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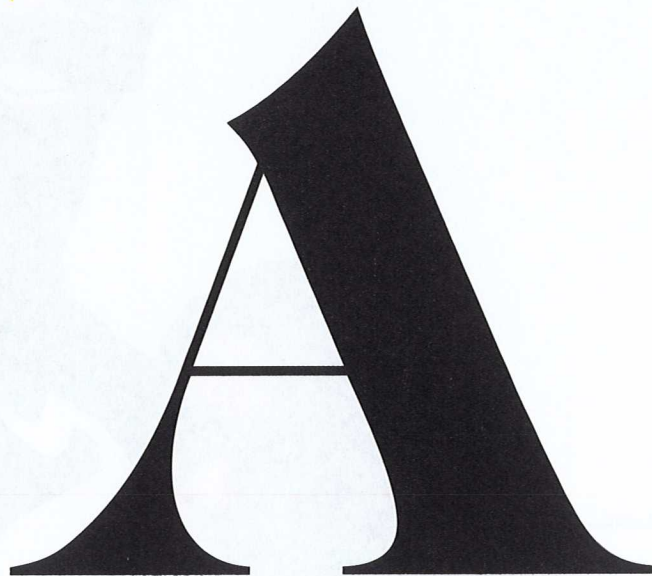
magazine

PULL-OUT
A recipe a day for
the next 2 months!

PHILADELPHIA

Words **Paul Dring** Photography **Matt Munro**





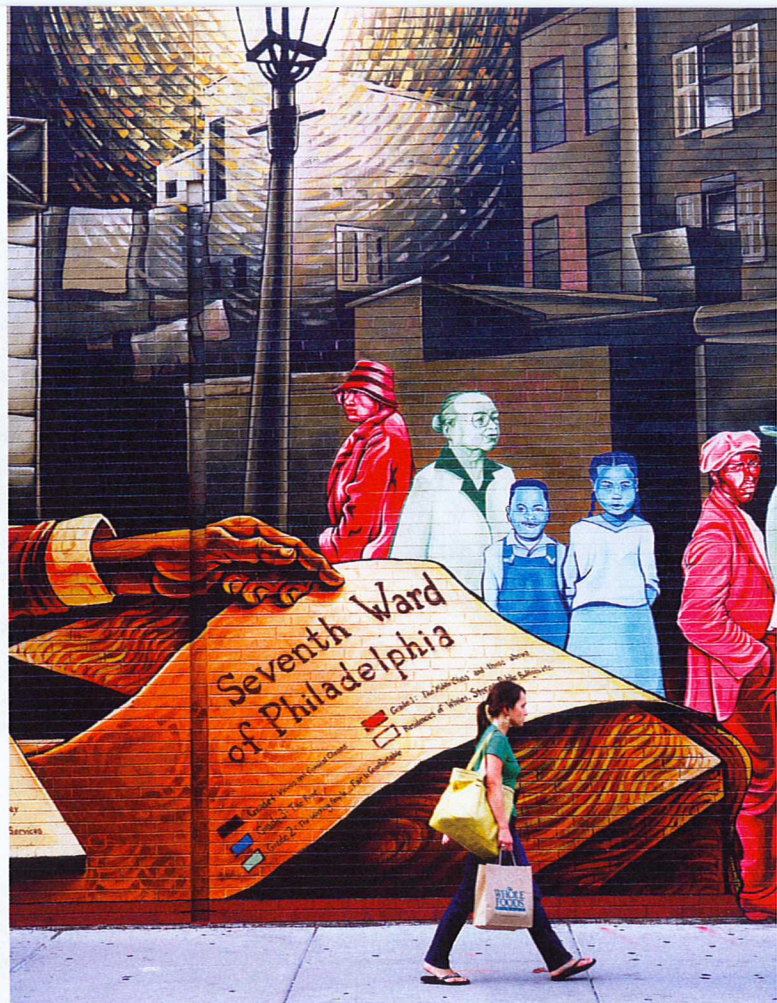
America's fifth largest city has a bit of an image problem. It's a place that's been named the country's ugliest city, according to a survey by *Travel & Leisure* magazine. It's been called Murder Capital USA, with more than one untimely demise every day. And, just for good measure, its residents are regularly named as among America's fattest, which, given the stiff competition involved, is quite an achievement - up there with being named Britain's least popular banker, perhaps, or Parliament's most dishonest member.

