

LOW COUNTRY STAR

Thanks to expanding art and design communities, urbane shops, and an exploding restaurant scene, there's new vibrancy in old Charleston



Clockwise from left: Palladian-style Drayton Hall, one of the finest pre-Revolutionary homes in the country. Furnishings and decorative items at John Pope Antiques. The 1893 building that houses the restaurant Husk, which serves up innovative Southern cuisine. A selection of classic menswear at Ben Silver.

Coursed by palmetto-lined promenades and graced with some of America's best-preserved historic architecture, Charleston, South Carolina, still bows to traditions—from Sunday suppers to sweet tea and pralines—while keeping up with the 21st century. The city is bursting with a cosmopolitan energy that is attracting once-strayed Southerners and a growing number of transplants who are shaking things up—in food, fashion, and design. “Charleston is filled with people doing creative things,” says Brett Carron, a former New Yorker who owns the men’s shop Indigo & Cotton. “This is a receptive, supportive community. You can take risks.”

Newcomers and old guard alike turn out for the **Charleston Antiques Show**, March 22–24, which is marking its tenth year with an opening-night benefit for Historic Charleston (historiccharleston.org), the fair’s organizer. An even bigger draw is the **Spoleto** performing-arts festival (spoletousa.org), running May 24 to June 9 this year and presenting everything from Shakespeare to flamenco to Rosanne Cash. Of course, with



its cultural sites, beaches, smart shops, and one of the country’s liveliest food scenes, Charleston is bustling all year long.

WHERE TO STAY

Most of the city’s best hotels can be found downtown, close to the center of the action. The newest, just opened in February, is the 18-room **Zero George** (zerogeorge.com), occupying a series of converted 19th-



century homes connected by lovely courtyards. Book the gracious garden suite that is set in an old carriage house and features a parlor, bedroom, and study with pine floors and handcrafted furniture. Another recently opened boutique property is the **Restoration on King** (restorationonking.com), 16 suites in three adjacent historic buildings, with exposed-brick walls and dark-wood floors; a breakfast of fresh fruit and just-baked muffins is delivered to guests each morning in a picnic basket.

Perhaps the grandest of the city’s grande dame hotels is the five-star **Charleston Place** (charlestonplace.com), boasting a large spa and 435 spacious rooms, decorated with 18th-century-style furnishings and silk brocades. The hotel is also home to