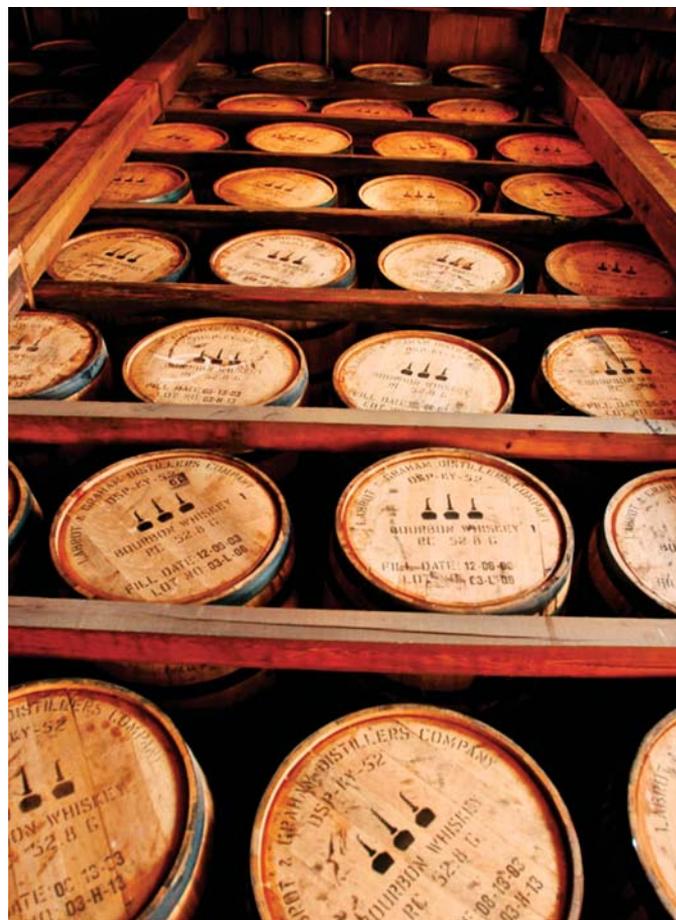




LIFE IMITATES ART! Clockwise from left: The lobby at the new 21c Museum Hotel; bourbon barrels at the Woodford Reserve distillery; downtown Louisville.



# THE RADAR WEEK ENDER

BY AMALIE DRURY

## TWO HOT MINUTES *With hipper-than-thou hotels and 'hoods plus a fine-wine attitude toward bourbon, Louisville is the place to catch a buzz*

A late-April day in Louisville, Kentucky, is laden with enough springtime sweetness, enough pre-Derby jitters and enough partying, preening and anticipation to lift the city up off of its riverside flood plain and carry it away on a magic Bluegrass carpet ride. It's all about the horses, of course.

For 134 years, the cycle of life in Louisville has revolved around that first-Saturday-in-May moment when the celebrities with their private jets and the locals with their wide-brimmed hats stand elbow to elbow at Churchill Downs to sing "My Old Kentucky Home." Some—like Usher, Kid Rock or Queen Elizabeth—read the lyrics from their programs; some wipe away sentimental tears as they gaze at the dirt-covered track. But all are waiting to watch a pack of the world's fastest thoroughbreds streak toward the most famous finish line in sports.

Yes, the Kentucky Derby and its preceding two-week festival are Louisville's *raison d'être*, but a recent influx of non-race-related cool is proving that these days, the River City isn't dozing off for the rest of the year.

### 21c MUSEUM HOTEL

**THE BUZZ:** Husband-and-wife philanthropists Steve Wilson and Laura Lee Brown (great-granddaughter of George Garvin Brown, founder of the liquor behemoth Brown-Forman Corporation) are two of the most prominent visionaries behind downtown Louisville's emerging hipness, currently

anchored by the 21c Museum Hotel. The couple conceived the hotel as a place to showcase their more-than-2,000-piece contemporary art collection.