This particular unwanted accolade isn't surprising when one bears in mind Philadelphia's main contribution to world gastronomy. The Philly

cheesesteak consists of slices of fried rib-eye steak, topped with fried onions and slathered in melted cheese, served up in a foot-long roll. This normally weighs in at around 900 calories a pop, though when ABC News analysed the chargrilled flat-iron steak with fries and cheese sauce served at a place called the Cheesecake Factory, they found it clocked up an impressive 2,320 calories - almost all an Englishman's recommended daily intake of 2,500.

Despite the cheesesteak's undoubted popularity, however, it's unfair to write off Philadelphia as a blue-collar gastronomic wasteland. Take the onion crêpe at Vetri. This sweet yet deeply savoury concoction comprises onions caramelised during eight hours of slow cooking, wrapped up in a crêpe, which is sliced across its length and topped with grilled parmesan. The effect looks like a slice of marrowbone or a meat pie, and is just one reason why this little bistro has been called America's best Italian restaurant. A word of warning: if you plan to go next summer, book your table now.

This is the kind of sophisticated, Old World-style establishment you might expect to find in a city that prides itself on being America's oldest. It was here, in 1776, that the founding fathers put their quills to the Declaration of Independence, and prompted the jubilant citizens to rush out onto the streets in a fit of nation-building zeal and burn their British flags. Everywhere you turn in Philadelphia, you come across America's oldest something or other, whether it's the first hospital (established by Benjamin Franklin in 1751) or the longest continually occupied street (Elfreth's Alley, 1702), the first ice-cream maker (Bassetts, 1861) or the oldest theatre (the Walnut Street



Clockwise from above left: As well as the Amish stalls at the Reading Terminal Market, Philadelphia is renowned for its many colourful murals. Plus there's lots of evidence this is the City of Brotherly Love, from the friendly service at Di Bruno deli, founded by brothers Danny and Joe Di Bruno in 1939, to at Robert Indiana's statue in Love Park, aka JFK Plaza.



Theatre from 1802, which it would seem is before Americans forgot how to spell).

Vetri is just one restaurant in a city buzzing with culinary inspiration and full of great places to eat. "The scene's grown a lot in the last 10 years," says chef and restaurateur Jose Garces over a pisco sour in his city-centre spot, Chifa. "People are into good food here. A lot of the people who live in or around the city eat out, so that's great for business. It helps new restaurants to open, and it keeps the marketplace competitive." Jose should know. Chifa is the fifth restaurant he's launched since October 2005, when he cut his teeth on upmarket tapas joint Amada. "It's an interesting cuisine we do here at Chifa," he says. "It's a co-mingling of the cultures of Peru and China. We have a knowledgeable clientele in Philly. They want good food but they want it to be creative."

A case in point is across town in Zahav, presided over by Israeli-American chef Mike Solomonov. Set in an unremarkable 60s building, the cavernous dining room that improbably manages to combine design elements from both municipal gymnasium and medieval banquet hall is an unlikely setting for what is supremely good food. Drawing inspiration from the food of Israel, as well as the wider Eastern Med, the menu offers

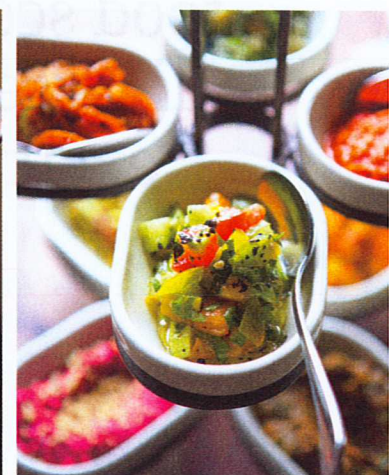
everything from beautifully zingy little salads such as fried cauliflower, and beetroot and couscous served with laffa flatbreads, to the pièce de résistance: a whole roasted lamb shoulder, cooked to tender perfection with a pomegranate-lamb jus and chickpeas.

Zahav's inventive menu sits easily in a city whose culinary creativity has received a significant boost from its burgeoning BYOB scene. At almost 200 places in the city, restaurateurs have opted to forgo a wine list and encourage diners to bring their own bottles. In the south of the city, French chef Pierre Calmels and his wife Charlotte have recently opened a little bistro, Bibou, and, as Pierre says, having a wine list was never an option. "The liquor licence here is about \$85,000 and on top of that you have to buy the stock for your bar. That's a lot of money. So the BYOB system is very liberating. It makes it possible for a young couple like us to open a restaurant. And it's better to have a small place of your own than work in a big place belonging to someone else."

