

Creative Inspiration

Treasure hunting in Orlando's Design District

By Kristen Manieri • Illustration by Anne Smith

You won't find any splashy street signs to let you know you've arrived in the Orlando Design District, but, as you take notice of its whimsical collection of boutiques, eateries and businesses, it's easy to see why the area has unwittingly become the unofficial hub of all things creative in the city.

Spanning several blocks just north of downtown, the district encompasses Ivanhoe Village, long known as an antique-lover's haven, and Mills 50, home to an eclectic selection of restaurants and bars where urban hipsters gather after working at nearby creative houses, including many of the city's interior design, architecture and advertising firms.

Some might call it a self-realizing gravitational pull that seems to continuously attract more and more independent eateries and one-off boutiques. Unique businesses with creative slants are opening all the time. And, while Orlando's main draw for visitors has always been—and likely always will be—its remarkable theme parks, it's nice to see the city's urban side carve out its own distinctive offering worthy of at least a day's perusal. Here are some of our favourite Design District gems.

Orlando's Design District



TOP 5

Shops for Retro, Antique and Upcycled Goods

Retromended

Vintage clothing packs the racks in this highly curated N. Orange Avenue boutique where retro finds in polyester, suede and corduroy have stood the test of time. (retromended.com)



Rock & Roll Heaven

Sort through the expansive collection of vinyl LPs, 45s, cassettes and posters at this jam-packed record shop. (rock-n-rollheaven.com)



The Carousel Emporium

Dozens of dealers display their bygone kitsch inside this 6,500-square-foot antique hub that also hosts a monthly vintage flea market in its parking lot. (carouselemporium.net)



A & T Antiques

Unearth a quirky lamp or stately rolltop desk inside the massive showroom at the area's oldest and largest antique store. (aandturnitureantiquesorlandofl.com)



1618 Something Different

It's like being on the set of *Three's Company* when visiting this quirky shop that specializes in furniture and home accessories from the 1960s and '70s. (somethingdifferentretro.com)



1 Teal's Twisted Bliss

Step up to the colourful walk-up window at this sweet little ice cream shop offering a variety of fanciful frozen concoctions. Soft-serve ice cream, Italian ice and gelati are topped with unlikely treats like Fruity Pebbles and Lucky Charms. (facebook.com/TealsTwistedBliss)

2 Washburn Imports

New and antique tables, wardrobes and artwork—all hand-selected from Bali, India, Indonesia and Thailand—make this distinctive furniture store a pleasure to peruse, especially at night when the back room becomes Imperial Wine Bar & Beer Garden, a somewhat clandestine watering hole offering a carefully curated selection of boutique wines and craft beers. (washburnimports.com)

3 QUI Studios

Large sculptures and custom furniture fill this 8,000-square-foot gallery, which also serves as a working studio where husband-and-wife team Jacquelyn and Jacob Harmeling invoke their art and interior-design backgrounds. Besides finished pieces made from glass, reclaimed metal and wood, the studio showcases works-in-progress that can be perused daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (quidesignstudios.com)

4 L2 Studios, Inc.

This petite paper shop serves as a storefront venture for Lure Design, a creative studio specializing in online and print-design work. Inside the sunny space, artists showcase their eccentric style via small-batch cards, journals and posters. (l2designcollective.com)

5 The Matador

Patrons shoot pool or cozy into antique couches to sip gin and tonics—available on tap—at this small, but much-loved bar where a blackboard boasts a rotating menu of Prohibition-era cocktails and craft beers. (facebook.com/TheMatadorBarOrlando)

6 Twelve21 Gallery

Works by up-and-coming local and national artists line the walls of this second-floor space overlooking Lake Ivanhoe. Open on weekdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Twelve21 offers pieces starting at US\$100 and schedules a slew of opening reception parties throughout the year. (twelve21gallery.com)

7 Tako Cheena

A successful marriage of Latin and Asian cuisine has catapulted this tiny, vegan-friendly eatery to legendary status amongst locals who descend on its handful of tables for lunch and dinner. Try the Panko Crusted Cod and the Tom Yum Mojo Shrimp takos. (321-236-7457)

✈ GETTING THERE WestJet flies to Orlando 39 times a week from 11 Canadian cities.