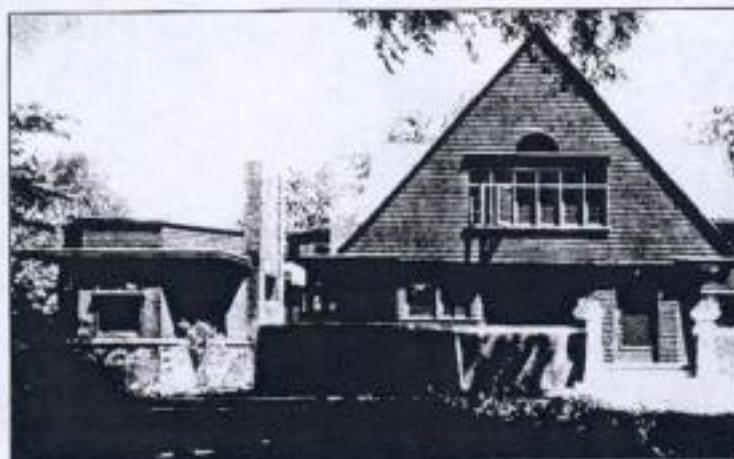


# OAK & PARK & RIVER FOREST



*Frank Lloyd Wright's home and studio draw visitors from around the world.*



*The updated and expanded Lake Theater is a popular evening attraction.*

The Oak Park Avenue  
business district thrives  
with a mixture of  
distinctive shops and  
restaurants tucked  
within historic buildings.



Centrally located, Scoville Park serves as a town square of sorts for Oak Park.

## *Blending the urban with the suburban*

by Matt Alderton

**O**AK PARK AND RIVER FOREST are not your typical suburbs. In fact, many residents of the towns — a large percentage of whom are former city dwellers — would bristle at the thought of their communities being described as suburbs at all.

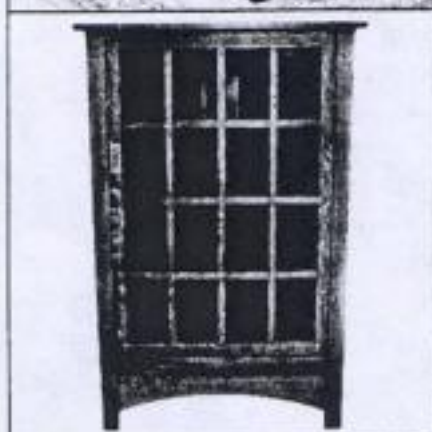
After all, your average suburb doesn't make a political statement by declaring itself a nuclear-free zone, as Oak Park did in 1988. Your typical suburb doesn't pass a landmark ordinance banning handguns, as Oak Park did in 1985. Nor does your average suburban town vote to legally recognize same-sex partnerships, as Oak Park did in 1997.

Supposedly, Ernest Hemingway once called his hometown a place of "wide lawns and narrow minds." My how things have changed.

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## AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO OAK PARK & RIVER FOREST

Located just 10 miles due west of downtown Chicago and settled in 1835 by English immigrants Joseph and Betty Kettlestrings, Oak Park and River Forest were among the city's first true suburbs. The Kettlestrings built themselves a small house near what is now the intersection of Harlem Avenue and Lake Street. Today, more than 160 years later, that intersection is still where the action is in what has become the commercial heart of both communities.

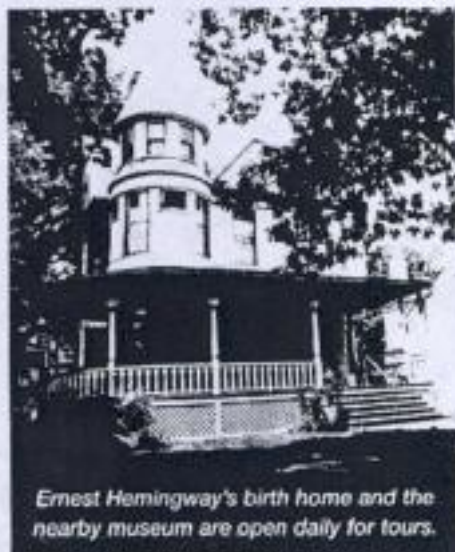
Though bound together by a shared history and a common high school, the two towns are actually quite different. River Forest is the smaller of the two and almost exclusively residential. Its upscale houses and quiet streets evoke the feel of a traditional suburb.