Since opening to great acclaim in May, Pierre has found that many of his diners use BYOB as an opportunity to bring along the calibre of wine that would otherwise be too expensive to order from a list. "We've started to see some great bottles in here," he says. "We've had old bordeaux, like a 1962 St Julian, and a 1977 port. When you see bottles like that being brought in, it's a good sign for your place."

Philly restaurants such as Bibou are all handily placed to take advantage of plenty of great local produce, as one can see displayed at Reading Terminal Market. This huge covered market, which sprawls over an entire city-centre block, has been the city's top spot for fresh produce since its inception in 1892. Today, it sells a huge range of foods, though it is the Amish stalls, packed with goods from the farmlands of Lancaster County's Mennonite

The Philly food scene is as diverse as its community. Sample pho (opposite) at Pho 75, then (below, from left) Chifa's empanadas, coffee at Gleaner's, manhattans at Southwark and salads at Zahav.





Christian communities, that really catch the eye. At one counter, bonnet-and-shawl-clad Amish ladies dispense huge dill pickles from big wooden vats. At another, an old man with a straw hat and a moustacheless beard rolls out ring doughnuts using a purpose-designed, cast-iron roller. At a third, a teenager with incipient facial hair prepares pretzels – a pair of comfortable trainers his only sartorial concession to modernity.

Sarah Cain runs Fair Food Farmstand at the market, a non-profit operation that sells produce, from Amish farms and otherwise, grown within the local area. “Reading Terminal Market has been an operating farmers’ market since the 1890s, when the farmers used to catch the train into town, sell their wares, and take the train home again. But over the years, it had gotten away from this, and a lot of the produce that was grown locally would be sold in auction houses to be shipped around the country. Philadelphians were losing touch with the fact that we’re surrounded by such fertile farmland, which is one of the reasons we started the farmstand – to reconnect the market and its shoppers with their roots.”

This is not the only market in town. In the south of the city, the Italian Market runs along 10 blocks of 9th Street, and is home to a bewildering variety of food shops, from the truly wonderful Di Bruno deli to Claudio’s cheese shop next door and Sarcone’s Deli bakery. This Italian enclave is just one of many ethnic elements that make Philadelphia’s food scene so diverse and exciting. There are West Philly’s Ethiopian restaurants, such as the excellent Abyssinia. Then there’s South Philly’s Vietnamese scene, where places such as Pho 75 turn out authentically simple fare. There are Indian restaurants, a buzzing Chinatown, great

Mexican cantinas and German, Caribbean, Greek, Persian and Thai places.

There are old-fashioned American diners, such as the Continental on 2nd Street, with its 50s-influenced décor and menu. This whimsical sentimentality reaches its full expression next door, at eccentric ice-cream parlour the Franklin Fountain, which comes down on just the right side of kitsch (though – with its Edwardian décor and 100-year-old soda fountain fashioned out of Mexican onyx – it’s a close call). Staff in period costume serve ice-cream sundaes that go by names such as Dr Dovey’s Classic 1904 Banana Split, and there’s a selection of old-time fizzy drinks, from root beer to cherry soda.

As moustachioed owner Eric says, as he hands over a business card detailing his website address, “You have to learn how to tie a bow tie to work here.” It’s a blend of pride in the old and embrace of the new that seems curiously, essentially Philadelphian.



The Franklin Fountain takes customers on a trip down memory lane (this page), while Vonda Bucci and her daughter serve Philly’s best cheesesteaks at John’s Roast Pork (opposite).



Cheesesteaks

"You wait till you eat it, you'll love it. It's like your fish and chips in England." Vonda Buccini, 76-year-old doyenne of the Philly cheesesteak, is seated outside John's Roast Pork, the shack she runs with her son John on the southern edge of town. It's only 11am, but already the picnic tables are filling up with her loyal clientele. "These are my customers," she says, saying hello to regulars Ralph and (another) John at the next table. "I knew them from when they were little. Most of my customers call me Mom."

