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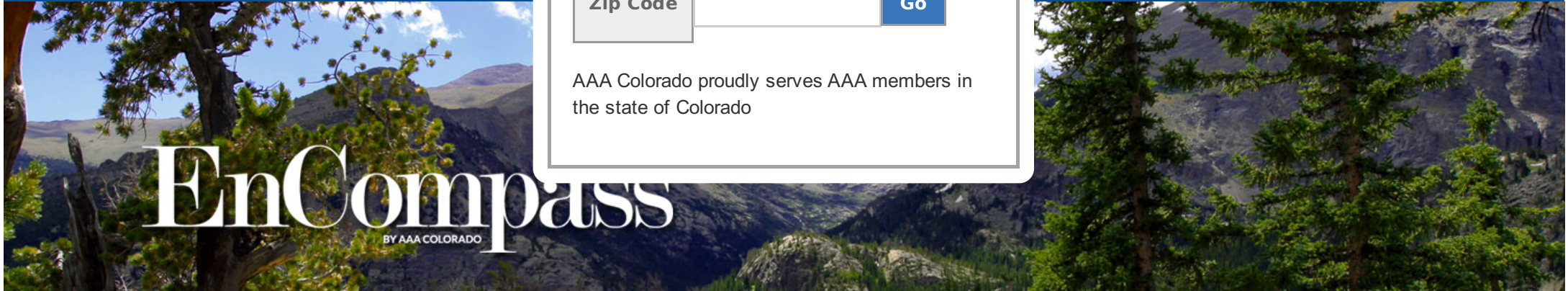


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EnCompass BY AAA COLORADO

ONLINE FEATURE: SOURCE OF INSPIRATION

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The Source, a new artisan collective in Denver's gritty but trendy RiNo neighborhood, is causing quite the stir among Front Range

MON
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WOMEN OF THE WORLD: PAINTINGS BY REBEKAH MERLINO

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MON

DROP CITY AT 50 EXHIBIT

foodies.

By Davina van Buren

One of my favorite ways to experience a city is through the local food scene. In fact, I've been known to plan entire vacations around restaurants, food trucks, and seaside vendors. In San Francisco, I went to the Ferry Building every day for picnic supplies. I plan my visits to Chicago months ahead in order to dine at Next, a restaurant that not only changes their menu—but their entire concept—every three months. And in the Dominican Republic, I buy juicy mangoes and fresh ceviche from the same hard-working fisherman on the same beach every fall.

My latest excursion, though, was a food-focused “staycation.” [The Source](#) (3350 Brighton Blvd., a half-mile south of the Denver Coliseum)—a new artisan collective in Denver’s River North (RiNo) neighborhood—is a locavore’s utopia. The newest venture from Zeppelin Development (the father-son team of Mickey and Kyle Zeppelin) is located in what used to be an 1880s iron foundry. “When we first walked through the building, we were immediately hooked,” Kyle Zeppelin says. “Our experience of walking into a place that takes your breath away demanded that it become a public space.” Now, with its 60-foot ceilings drenched in natural light and fresh air, the building echoes the community-minded message behind the project. You’ll find everything from coffee roasters to a whole-animal butcher under this roof. At 26,000

27

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square feet, it embodies the hustle and bustle of a miniature city.

Each of The Source's 15 tenants was handpicked by Zeppelin, who spent months traveling everywhere from Europe to Wisconsin to glean inspiration from the world's most-loved bazaars. "We drew on new formats for urban markets that are springing up throughout the country, ones that combine a curated selection of purveyors," Zeppelin says. "The goal wasn't to replicate any one, but combine successful ideas and take advantage of the unique opportunities that existed here."

What I like about The Source is that you don't have to wonder about quality. Is this produce organic? "That shouldn't even be a question," says Americanum Provisions' Rise Tren. Is the meat at the butcher shop humanely raised? Of course it is. And you won't find things like high fructose corn syrup and GMOs in the products here—just local and sustainably produced goods made with love (and ingredients you can pronounce without a dictionary).

But visiting The Source is not just about dining out or shopping—it's about the experience. Not only can you meet the artisans, you can watch them practice their craft, ask questions, and get educated about the food supply. A serious foodie could easily spend a whole day here. In fact, I did just that: Here's what I found.

THE FOOD

My suggestion: Start at [Comida](#). Grab a bite, scope the scene and take in the building's architecture.

What began as a Boulder-based food truck with a loyal following is now one of The Source's anchor tenants. The menu is heavy on "antojitos"—Mexican street snacks—which range in price from \$2 to \$8. I'm choosy about my meat, so was thrilled to see Tender



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Belly local pork on the menu. The service is prompt, casual, and friendly—so much so that when I couldn't decide between the pineapple habanero and watermelon jalapeno margaritas, the bartender enthusiastically offered to mix a custom concoction. The juices are fresh squeezed with an emphasis on tart, and beverages are served in non-assuming mason jars. Two massive garage doors open like gaping mouths to a sunny outdoor patio on warm days. Ask about the rotating selection of homemade cookies and ice cream (you can thank me later).