With a vibrant downtown business district and more than 52,000 residents living in an area of just 4.7 square miles, Oak Park has a decidedly more urban feel. The village's more cosmopolitan flavor is further enhanced by one of its most defining characteristics — diversity.

Along Oak Park's shaded streets, grand Victorian homes sit next to the signature Prairie-style buildings of famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright. In its restaurants you can eat food from practically every corner of the world. More than anything, though, you'll notice a colorful palate of people.

That Oak Park's residents come from a large variety of racial, economic and religious backgrounds is not an accident — it is the intended result of public policy. In 1973, responding to racial unrest nearby on the west side of Chicago, the village's trustees signed a statement entitled, "Maintaining Diversity in Oak Park." Today, the statement, which has been revised and expanded in the years since its adoption, reads, "The people of Oak Park choose this community, not just as a place to live, but as a way of life ... Ours is a dynamic community that encourages the contributions of all citizens, regardless of race, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, economic status, political affiliation or any of the other distinguishing characteristics that all too often divide people in society."

The upshot of this policy is that Oak Park has become a true cultural melting pot, often cited in particular for its racial diversity, as 22 percent of residents are African American. Many credit the town's character and vibrancy



Ernest Hemingway's birth home and the nearby museum are open daily for tours.

to its ability to embrace diversity and, indeed, it is a key reason many residents choose to live here.

### A HISTORIC TOUR

A visit to Oak Park and River Forest necessarily starts with a historic and cultural tour. Oak Park has been home to a score of famous writers, inventors, artists, entrepreneurs and performers. Among them are Edgar Rice Burroughs, creator of Tarzan; Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's; James Dewar, inventor of the twinkie; Richard Sears, father of the department store that bears his name; actor Bob Newhart; and actor John Mahoney, the dad on the television show "Frasier."

But at the top of Oak Park's A-list are architect Frank Lloyd Wright and writer Ernest Hemingway. The Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio are located at 951 Chicago Ave. Wright spent the first 20 years of his career here experimenting with new architectural ideas. There are 25 of his buildings in the surrounding neighborhood, which serves as a living and breathing museum of architecture. Wright's Unity Temple, built in 1908 and considered one of his most innovative designs, is located on Lake Street just a couple blocks west of Oak Park Avenue. Drive through River Forest to see even more of Frank Lloyd Wright, such as the River Forest Golf Club and the J. Kibben Ingalls House.

The Victorian home where Ernest Hemingway was born in 1899 still stands at 339 N. Oak Park Ave. The Ernest Hemingway Museum, which contains rare childhood photos of the Nobel Prize-winning author

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## AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO OAK PARK & RIVER FOREST

along with his childhood diary, letters and some of his early writings, is down the block at 200 N. Oak Park Ave. — a must see for any literature buff.

A little more off the beaten path are two other historic structures worth a visit — the Cheney Mansion and Pleasant Home. Built in 1913 and located just a few blocks from the Hemingway birth house, the 12,000-square-foot Cheney Mansion is reminiscent of a classic English estate, complete with a Frank Lloyd Wright designed coachhouse, a separate greenhouse and two and a half acres of landscaped grounds.

Pleasant Home is another architectural gem. Designed in 1897 by noted Prairie school architect George H. Maber, the lavish, 30-room mansion features beautiful art glass, carved woodwork and custom furniture. Open for tours Thursday through Sunday afternoons, the structure is also home to the Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest, which boast a variety of ongoing exhibits.

If you've had enough history and architecture, take an afternoon stroll through Scoville Park at the corner of Lake Street and Oak Park Avenue. It's landscaped beautifully and there's a playground if you have kids. Interestingly, the park also sets right on the Continental Divide. No, not the same divide that runs north and south through the Rocky Mountains, but rather one of several lines that divide the United States into basins — the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, the Gulf of Mexico, the Hudson Bay and the Great Lakes — into which the nation's rivers flow. One of these divides cuts right through the center of Oak Park.

If that kind of unusual information piques your interest, perhaps a visit to village's new library might be in order. Casting a dramatic architectural shadow across the park, the much-awaited facility is scheduled to open this fall.

