



Andrew Sessa photo

Big changes are remaking the Eternal City — here's a cheat sheet for what's new in the Caput Mundi right now

By Andrew Sessa

ROME, Italy — Visitors to Rome often approach the city with what you might call a Julius Caesar attitude: “*Veni, vidi, vici*,” they say. “I came, I saw, I conquered.”

Colosseum? Check. Imperial Forum? Check. Coins tossed in the Trevi Fountain, neck cramps suffered at the Sistine Chapel, scoops of gelato eaten in front of the Pantheon? Check. Double check. And then they're out.

There's good reason for this, of course. Not for nothing is Rome called the Eternal City — for the most part, it seems to stay eternally the same. So why change the itinerary from the greatest hits tour your parents did in 1967, or even the one your grand-touring ancestors did in 1767?

But Rome is a place in flux these days. The city has seen two popes in as many years and three

INSIDER'S GUIDE

prime ministers in the last 18 months.

And that's just the beginning.

Despite the economic crisis that continues to linger in Italy in general and in Rome in particular — or perhaps because of it — there's innovation aplenty to be found here.

Exciting just-opened hotels and novel restaurants impress with their style and design; rising neighborhoods and forward-thinking individuals demand attention; and even the old is new again, as ancient and recently uncovered historical sights have opened to the public for the first time.

Today, getting to know the city is all about going deeper, feeling more adventurous and veering much further off the typical tourist path. Here are seven insider tips for making the most of Rome right now.

Rome continues on L4



Marco Bertani / D.O.M. Hotel

Top: The domes and rooftops of Rome in silhouette, including the spiraling tower of Sant'Ivo alla Spaienza and St. Peter's Basilica. Above: A suite at the chic new D.O.M. Hotel.

HOME DESIGN

A different point of view

Bucking tradition, a Houston family of four sold their Heights home to create an artful, high-rise abode in downtown

By Sarah Rufca

Colombe and Marcelo have arguably the best backyard in Houston. The 9- and 5-year-old children, along with their parents, Matt Emal and Shannon Langrand, live on the 24th floor of One Park Place, the high-rise just across the street from Discovery Green.

“The expected route in Houston is that after you have kids you move to a cul-de-sac in the suburbs, but that just wasn't us,” said Langrand.

The married couple, who own advertising and marketing agency Langrand & Co., didn't expect to become a family of urban dwellers. They bought a historic house in the Heights in 2002, but after 11 years and two

Home continues on L5



Johnny Hanson / Houston Chronicle

Former Heights residents Matt Emal and Shannon Langrand, with kids Colombe and Marcelo, traded their home for an apartment at One Park Place.

GEAR

Hoodiebuddie headphone/microphone jacket

Here's a utilitarian piece of clothing that solves a couple of problems for travelers: the annoying tangle of headphone chords, and the worry of carrying your smartphone visibly on foreign streets. The HB “Base” sweatshirt has integrated headphones and microphone built into the draw-strings of the zip-up's hood. You hide your phone or music player into a zippered side pocket that has its own plug-in jack, and make calls while talking into your cuff like a secret agent. It is comfy and durable, and the mic and headphones still work perfectly after putting it through the wash a couple times.



Hoodiebuddie

Why we like it: An affordable and warm, stealth way to carry headphones and a microphone while traveling.

Not so much: People tend to look at you funny when you have your hood draw-strings stuck in your ears.

Vitals: \$71.40 at shop.hoodiebuddie.com

Bill Fink

New dining, lodging and shopping options around Rome

Rome from page L1 [DINING] Nibble around the edges

Some of the most exciting new spots to eat in Rome these days are well beyond the well-trod historic center. All you need to experience them is cab fare — or a willingness to brave public transportation — and a sense of adventure. A good appetite won't hurt, either.

In Monte Verde Vecchio, you'll find **Cesare al Casaletto** (Via del Casaletto, 45; +39-06-536-015). It's been in business since the 1960s but for the last few years run by Leonardo Vignoli, whose passion for carefully sourced regional ingredients, long-forgotten Roman recipes and all-natural wines shines through in everything he does.

More recently opened are two spots in the city's far east. In nightlife-savvy Pigeto, one of Rome's most on-the-rise neighborhoods, **Mazzo, the Fooders** (Via delle Rose, 54; thefooders.it) — a bricks-and-mortar iteration of a popular former pop-up — specializes in small-bites and craft beers.