[Acorn](#) serves up rustic yet modern American cuisine, with a focus on seasonal menus made from locally sourced ingredients. Much like its sister restaurant, Boulder's acclaimed [Oak at Fourteenth](#), the kitchen's centerpiece is its oak-fired oven and grill. The philosophy at Acorn is similar to the Spanish concept of tapas: it's best to order several dishes and share. On a recent trip, my girlfriends and I savored small plates such as crispy kale and apple salad, shrimp and grits, coal roasted baby beets, and tomato braised meatballs. However, with dishes like the 56-ounce, bone-in, cumin-spiced pork shoulder, Acorn works equally well for a hearty family dinner. Like Oak at Fourteenth, Acorn has an extensive beverage program which offers a nice variety of low-alcohol and non-alcoholic libations. Try the Brighton Blvd. Tea Time—a snappy, yet soothing concoction of green tea, lavender, lemon, ginger, and grapefruit bitters.

THE DRINKS

Smack dab in the middle of the Source is [CapRock Farm Bar](#)—a craft cocktail lover's dream and Colorado's first off-premises distillery tasting room. The biodynamic (also known as “deep organic”) spirits served here are from Jack Rabbit Hill Farm, winery, and distillery in Hotchkiss. In the morning they'll serve

handmade juices from the orchard; throughout the day order plates of pastured meats from [Four Sisters Farm](#) to accompany your cocktail.

Be sure to check out the massive Ideal Rapid roaster—built in Germany in 1929—at local favorite [Boxcar Coffee Roasters](#). Owner Vajra Rich restored and modernized the roaster, which is considered by many roasting experts to be one of the most unique coffee roasters in the country.

I don't like beer, and don't have the slightest interest in the brewing process (something that begets many strange looks in Colorado). But I do love travel ... and that's what's interesting to me about [Crooked Stave Artisan Beer Project](#). Owner and brewer Chad Jacobson—a sommelier and professor of beer-brewing at Colorado State University—collected wild yeast samples from places as far away as Belgium, New Zealand, and Australia for his thesis on *Brettanomyces* yeast. Now he propagates his yeast in-house to produce the company's incredibly flavorful sour beers. These guys can really geek out about beer, yet I was enthralled with their brewing stories. Ask taproom manager Ben for the lowdown on what suds are currently tapped.

THE SHOPS

In the South we have a saying when something tastes extraordinary—we say it's “slap-your-mama good.” And that's exactly what I blurted out when I tasted the baguettes at [Babette's Artisan Breads](#). In a word, it's ridiculous. Owner Steve Scott uses traditional French baking techniques and organic grains to create rustic loaves, raisin au pan, and beautiful morning pastries. Whatever you do, don't miss the croissants. I'm not ashamed to say I brought one home for later and made some scandalous

noises while savoring it!

Anyone with tattoos of turnips and cacao beans has to be good people, right? Americanum Provisions owner (and fashionista) Rise Tren is passionate about being a conduit for local farmers to purvey their goods. Most of her produce comes from within 10 miles of The Source—from urban farms such as The GrowHaus, Produce Denver, and Bean Acre Farm. I loved the vintage and found kitchen items, too.

As I said earlier, I'm very particular about my meat. Which is why the thing I was most excited about in The Source was [MeatHead](#), a whole-animal butcher. I wasn't disappointed. A quarter cow and a pork shoulder hang in the chilled cutting room, where patrons can watch owner Kevin Klinger practice his art through a glass window. Klinger comes from a long line of butchers, and it's obvious from chatting with him that he is super-skilled at his trade. He sources his ethically-raised meat from small sustainable farms, and his prices are fantastic. Next time, I'm bringing a cooler.

Find small-batch spirits, independently produced wines, craft beers, and more at Proper Pour. The specialty bottle shop will also offer wine storage.

After several years as an online vendor to specialty restaurants, [Mondo Market](#) has ventured into retail territory. The cheese-and-spice shop features both local and imported items, and supplies hard-to-find ingredients and gourmet foods. My favorite part about Mondo is the samples. Try the *morbietz delize*, a French cow cheese that has a thin line of ash through the middle, which farmers use to separate the morning and night milkings. (Some cheese aficionados say they can taste a difference!) You can also get a quick sandwich or charcuterie plate here.

Find sustainably grown—and in some case, foraged—plants and flowers at [Beet & Yarrow](#).

[Super Ordinary Gallery](#), a design store and art exhibit space, and Collegiate Peaks Bank round out the tenant list.

WHY RINO?

It's an ambitious project, and some wonder if The Source's location will be a challenge. But Zeppelin says there is a culture in RiNo that supports this kind of endeavor. The father-son duo is also responsible for RiNo's [TAXI](#)—an innovative mixed-use development just a few blocks away—that now houses 80 businesses, 44 residences, two restaurants, a coffee shop, a hair salon, and an early childhood education center. [Great Divide Brewing Company](#) is moving in across the street as part of its massive expansion (they'll go from brewing 32,000 bottles of beer each year to 250,000). RiNo's art district is the fastest-growing in the city. And soon the [Union Station redevelopment project](#) will be complete, bringing tourists all the way from DIA to downtown Denver, just a mile away.

“There is an increasing appetite to be in urban places that are outside the mainstream,” Zeppelin says. “RiNo has been our home for over a decade and we see it as the next frontier for the growth for creative and high tech businesses in Denver.”

I'll take his word for that. For now, I'll just enjoy the food.

Davina van Buren (davinavanburen.com) is a Denver-based freelance writer and multimedia journalist who specializes in travel, food, and environmental reporting.

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