### SHOPPING & DINING

Scoville Park is located right at the edge of the Oak Park Avenue business district, one of Oak Park's most vibrant areas for shopping and

dining. Check out the fine antiques at Barley Twist or Hourglass Antiques, or the distinctive Mission, Arts & Crafts and Prairie style furnishings at Oak Park Home & Hardware. Browse among the the paintings and sculpture at Boulevard Fine Art or shop for the unusual gift at Lindsey Gallery, Ananas, Camille et Famille or the Irish Shop. Then duck under the el tracks for a quick stop at Val's Halla Records, an eclectic collector's paradise for audiophiles.

If you are ready for a bite to eat, the Pasta Shoppe is a small Italian cafe that serves fresh, homemade pastas and desserts. It's cozy — with a quaint outdoor dining area in the adjacent alley — reasonably priced and delicious. Across the street are the family-friendly Eric's Delicatessen and Geppetto's, both offering great sandwiches and extensive salad bars. Down the block is the also popular Cafe Winberie.

If after enjoying a good meal, you've still got the shopping bug, head up Lake Street and stop in Alphabet Soup, a trendy little shop where you can find gifts, collectibles, unique jewelry and unusual home decor. Down the block is the just-opened Designs of the Interior, featuring a variety of home furnishings. If you're the culinary type, stop by Penzey's Spices, where you can sample and smell an endless variety of traditional and exotic spices from all over the world.

Anchoring the nearby Marion Street mall is Spaulding's for Men & Women. Opened in 1936, the popular clothing and sportswear store is one of Oak Park's oldest retail establishments. Also on Marion is Schereck Designs, which specializes in gorgeous floral design, glassware and vintage pots. Around the corner on North Boulevard is the quirky but fun Pumpkin Moon.

For those looking for the comfort of the national chains, Pier One, the Gap and Old Navy can be found in a newer retail strip at the corner of Harlem and Lake streets. Across the street in River Forest Town Square is a Whole Foods and behind that is a brand new retail strip with a Talbots, Ann Taylor Loft and Linens & Things.

After a day of sightseeing and shopping, take a load off your feet at the serene Austin Gardens just a few blocks from the Lake Street shopping district. Or jump in your car for a trip to the Oak Park Conservatory and immerse yourself in



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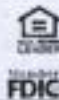


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## AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO OAK PARK & RIVER FOREST

exotic flora and fauna. Or perhaps head over to the Harrison Street Arts District. Take a walk through the unusual collection of galleries and then relax over a cup of coffee at the Buzz Café.

### DINNER AND A MOVIE

For a truly elegant evening meal, consider Philander's for its excellent seafood and live jazz, or try Hemmingway's Bistro, a relative newcomer that has quickly earned the reputation as one of the best dining establishments in the area.

Another popular new restaurant is Café Le Coq, an eclectic French bistro on Lake Street. It's reasonably priced and the chef, Steven Chiappetti, has the kitchen receiving rave reviews. Or check out the Marion Street Grille, a classic American bistro known for its appetizers, seafood and great steaks.

If you're in a more adventurous mood, try Khyber Pass, a gourmet Indian restaurant, the more cozy Grape Leaves for Middle eastern cuisine, or the boisterous Paspaspiros for classic Greek fare. For Italian, the choices are abundant — try La Bella, Vivaldi or Cucina Paradiso. For Mexican, local favorites are Lalo's and La Majada.

Though nightlife in Oak Park is fairly lethargic, Avenue Ale House is a notable exception, offering live music every Thursday through Saturday. During the warmer months, its rooftop bar is a popular gathering place.

The Lake Room on Lake Street is Oak Park's first attempt at a nightclub. It's worth stopping in for a drink and some live jazz if you're out late. But for true music lovers, Fitzgerald's is the destination of choice. Located just across Roosevelt Road in neighboring Berwyn, Fitzgerald's is known for its informal roadhouse ambiance and its eclectic mix of live musical offerings — from jazz and R&B, to country and bluegrass, to Zydeco and rock and roll.

Unless you have your heart set on music and/or drinks, consider catching a movie at the historic Lake Theatre. In addition to its seven screens, the Lake has become somewhat of a museum of sorts, featuring a unique collection of decorative pieces — ceiling fixtures, statues, etc. — taken from other vintage-era theaters in Chicago before their demolitions. ❖