Pro Loco Dol (Via Domenico Panaroli, 35; diorignelaziale.it), in even more far-flung Centocelle, doubles as a restaurant and deli-like specialty food shop, serving giant boards of local cured meats and cheeses and wood-fired pizzas with intriguing toppings, plus a small and frequently changing assortment of pastas, mains and vegetables.

Heading south of the city center to the Testaccio area, you'll encounter the **Nuovo Mercato di Testaccio** (Via Galvani, 57), a covered market near former cattle stockyards, which themselves now house a branch of the city's contemporary MACRO museum. Nearby, try the **Città dell'altra Economia** (Largo Dino Frisullo; cittadellaltreconomia.org), a foodie destination comprising a simple coffee bar; an organic food store; a weekend outdoor organic market; and **Stazione di Posta** (stazionediposta.eu), a restaurant that plays with traditional dishes.

Farther south, in Garbatella, there's the huge Roman outpost of **Eataly** (Piazzale XII Ottobre 1492; roma.eataly.it), the pan-Italian specialty-food hall and restaurant complex that got its start in Turin and now, in partnership with Mario Batali, has U.S. branches in New York and Chicago. Another option is **Porto Fluviale** (Via del Porto Fluviale, 22; portofluviale.com), a buzzing, subway-tiled, all-day dining spot serving casual Italian dishes, with an emphasis on the tapaslike Venetian snacks called *cicchetti*, in its lounge, bar, trattoria and pizzeria.

Trapizzino (Piazzale Ponte Milvio, 13; trapizzino.it) is worth a detour up north to Ponte Milvio. It's an order-at-the-counter joint, serving the novel snack food from which it takes its name: a triangular bit of pizza dough stuffed with hearty fillings such as shredded bits of chicken cacciatore, meatballs in red sauce or zucchini and eggplant Parmesan.

Beyond official restaurants, Rome has a budding pop-up dining scene. **The Eatery** (theateryinrome.com) hit the ground running this winter with semi-monthly, four-course, locally procured dinners that combine the backgrounds of its creators, an Italian-born sous chef at the American Academy in Rome and his Danish pastry-chef girlfriend.



Eataly

In Rome's Garbatella area there's the huge outpost of Eataly, the pan-Italian specialty-food hall and restaurant complex that got its start in Turin and now, in partnership with Mario Batali, has branches in the U.S.



Gerardo Gaetani

The Eatery's Sofie Wochner and Domenico Cortese offer a semi-monthly, locavore-savvy pop-up dinners.



Porto Fluviale

All-day dining spot Porto Fluviale serves casual Italian dishes, especially Venetian snacks or *cicchetti*.



J.K. Place Roma

The months-old J.K. Place Roma hotel has 30 rosewood-paneled, marble-bathed and smartly appointed rooms and suites.



0° 300° Cold and Grill

0° 300° Cold and Grill fills the roof terrace of the historic center's First Hotel and boasts great city views.

Meanwhile, in addition to conducting market tours and leading lunchtime cooking demonstrations, self-described "food interpreter" **Eleonora Galasso** (eleonoragalasso.com) hosts Italian-focused dinners once or twice a month at her three-suite **La Regola 67** hotel.

[HOTELS] Sleep in stylish new stays

After what seemed like ages without a new hotel of note, Rome has welcomed a pair of perfectly appointed, aesthetically minded boutique spots.

A stone's throw from the Spanish Steps, past the west end of high-end shopping mecca Via dei Condotti, sits **J.K. Place Roma** (from €540 per night, Via di Monte d'Oro, 30; jkroma.com), the months-old sister property of the beloved J.K. hotels in Florence and Capri.

Here, Florence-based architect Michele Bönan and consummate host

and hotelier Ori Kafri have created a residential-feeling home-away-from-home that takes its cinematic, midcentury modern cues from Federico Fellini's "La Dolce Vita" and Tom Ford's "A Single Man." In addition to 30 rosewood-paneled, marble-bathed and smartly appointed rooms and suites, the hotel has a living roomlike lobby, book-lined library and bistro café. An alfresco rooftop lounge is expected to bow this summer.

A block off the Tiber River, meanwhile, a team of chic natives have opened the noir-feeling **D.O.M Hotel** (from €400 per night, Via Giulia, 131; domhotelroma.com) in a 17th-century former monastery on the very aristocratic street Via Giulia. Combining influences gothic and contemporary, Art Deco and Hollywood regency, its 24 rooms, clubby bar, lounge-like restaurant and sun-soaked rooftop terrace all offer a sexy boudoir feel.



