

MAD MAGAZINE

This year, do your holiday shopping on New Orleans' coolest street

By MARK ELLWOOD

EVER been to Magazine Street in New Orleans? It's never too late to become a fan. One of America's most unique shopping strips is the ideal spot for holiday gift buying. Running parallel to the Mississippi River, the mostly-strollable, tree-lined strip ambles on for six miles, each cluster of shops reflecting the needs and bent of the surrounding neighborhood. Neither crammed with chains nor jammed with touristy nonsense, Magazine Street is divided into distinct chunks, each several blocks long. Neighborhood budget strips

with liquor stores and down-at-the-heel supermarkets sit alongside East Village-like hipster hubs full of dive bars, breakfast-'til-4-p.m. cafes and ironic shops; West Bleecker Street-like enclaves where girly treats are displayed in Intermix-style boutiques are interspersed among them.

Deciding to stroll down the entire length one warm winter Sunday, I started at the easternmost end.

This is the roughest but arguably most interesting slab — don't be put off by the after hours grilles on most street-facing windows. It's anchored by men's stores and has a San Francisco vibe. Vegas (No. 2042) is crammed with Modern Amusement and Stitches denim, while locals flock to retro



Cheryl Gardner

Actor Bryan Batt at Hazelnut.

barbershop Aidan Gill (No.2026.). The chatty staff at Jim Russell's Records (No. 1837) across the road makes Jack Black in "High Fidelity" look like a part-timer.

Further on, there's another hipster hub — this one features made-to-order decal tees at Boots's Fun Rock'n (No. 3222) and a gallery-cum-grown-up-boys'-toys-store, Sputnik

Ranch (No. 3029) which has racks of western-wear Scully clothes as a bonus. Make sure not to miss Sucr e (No. 3025) one of two gelato purveyors on the same block.

Moving on, Magazine Street becomes homier and tonier. It's here that you'll find some of the street's best offerings.

Make Me Up (No. 3426) is all rocking chairs and baskets. The only-in-New Orleans-named Mignon Faget is known for her affordable and simple baubles. The first of her two boutiques is in this strip (No. 3801), the other is just up the road, in a converted bank (No. 4300).

For celeb cred, how about New Orleans-born, "Mad Men" star Bryan Batt? Batt co-owns interiors shop Hazelnut (No. 5515). Along with the actor's own fabric designs and tabletops, he's sought out niche artisanal goodies like the bright-colored ceramics from Russian pottery collective Art Department.

Finally, there's Dirty Coast (No. 5704). It churns out New Orleans Pride T-shirts and witty decals for \$20 or so (bestseller: "New Orleans, So Far Behind We're Ahead"). Do drop in.

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NEWS + NOTES

ALL ABOUT THE BENJAMINS WANT to do Philly for under \$25? The CVB Web site lists a whole slew of things to do. We like Thanksgiving Dino Weekend (Nov. 28-30) at the **Academy of Natural Sciences**. It's only \$10 for adults, \$8 for kids (gophila.com/holiday).

SPECTATOR SPORT BESIDES healthy servings of blood and broken bones, what do you get when you mix hockey, downhill skiing and snowboarding? The **Red Bull Crashed Ice** race, coming Jan. 24 to Quebec City. It's free to watch (redbullcrashedice.com).

EASY VISA FEEL like a working vacation? Australia has entered into a "**Work and Holiday Agreement**" with the US. Passport-holders 18-30 going Down Under may now work for up to a year and study for four months. (myspace.com/mysydney).