oceanhouseri.com; rates from \$504), which recently opened after a \$149 million renovation. A private beach, five restaurants, wine tastings and even culinary classes (want to see where those fresh scallops came from?) round out the salty getaway.

—Michael McCarthy