The Gin Corner

The Gin Corner in Rome, as its name suggests, focuses on sips made from the distilled-juniper spirit.

[RETAIL] Mount a shopping excursion to Monti

It feels of late like every major high-fashion Italian label has launched or re-launched a flagship near the Spanish Steps, with Bulgari, Bruno Magli, Max Mara, Pucci and Versace all now newly in place, and Valentino soon opening a massive store next to its headquarters just off Piazza di Spagna.

For a more under-the-radar retail experience, however, those in the know head to the neighborhood of Monti, just south over the Quirinal Hill from the historic center. Here, on the parallel streets of Via dei Serpenti and Via del Boschetto, as well as Via Panisperna and others running perpendicular, you'll find a fleet of artisanal and one-of-a-kind items, as well as the vintage and unknown.

Among the newest arrivals are the jewelry shop **Lo Scrigino di**

Valentina (Via dei Serpenti, 135), where designer Valentina Pacifici creates contemporary cameos, some incorporating skull and bone motifs, as well as more classical looking pieces using precious metals, coral and turquoise. Nearby, **Wow Bar** (Via del Boschetto, 123; wowbar-shop.com), a spinoff of Monti's popular Gallinelle women's boutiques, does casual pieces plus brightly colored and patterned shirts of its own production.

In addition to the linens, rugs and jewelry it imports from Turkey, **Fondaco dei Turchi** (Via degli Zingari, 12; fondacodeiturchi.com) has a selection of Italian cashmere and deconstructed-looking, all-black women's wear from local micro-label FRI.LA. Slightly older is women's vintage shop **Blue Goose** (Via del Boschetto, 4; +39-06-4890-6738), offering a mix of midrange and high-end Italian labels, and **Le**

If you go

GETTING THERE

There's no nonstop commercial flight to Rome from Houston, but flights with one stop to Rome's Leonard da Vinci-Fiumicino Airport (FCO) from IAH start from about \$1,200 and are available on Air France, Alitalia, British Airways, Delta, KLM and United.

GETTING AROUND

Rome is a walking city more than anything else, and you'd be remiss if you don't explore on foot, even if you get lost now and again. The underground metro's two easy-to-navigate lines hit many of the top tourist sites, however, and a single ticket, good for 100 minutes, costs €1.50, with daily tickets available for €6. Both cover not only the metro, but also the extensive (though considerably more opaque) bus and tram systems. In town, reasonably well-priced cabs can be hailed but are best found at plentiful taxi stands. Cabs from the airport to the city center have a fixed rate of €48, and the air train from FCO to Termini, the main train station, costs €14.

Talpe (Via Panisperna 222a; le-talpe.it), whose eclectic mix of jewelry, art and fashion changes frequently.

If you need a shopping break, grab a coffee at the months-old café **La Casettita** (Via Madonna dei Monti, 62) or a snack at the equally new **Dall'Anto** (Via Madonna dei Monti, 16; dallanto.com), a bakery focusing on delicious breads and snacks made from ancient types of wheat as well as chestnut and chickpea flours.

[NIGHTLIFE] Quaff craft beer and cocktails

Having swept through most major American cities, not to mention London, Paris, Tokyo and beyond, the crazes for local artisanal beers and artfully made cocktails have finally hit Rome.

Settembrini Birra (Via Ciro Menotti, 32; viasettembrini.com), in the northern reaches of the Prati neighborhood, is among the latest brew bars to join more longstanding and centrally located beer bastions like the cavernous **Open Baladin** — with 20 to 30 beers on tap plus 100-plus more in bottles — and smaller **No.Au**.

For harder drinks, the reservations-only, password-protected **Jerry Thomas Project** (Vicolo Cellini, 30; thejerrythomasproject.it) gives the city what may well be its first bar with real speakeasy style.

Although largely focused on natural wines, **Litro** (Via Fratelli Bonnet, 5; vinerialitro.it) in the Gianicolo Hill area also specializes in tipples made with mezzal. **The Gin Corner** (Via di Pallacorda, 2; hoteladriano.com), as its name suggests, focuses on sips made from the distilled-juniper spirit; from the folks behind Barnum, a pioneer in Rome's classic cocktail scene, it sits in the Hotel Adriano.