John's has been voted purveyor of the city's best cheesesteak, beating more high-profile operations such as Jim's Steaks, Geno's Steaks and Pat's King of Steaks. It was at Pat's that the cheesesteak was invented back in 1933, when Pat Olivieri was searching for an alternative to the hot dogs he was selling. Consisting of fried slices of rib-eye beef, fried onions and a lurid orange gloop called Cheese Whiz, all packed into a long, soft roll, his cheesesteak soon became a popular lunch option for Philly's working men. Pat's still stands opposite its rival Geno's in the heart of Philly's Italian

Market and customers tend to be fiercely loyal to one or the other, though these days the queues that snake round the block are just as likely to be tourists as locals. For Vonda, the secret to a great cheesesteak is simple. "Good bread, good meat, good cheese and the way it's done," she says. "It's not pre-cooked, it doesn't sit on the grill getting dry. Each sandwich is made to order." Over the years, the Buccinis could have capitalised on their good press and expanded their business but, for Vonda, this was never an option. "We need to keep it small so we can keep it family-run. It's the family factor that means we can guarantee quality."

Philadelphia's food scene is diverse and exciting

City Guide

EAT & DRINK

Abyssinia 229 S 45th Street; +215 387 2424. First-rate Ethiopian restaurant serving spicy stews and injera flatbread.

Amada 217 Chestnut Street; +215 625 2450, amadarestaurant.com. Top tapas at Jose Garces' flagship restaurant.

Bassetts Reading Terminal Market; +215 925 4315; bassettsicecream.com. This old-fashioned ice-cream stand has been selling frozen confections for nearly 150 years.

Bibou 1009 S 8th Street; +215 965 8290, biboubyob.com. Assured bistro fare at the newest star of the BYOB brigade.

Chifa 707 Chestnut Street; +215 925 5555, chifarestaurant.com. Chef Garces' Peruvian-Cantonese joint serves superb ceviche.

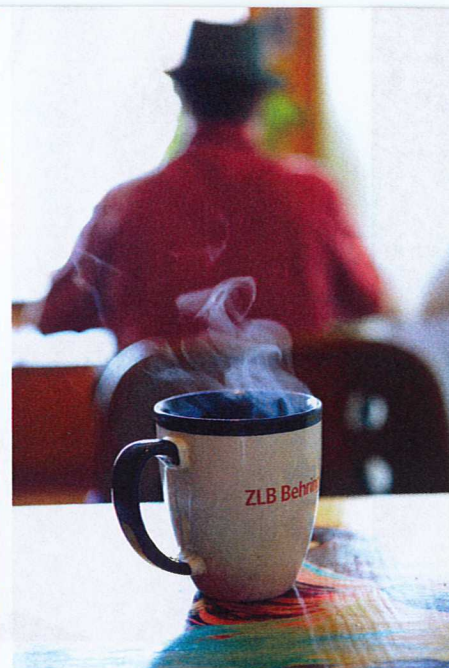
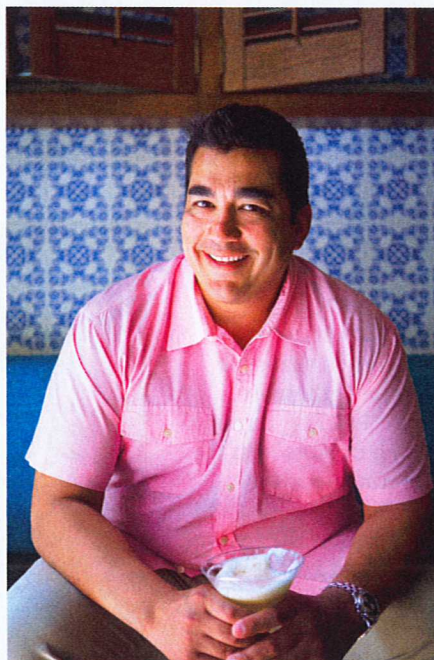
Continental 138 Market Street; +215 923 6069, continentalmartinibar.com. This stylish diner was Stephen Starr's first. With 12 in town, he's the biggest player on Philly's restaurant scene.

Fountain Restaurant The Four Seasons Hotel, 1 Logan Square; +215 963 1500, fourseasons.com. The city's premier destination for haute cuisine and starched napery.

The Franklin Fountain 116 Market Street; +215 627 1899, franklinfountain.com. Deliciously eccentric Edwardian-style ice-cream parlour with 100-year-old soda fountain.

Geno's Steaks 1318 S 9th Street; +215 389 0659, genosteaks.com. Cheesesteak institution in the Italian Market, though its owner has racially dubious serving policies (English speakers only) that are enough to make one go elsewhere.