**THE NEIGHBORHOOD:** Main Street, once home to 50 distilleries and known as "Whiskey Row," is the largest collection of buildings with cast-iron facades outside of Manhattan. Within walking distance are the Louisville Slugger Museum, the new Muhammad Ali Center, the kitschy-but-fun Fourth Street Live entertainment district and Actors Theatre, presenter of the annual Humana Festival of New American Plays. **THE PERKS:** The 91-room 21c doubles as North America's first museum dedicated exclusively to works of art produced in the 21st century. A 5,000-square-foot exhibition space features pieces by such acclaimed artists as sculptor Yinka Shonibare and video artist Bill Viola. Start your night with in-room Mint Juleps served from a sterling silver set, then stroll the galleries before hitting the town. **THE VERDICT:** 21c is decidedly of-the-moment—and the Southern hospitality doesn't hurt a bit. 700 W. Main St., 877.217.6400 or [www.21cotel.com](http://www.21cotel.com). Rates from \$199-\$379 per night.

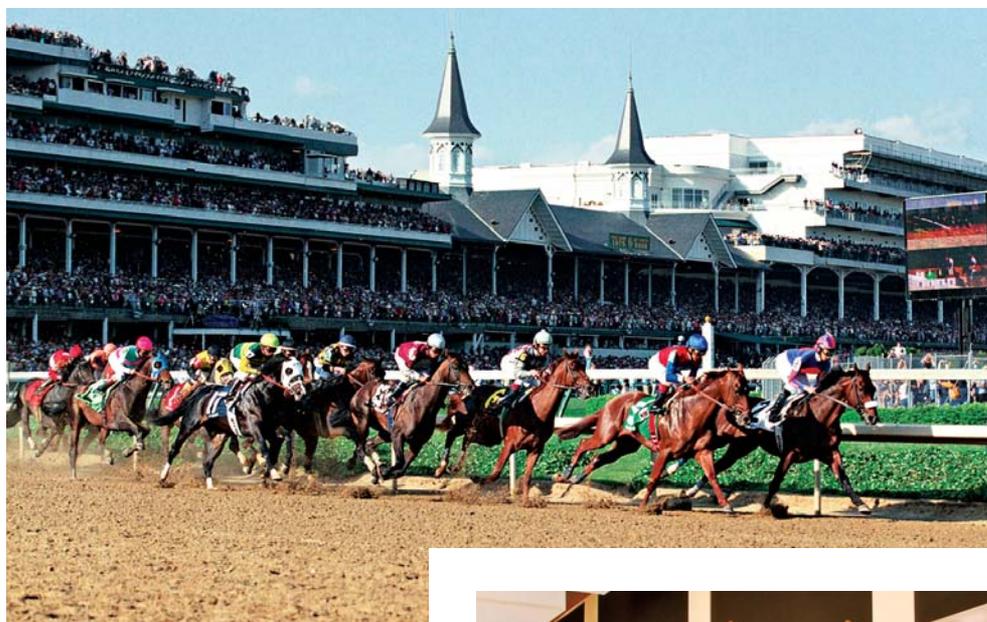
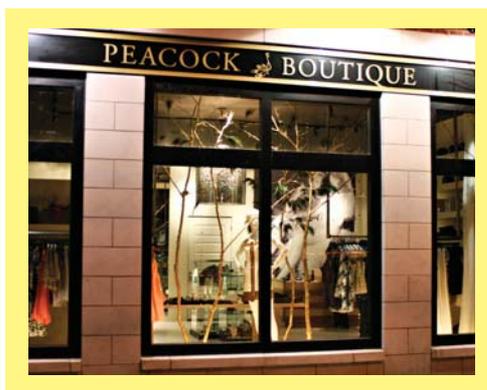
### PROOF ON MAIN

**THE BUZZ:** Chef Michael Paley serves up modern American fare with Tuscan influences at Proof on Main, the award-winning restaurant attached to 21c. **THE MENU:** With an eye toward sustainable farming, artisanal foods and the agricultural bounty of the humid, greenhouse-like Ohio River Valley, a night at Proof on Main is a sophisticated study in