Two others with hotel connections are **Co.So.** in Pigneto (Via Braccio da Montone, 80) whose mixologist comes from the tip-top bar at the ultraposh Hotel de Russie, and **0° 300° Cold and Grill** (Via del Vantaggio, 14; ristorantealloro.it), where creative drinks can be paired with food by a Michelin-starred chef. It fills the rooftop terrace of the historic center's First Hotel and offers some of the best 360-degree views in town.

Rome continues on L6

Latest Roman sites and side trips



Fiorano, a 20-minute drive from central Rome, is a small organic farm, winery and cafe. It would make a great side trip.

Rome from page L4

[PILGRIMAGE] Rediscover the Vatican

Holy Father-turned-international rock star Pope Francis — Papa Francesco in Italian — isn't the only new thing remaking the Vatican, which expects a crowd of up to 5 million pilgrims for the canonizations of popes John Paul II and John XXIII on April 27.

The Vatican Museums (Viale Vaticano; mv.vatican.va) have debuted or re-opened several new spaces in the past 18 months, including the **Profane Museum**, whose cache of small 17th- and 18th-century *objets* such as cameos, glass pieces, ivories and bronze statuettes are displayed in the gallery's original ornate Brazilian-wood cabinets, and the **Carriage Pavilion**, which shows off how papal modes of transportation have evolved over the years. **The Vatican Historical Museum**, which sits above the Carriage Pavilion, will soon emerge from its own reorganization and renovation.

Also part of the museums but requiring a separate ticket and guided tour, the **Via Triumphalis Necropolis** was unveiled this winter after a 60-year excavation, revealing a fascinating and expansive burial site, used from the 1st

century B.C. until the 4th A.D. and filled with sarcophagi, statues, mosaics and frescoes.

Want to stay close to the Holy See? Next month, Small Leading Hotels is debuting the nine-suite **L'Angolo di San Pietro** (from €580 per night, Via Stazione Vaticana, 1; langolodisanpietro.it), located in an early-20th-century former Catholic guesthouse only slightly beyond the southern walls of Vatican City. The nearby but much larger **Gran Meliá Rome** (from €475 per night, Via del Gianicolo, 3; melia.com), whose outdoor pool and gardens make it unique, debuted two years ago in a centuries-old ex-convent.

[SITES] Venture underground

A pair of ancient sites, only newly open to the public, invite history buffs to descend through the ages, going underground to go back in time.

What is today the oval-shaped Piazza Navona sits atop a stadium originally built in the 1st century A.D. by Emperor Domitian. Now, after extensive excavation, a piece of the complex's below-street-level ruins have opened as the **Stadio di Domiziano museum** (stadiodomiziano.com), showing off the structure's impressive travertine archways, columns and staircases in all their glory.

Through May 4, the museum's temporary galleries will exhibit photographs of Pope John Paul II, some never before seen.

Elsewhere in the city, on the edge of the Villa Ada park, the newly revealed **Catacombs of Priscilla** (Via Salaria, 430; catacombepiscilla.com) comprise eight miles of 2nd-to-5th-century burial chambers and galleries, including the tombs of many early Christian martyrs and some beautifully restored frescoes.

[SIDE TRIPS] Get out of town

Those looking for a relaxing little day trip will find a perfect destination in **Fiorano** (Via di Fioranello, 34; fattoriadifiorano.it), a 20-minute drive or 90-minute bike ride from the center of town along the Appian Way. Alessia Antinori, whose renowned and aristocratic wine-making family has held this acreage for centuries, created a small organic farm, winery and cafe that opened in September, offering a table-to-farm experience for city-weary locals and visitors alike.

Further afield, but an easy overnight, is the 12-room **La Bandita Townhouse** (from €195 per night; 111 Corso Rossellino; labanditatownhouse.com), which opened last Easter in a 15th-century former convent in the picture-perfect medieval hilltop town of Pienza, about a two-hour drive from Rome.

Sitting in the rolling hills of southern Tuscany's Val d'Orcia, the Townhouse offers easy access to the nearby wine capitals of Montalcino and Montepulciano, with their Old World tasting rooms and ancient architecture. But the hotel's hands-on American owners and operators — a former music industry executive and his writer wife, whose first La Bandita outing, a converted farmhouse just outside of Pienza, won raves — have also injected some highly contemporary cool to its downtown-loft décor, as well as to the modern Tuscan menus at its restaurant.