Gleaner's Café Gallery 917 S 9th Street; +215 923 3205. Art



café in the Italian market serving some of the best coffee in town.

James 824 S 8th Street; +215 629 4980, jameson8th.com.

Fine-dining restaurant, strong on locally sourced seasonal produce.

Jim's Steaks 400 South Street; +215 928 1911, jimsteaks.com. Eye-catching cheesesteak place whose design blends 30s art deco and 50s diner chic.

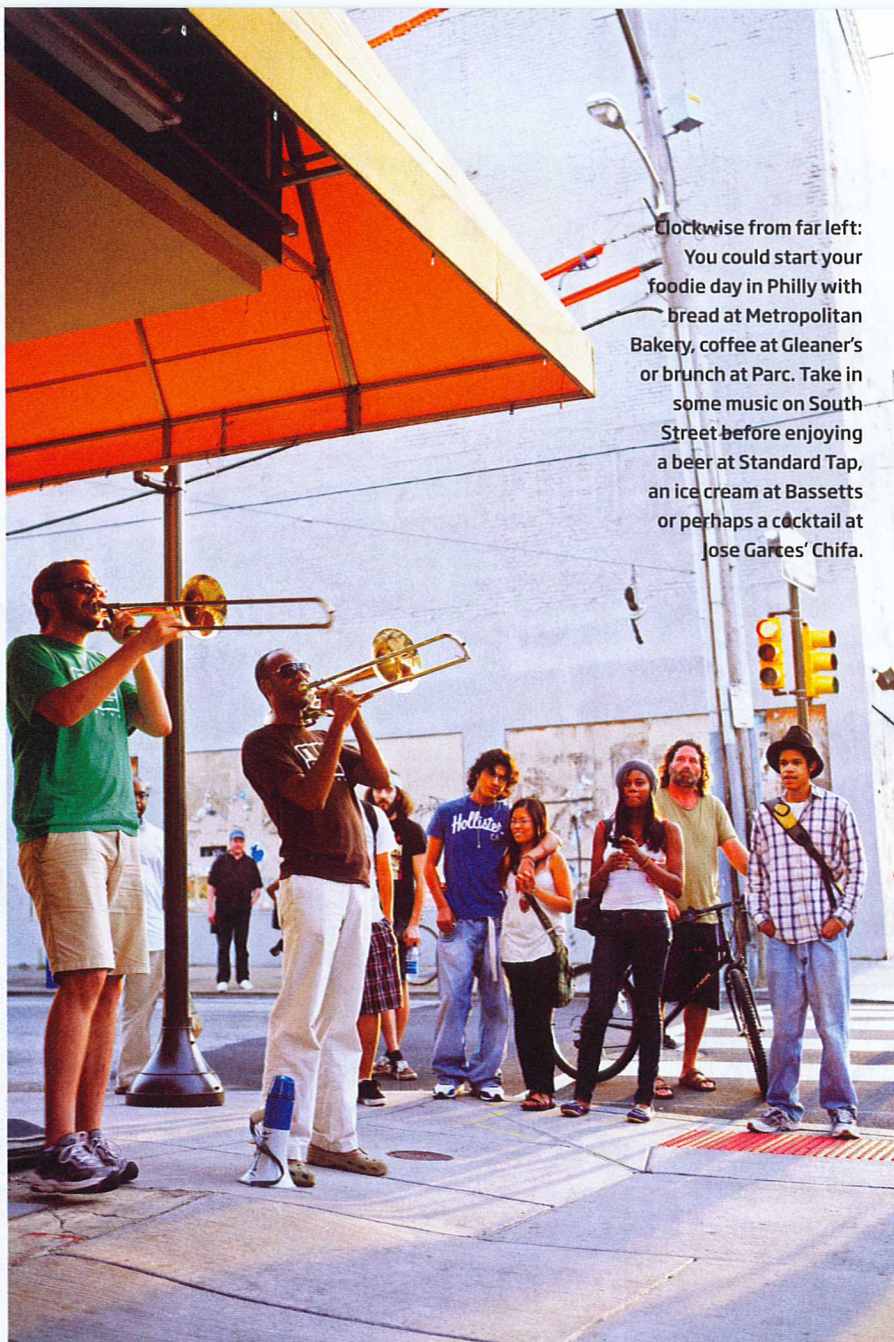
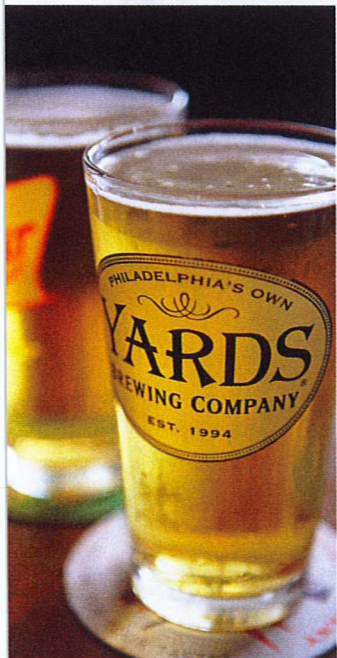
John's Roast Pork 14 E Snyder Avenue; +215 463 1951, johnsroastpork.com. Family-run pork sandwich shack with the best cheesesteak in town.

