

WEST VISTA OFFERS DIVERSE MIX OF NIGHTLIFE, SHOPS—WITH A VIEW

By Marc Rapport

The newest of new wave and traditional pickin' and grinnin', coffee stops, a flower shop and a store where you can get your book bound—this eclectic mix is all part of the West Vista.

An area of several blocks along State and Meeting Streets in West Columbia, SC, the West Vista has become a hot spot in the past few years, in tandem with its much larger neighbor across the river, Columbia's historic downtown Vista.

In fact, a view of downtown Columbia with its growing skyline is one of the highlights of the West Vista. Good places to enjoy that view include Al's Upstairs, a long-popular, high-end Italian restaurant on Meeting Street, or the back porch of New Orleans, another popular restaurant on the Riverwalk just off Meeting Street along the Congaree River.

The West Columbia Riverwalk itself is part of a series of green spaces and walkways already stretching several miles along both sides of the wide, rocky river. The West Vista's part includes an amphitheater next to the picturesque Gervais Street Bridge stretching overhead as it connects Richland and Lexington counties.

The little amphitheater hosts events year-round, including a summer music series put on by the West Metro Chamber of Commerce, whose executive director says that it is just one more sign of the vibrant growth and activity that marks his neck of the woods.

"It's got a lot going for it," Gregg Pinner says of the West Vista. "It's a historic area, with the New Brookland mill village and the old buildings that line State Street. Those used to include the police station and other West Columbia buildings, but now there's just an eclectic mix of bookstores and gift shops, cafés and restaurants, business people, elegant dining and students."

The entertainment venues exemplify the diversity. On the one hand, for the tattooed, late-night crowd, there's the New Brookland Tavern, a mainstay of the alternative music scene in South Carolina. On the other, there's Bill's Pickin' Parlor, where no alcohol is served, but the menu includes a steady diet of bluegrass performed by local aficionados and national legends alike.

"We've got it going on over here. It's got the big-city attractions you want without the big-city hustle and bustle," says the Chamber's Pinner. "The West Vista is a happening place."

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