Andrew Sessa is a freelance writer living in Rome.

GAUGE

On the market in the downtown area, by price

Commerce Towers: 3 bed/2½ bath apartment in the heart of downtown is nearly

3,200 square feet and has features such as crown molding, granite counters, and recessed lighting intermixed with 18-foot ceilings in the 700-foot living room, which is adjacent to a lofted bedroom and study space; \$1,390,000



Rise Lofts: On the lively edge of Midtown, this contemporary 3 bed/2 bath apartment

is one of four penthouse units on the 15th floor. It has 2,359 square feet, including a 742-square-foot terrace, plus a gourmet kitchen, 15-foot ceilings and floor-to-ceiling windows with unobstructed views of the city; \$869,000



Warehouse District: Built in 2005, this 4 bedroom/3½ bath townhouse has a 4,800 square

feet, downtown views and several large glass-block windows that provide both natural light and privacy; \$645,000



St. Germain: Hardwood floors, exposed duct work and a wall of windows give an urban feel

to this 1,764-square-foot, 2 bath/2 bath loft, which also includes a study nook and walk-in closets; \$325,000



Franklin Lofts: 1 bed/1 bath apartment boasts a functional layout that maximizes the unit's

1,117 square feet, including a 15-foot walk-in closet in addition to exposed brick and cement walls, 15-foot ceilings and a chalkboard backsplash; \$234,900



Bayou Lofts: Exposed brick pairs with modern stainless steel appliances and high-

end bathroom surfaces in this open 1 bed/1 bath loft apartment with 913 square feet, a small balcony and north-facing views of Buffalo Bayou; \$224,900



HAR photos

Your Sunday Indulgence

Treat yourself to Houston culture, fashion, and fun every Sunday in the Houston Chronicle. #ZestMe

We're combining the sections you love —

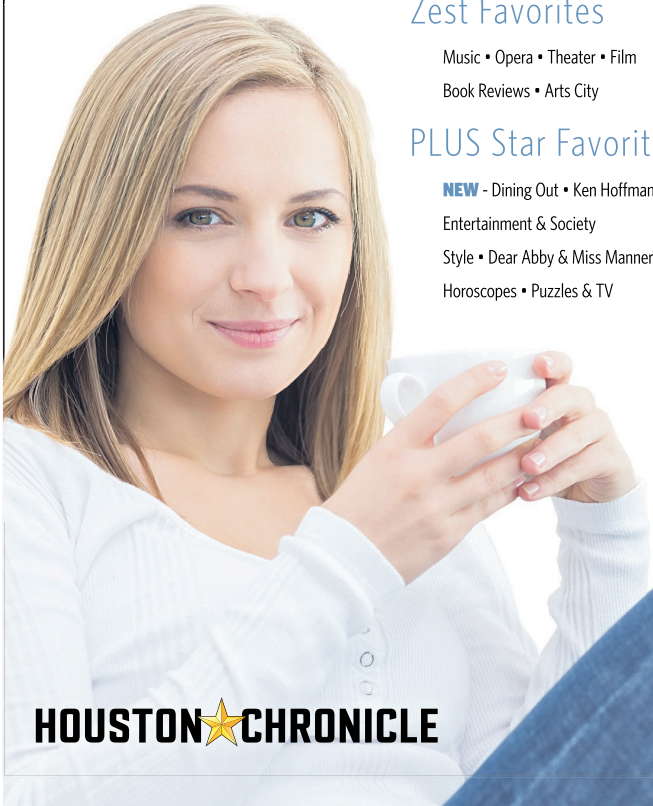
Zest and Star!

Zest Favorites

Music • Opera • Theater • Film
Book Reviews • Arts City

PLUS Star Favorites

NEW - Dining Out • Ken Hoffman
Entertainment & Society
Style • Dear Abby & Miss Manners
Horoscopes • Puzzles & TV



HOUSTON★CHRONICLE

VISUAL ARTS
George Star captures an artist's side of Houston

LOOKING BACK
Looking back on the MS 150

BOOKS
Check out this week's best sellers

PHOTOS
A look at the city's best

ZEST PLUS STAR
Local fashion designers getting national attention

AN ARTIST REINVENTED
Watercolor's exhibit offers luminous look at John Singer Sargent's work

THE WIZARD OF OZ
A look at the city's best