

A Perfect Girls' Day out.

By Katie McElveen

Thanks to five busy schedules, it's not very often that Ann, Liz, Kim, Margaret and I are all free for a girls' day, but that's exactly what happened on a recent sunny afternoon.



Determined to take full advantage of our afternoon together, we met at the Starbucks in Columbia's Vista. Once a rundown warehouse district located a few blocks from South Carolina's elegant State House, the Vista is now home to restaurants of all sorts, stylish boutiques, galleries showcasing both the avant-garde and the classic, and even a few original establishments like Adluh Flour Company. At night, the company's iconic red neon sign blinks from above the building's tall tower, a beacon to the crowds who flock to the area's lively clubs and sleek bars, many of which are housed in an old railroad depot.



Our first stop was the Carol Saunders Gallery, where Ann needed to get a wedding gift, and we wanted to ogle the jewelry from David Yurman and other artisans, peer at rainbow-hued glass vases, serving plates and champagne flutes, and gaze into Stephen Chesley's hypnotic landscapes. From there, it was Paul Sloane's glitzy interior design emporium, where fanciful chandeliers and Ann Gish linens add glamour to antique dining tables. Our next stop was Goga, where Liz picked up a sparkly camisole to wear during the holidays. Along the way, we dug through cases of old-fashioned candy—sticky BB Bats and the like—at Palmetto Candy Company, took in paintings, sculptures and drawings at City Art and If ART galleries and, finally, got down to business and decided where to have lunch.

Fun eateries abound in the Vista, and the decision wasn't an easy one. Asian at the red-lacquered M Vista? Pizza at the boisterous Mellow Mushroom? Tapas at Gervais and Vine?

We finally decided on stylish Southern specialties—think grilled pork tenderloin

with a fruited chipotle glaze atop a tangle of microgreens and pecan-studded chicken salad on brioche—on the patio at Motor Supply Company, an art-filled bistro on the site of a former garage. There, cooled by lazy ceiling fans and glasses of sweet tea, we spent a glorious hour or so laughing, telling stories and figuring out how to spend the remainder of the afternoon. Kim needed a hostess gift to take to a dinner party that night, so after lunch we made a trip to Cloud 9 Market, filled a basket with gourmet goodies and topped it with a festive bow.

By now, as the sun had begun its descent toward the banks of the Congaree River, we knew it was probably time to head home and end our perfect girls' day. Then, thankfully, in a show of what could only be sheer genius, Margaret suggested that if we could get our husbands to join us for happy hour on the roof deck at Carolina Ale House, they could watch football, and we could extend our day a bit. Out came the cell phones; sure enough, they were game, and we were ready for a glass of wine and more girl talk.

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Columbia Shopping, page 89