

**“Beauty and culture are vital to any city’s appeal, but they become pretty irrelevant if the air is so polluted you can’t go outside.”**

– Nathan, Yours Partners





# LOCAL

JAN/FEB 2010>>DESTINATION>>MERIDIEN  
LAT:47°36'0" LONG:14°31'0"

# MRD



## P48/ 2 WHEELS GOOD

Alexes K., director of Meridien's Urban Museum, takes us on a personal tour. Sometimes the best way to see the city is by bicycle. By Franklin M.

## P60/ BIN THERE, DONE THAT

The way we generate and dispose of refuse is not sustainable in the long run. That's why Meridien's Waste Disposal guru, Glen W., is developing new ways to get residents off their trashy ways. By Ella G.

## P68/ FARM IN THE BACKYARD

More and more Meridien residents are forgoing the flower garden and swing set for tomato plants and chicken coops. Local contributing editor Martin H. talks to some of these modern-day Old McDonalds.



## P12/ LETTERS

## P18/ THE LOCAL LIST

From art restorers to restaurants, your monthly mix of better urban living.

## P22/ PRODUCT PROTECTION

The latest do-no-harm wares that Local editors have been using, abusing and keeping around the office.

## P30/ 3X3

Our three monthly problems for another three of our favorite creative types: what to do with Meridien's empty South Square.

## P76/ BY THE NUMBERS

How does Meridien stack up to other favorite cities?

When I asked Alexis, director of Meridien's Urban Museum, to give me her personal tour of the city she's resided in since her teenage years, she accepted, but only if we did it by bicycle. I'm not a fitness freak and Meridien is known for its formidable hills, so when 6am rolled around, when I noted damp streets outside my apartment window and my cell phone started buzzing, I was hoping it was Alexis calling to tell me that we were switching to Plan B.

"Sorry, Charlie. We're not going to let a little misty air ruin our fun. Anyway, the forecast says it will clear up by late morning."

So much for Plan B.

We met at the Smith Street subway station, a mid-century, mildly brutalist concrete cube designed by architects in 1962 that is in the process of a full greening renovation.

"I love this building. It's a modern masterpiece—poetic instead of cold and off-putting. The city could have torn it down and put up a more contemporary structure, but they recognized its historical importance and

instead are just working to make it more environmentally friendly and energy efficient through our Off-Grid program."

We were here not to tour the subway station, though, but to pick up our transportation for the long ride ahead. And, no, weren't taking the tube. ("It's not going to be that hard a ride," Alexis emailed me earlier in the week, "Meridien's flatter than you think. Especially if you know the secret routes.") Meridien has its own bike-sharing program—called HUB—that has become increasingly popular with the locals, especially now with hundreds of bike drop-off/pickup stations scattered across the city.

One swipe of your credit or debit card and you're off to the races. Amazingly, the program has reduced traffic in the city center almost 50%, even in the chilly winter.

We grab our bikes and zoom across the street to the bike lane that skirts the northern edge of the park. Part of the bike-sharing program's popularity is that Meridien has invested heavily in creating

dedicated cycling paths to accompany the thousands of new bikes on the streets. We rush past the pastiche of architectural styles and eras that characterize Meridien's eclectic urbanism, something Alexis has made a career of celebrating. "A real city is never homogenous," she remarks.

One of Meridien's urban success stories is the rejuvenation of the Old Town district. Just five years ago, the area's cobblestone streets were strewn with trash and drug paraphernalia. The city's homeless would congregate here, and the historical buildings, some dating back to the 18th century, were primarily abandoned. But with the election of Mayor Pierre H. in 2006, the government allocated funds for a renewal project that provided new businesses and nonprofits with startup funding to renovate and occupy these empty structures. Before long, artists were occupying the upper floors, and boutiques, galleries, and cafés began to spring up to fit their lifestyles. Combine this with more robust social ser-

vice programs that provided housing and drug counseling programs, and the area underwent a speedy, remarkable renaissance.

The bumpy roads result in a precarious ride that makes steering the bikes in a straight line virtually impossible. Luckily, auto traffic is mostly banned from Old Town, making it a favorite destination for those who disdain cars and much safer for our own clumsy veering. We stop in front of Frugal Grounds, an airy café/gallery/performance space hybrid that was one of Old Town's first new businesses, to meet Scott G., Meridien's supervisor of urban renewal. He, too, arrives on a HUB bicycle, stylishly dressed for the weather in a medium-length Nehru style jacket and knit cap, the ensemble nicely complemented by a pair of stylish spectacles and a worn leather shoulder bag.

"There are some hard-core purists who dismiss this development as negative—gentrification to ease the fears of yuppies who wouldn't come near here before," Scott remarks, "but I find their argument difficult to sup-

port in light of all the good that has come to Old Town. We didn't move the blight out and then hide it somewhere else. We helped the people who needed assistance and let them stay as long as they weren't committing any violent crimes. They receive housing and there has been phenomenal success in getting many back into the workforce and making them part of the community again. How can this be bad?"

Our next stop is Friar's Market—an open-air agora for Meridien's local farmers and produce growers to sell their fresh organic sustenance to residents weary of the old supermarket model. The long arcade is a kaleidoscope of nature's colors—fruits, vegetables, and meats meticulously arranged in bins by their growers and producers.

"The best part of the experience here is that I get to converse with the people who actually grew this stuff," beams Alexis. "Nothing against the nice folks that work at the supermarket, but Friar's Market vendors have such an intimacy with what they sell

here. It's their lifeblood, their means of survival."

How could I argue? The green apple I bought and consumed on the spot was so scrumptious it almost made me want to grow my own tree de pomme on my building's roof.

We cut up Grayson Boulevard towards the "Green Light" district, Meridien's center of provincial haute couture and cuisine, where rustic cafes huddle alongside boutiques offering hemp clothing and hipster hubs that sell art, books, and the latest designer accessories. After a whirlwind browse through almost ten different retailers, we greet the setting sun by settling at Alexis's favorite evening hangout spot, Le Bon Mot.

"I'll always be pushing for Meridien to move forward—to promote thoughtful development by utilizing our best and brightest creative Minds. But I'll be honest—" Alexis eases back into her chaise lounge and smiles, "there's nothing like the vibe of an old French bistro, even if we're not in France."