Little Fish 600 Catherine Street; +215 413 3464, littlefishphilly.com. Chef Mike Stollenwerk's tiny South Philly BYOB does some of the best seafood in town.

Ms Tootsie's Soul Food Café 1314 South Street; +215 731 9045. Superior southern-fried chicken at this South Street joint.

Osteria 640 North Broad Street; +215 763 0920, osteriaphilly.com. Much bigger than Marc Vetri's place on Spruce Street, so easier to get a reservation.

Parc Rittenhouse Square; +215 545 2262, parc-restaurant.com.



Clockwise from far left: You could start your foodie day in Philly with bread at Metropolitan Bakery, coffee at Gleaner's or brunch at Parc. Take in some music on South Street before enjoying a beer at Standard Tap, an ice cream at Bassetts or perhaps a cocktail at Jose Garces' Chifa.

Stephen Starr's Parisian-style brasserie features a marble-topped wooden bar, terrace tables and a menu of classic French dishes.

Pat's King of Steaks 1237 E Passyunk Avenue; +215 468 1546, patskingofsteaks.com. The original cheesesteak joint, though not necessarily the best, despite what the huge queues would lead you to believe.

Pho 75 1122 Washington Avenue; +215 271-5866. Vietnamese canteen serving the town's best pho. Where the

city's chefs go for breakfast.

Southwark 701 S 4th Street; +215 238 1888, southwarkrestaurant.com. Go for Sheri Wade's assured bistro fare and husband Kip's cracking cocktails.

Standard Tap 901 N 2nd Street; +215 238 0630. Brilliant pub in the boho Northern Liberties district, serving local beers and superior grub, such as soft-shell crab sandwich with fries.

Vetri 1312 Spruce Street; +215 732 3478, vetriristorante.com. The hottest ticket in town. Diners are drawn from across

the north east to sample Marc Vetri's upscale take on rustic Italian cooking.

Villa di Roma 932 S 9th Street; +215 592 1295.

Warming spaghetti-house fare in the Italian market.

Zahav 237 St James' Place; +215 625 8800, zahavrestaurant.com. Wonderful Israeli and eastern Mediterranean cooking from talented chef Mike Solomonov.

SHOP

Claudio King of Cheese 924 S 9th Street; +215 627 1873.