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21c MUSEUM HOTEL PHOTO BY KENNETH HAYDEN; WOODFORD RESERVE PHOTO COURTESY OF BROWN-FORMAN; LOUISVILLE SKYLINE PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

**SOUTHERN BELLES**  
**Clockwise from top left:**  
 The Peacock Boutique on Frankfort Avenue; the city skyline as it will look when Museum Plaza is completed; the bar at Proof on Main; the Run for the Roses (otherwise known as the Kentucky Derby) at Churchill Downs.



garden. **THE VERDICT:** Spearheaded by a team of four developers (including 21c's Brown and Wilson), Museum Plaza is a groundbreaking move for a community that has long held a fondness for tradition. It proves Louisvillians are determined to push their city toward innovation. *Museum Plaza sales center, 707 W. Main St., 502.638.4924.*

### THE BOURBON TRAIL

**THE BUZZ:** Kentucky's version of the Napa Valley experience, this rural tour of seven distilleries offers the best chance to embrace the state's two great loves: horses and bourbon. **THE DRIVE:** Centered around the nearby cities of Lexington and Bardstown, the route winds through Bluegrass hills laced with white-painted fences and serene, verdant landscapes. **THE HIGHLIGHTS:** From the old stone buildings at Woodford Reserve to the shiny modern visitor's center at Maker's Mark, each distillery offers up modest samples of the strong stuff (this is a driving tour, after all), while guides shed light on the bourbon-making process. **THE VERDICT:** Well worth the trek outside Louisville city limits for the postcard scenery alone. *859.336.9612 or www.kybourbon.com.*

...CONTINUED down-home influences. Try the soul-soothing, melt-in-your-mouth Kentucky bone-in bison tenderloin and the sinfully creamy Weisenberger grits. **THE BAR:** Continuing the art-gallery theme with walls covered in a provocative collection of prints and photographs, the bar is stocked with a wide-ranging selection of Kentucky bourbons, including some bottled exclusively for the restaurant. Try one mixed with Proof's housemade ginger-clove syrup. **THE VERDICT:** The service and food are vibrant, never stuffy. *702 W. Main St., 502.217.6360 or www.proofonmain.com.*



### MUSEUM PLAZA

**THE BUZZ:** The new tallest building in Kentucky will be the 61-story Museum Plaza, currently under construction and slated for completion in 2011. **THE PLAN:** Initially met with huffs from the conservative old guard of Louisville, the Lego-like building—a trio of steel-and-glass towers that's been said to resemble a three-legged chair—was designed by New York architect Joshua Prince-Ramus. It has since been lauded by the design community for its unique effort to blend culture and commerce; its 1.5 million square feet will be divided into a mix of luxury condos, a Westin hotel, 30,000 square feet for the University of Louisville Master of Fine Arts program, a contemporary art museum, offices and a public

galleries, restaurants, bookstores and upscale boutiques makes Frankfort Avenue a true pedestrian paradise in a city otherwise ruled by car culture. **THE GOODS:** Pick up a perfect Derby dress by Jay Godfrey at the swank new Peacock Boutique (2828 Frankfort Ave., 502.897.1158 or [www.shopthepeacock.com](http://www.shopthepeacock.com)), then stroll down to Bourbons Bistro (2255 Frankfort Ave., 502.894.8838 or [www.bourbonsbistro.com](http://www.bourbonsbistro.com)) for Chef Michael Crouch's pan-seared ruby trout and a Washington Apple cocktail made with (what else?) bourbon, apple schnapps and cranberry juice. **THE VERDICT:** A pocket of urban chic in a city that just might be the biggest small town in America. [www.frankfortave.com](http://www.frankfortave.com). ■

PEACOCK BOUTIQUE PHOTO BY JASON MUDD; MUSEUM PLAZA PHOTO COURTESY OF MUSEUM PLAZA; CHURCHILL DOWNS PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LOUISVILLE CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU; PROOF ON MAIN PHOTO BY JOHN ROTT