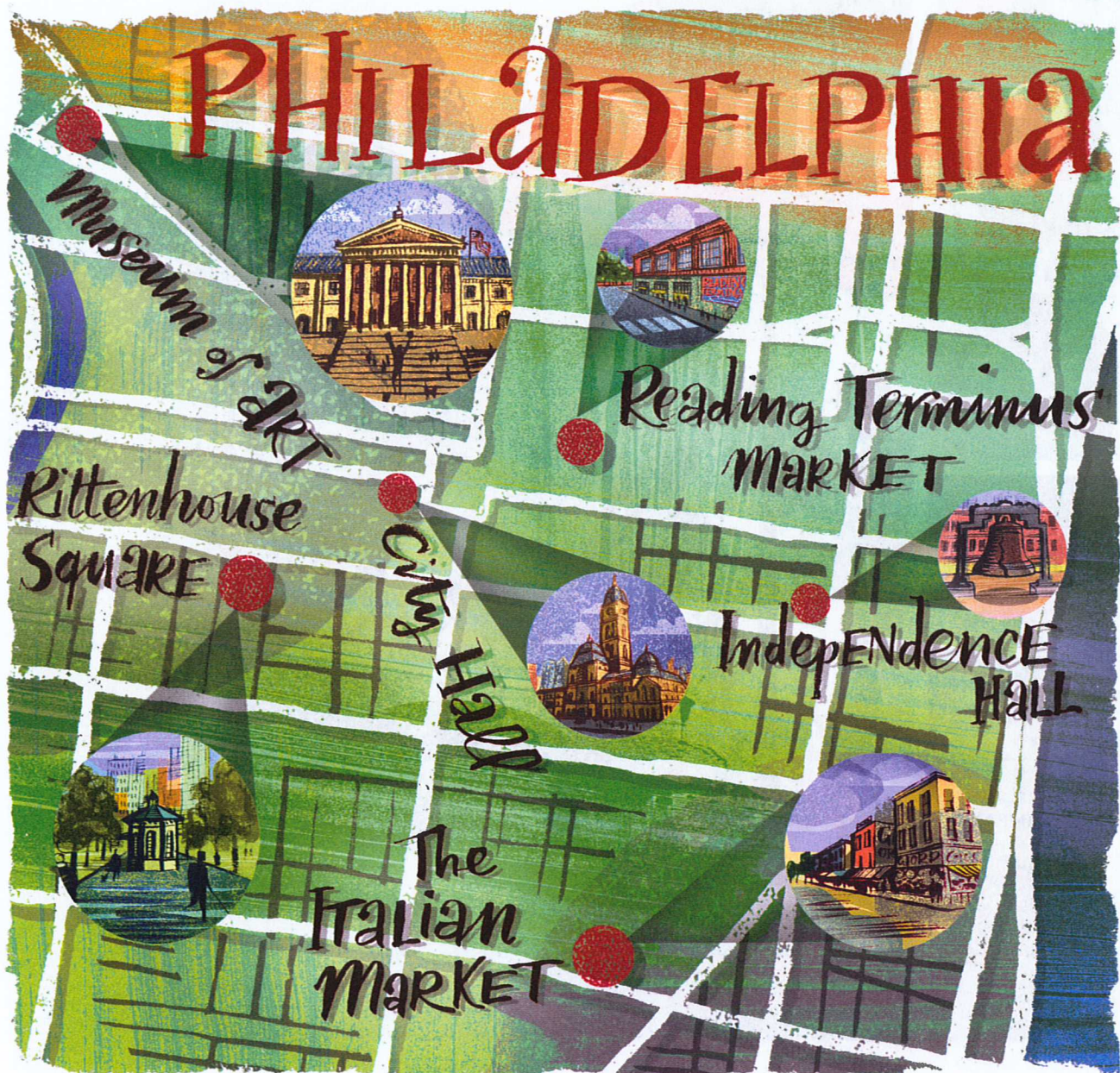


Illustration: Nigel Owen

Huge punchbags of provolone are suspended on meat hooks at this Italian Market stalwart.

Di Bruno Brothers 930 S 9th Street; +215 922 2876, dibruno.com. The Italian deli that everyone wishes they had in their neighbourhood. A tiny shop, but you could happily lose a few hours here.

Fair Food Farmstand Reading Terminal Market; +215 627 2029, whitedogcafe.foundation.com. Non-profit stand in the indoor market providing a showcase for Pennsylvania and New Jersey's

farmers to bring their produce to town.

Metropolitan Bakery 262 S 91th Street; +215 545 6655, metropolitanbakery.com. Good coffee and pastries at this Rittenhouse Square branch of Philly's best artisan baker.

Pumpkin Market 1610 South Street; +215 545 3924, pumpkinphilly.com/market. Deli arm of a burgeoning South Street empire, which also includes a much-lauded BYOB and a café. Stocks great local produce, including Wildflour baguettes, Uncle Henry's handmade pretzels and Kauffman's apple cider.

ESSENTIALS

Jamie Magazine stayed at the Four Seasons Hotel (1 Logan Square; +215 963 1500, fourseasons.com/philadelphia), which boasts one of the city's finest restaurants. Rooms start at \$315. US Airways (usairways.co.uk) has direct flights to Philadelphia from London Heathrow and Birmingham. British Airways (ba.com) also has direct flights to Philadelphia from London Heathrow. For more information on the city of Philadelphia, visit philadelphiaUSA.travel or call 0844 880 6853. ●