

PHOENIX IS A CITY FOUNDED IN A SHROUD OF MYSTERY—

just what happened to that advanced Hohokam civilization that mysteriously disappeared from here around 1450 AD? Named after the mythical Phoenix bird that sprang forth from its own pyre ashes, the city excels at impermanence, reconstructing itself—unfortunately—along ever more banal architectural styles. In examining these different phases, it's easier to tour prehistoric Hohokam ruins than to locate noteworthy remnants of the city's 20th century commercial landscape. Ancient is cool, valued and—most importantly—marketable; simply being old is reason enough to call in the bulldozers.

Fortunately, a few beacons of individuality continue to buck the increasingly long survival odds:

BEST PLACE TO RECEIVE A WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

- NEW WINDSOR HOTEL, 546 WEST ADAMS STREET.

This hotel is the ultimate conundrum. I call for reservations and the lady at the front desk hangs up. I appear in person and she ignores my requests for overnight accommodations. Yet strangely, I'm not offended—in her brusque way I suspect she's doing me a favor. The New Windsor Hotel caters to the homeless and she probably doesn't want the hassle of renting rooms to wanna-be hipsters who would only demand refunds once they saw the room's condition.

Now comes the odd part—despite its targeted clientele, those down on their luck can hold their heads high. Their temporary home has the most evocative neon sign in town, which the owners spare no expense in maintaining. Approaching the hotel's façade at dusk, you can't help but be whisked back to the 1930s—imagine yourself clutching a valise containing all your worldly possessions, having just debarked from a steam-powered, streamlined Southern Pacific train for a new life in Phoenix.

BEST PLACE TO FILL YOUR TANK - THE OLD STATION SUB SHOP, 1301 WEST JEFFERSON STREET

Ecological principles that govern nature also have their application in the business world. In a restaurant industry dominated by generalists (i.e. Subway), the Old Station Sub Shop is a specialist, cleverly locating its niche in a former Mobil gas station built in 1926 that is sandwiched between Phoenix's Pioneer Cemetery and the Arizona State Government complex. During the day, its bays are filled with daring bureaucrats adventuring beyond the comfort of institutional cafeterias. When the offices lock their doors, activity ceases in the neighborhood, creating a habitat that dissuades any sandwich conglomerate from infringing on the Old Station's turf. Long may they slather on the mustard!



**BEST PLACE TO CELEBRATE V-J DAY - BIKINI LOUNGE,
1502 NW GRAND AVENUE**

Looking to wedge into a spot at a bar, say, between a filmmaker who has just released the hobo art documentary, *Who Is Bozo Texino?* (great flick for train buffs!) and a slightly eccentric—change that to crazy—lady missing the majority of her teeth? This Tiki palace, opened in 1947 by a serviceman returning from the South Pacific, is a good bet—at least it worked for me. A dive bar, the Bikini has newfound popularity, as many of the nearby empty storefronts have been transformed into art spaces. This is the best, and perhaps only acceptable form of urban renewal: lots of energetic individuals with passionate dreams readapting historic structures to create a synergistic experience that is more than the sum of its parts...something no planned development has equaled.

**BEST PLACE TO PRETEND YOUR CAR HAS TAIL FINS
- COURTESY CHEVROLET, 1233 EAST CAMELBACK ROAD**

This animated, set-on-end, boomerang-on-steroids sign looks as good as the day it rolled out of the factory back in 1957. Driving by this advertisement in the right frame of mind, your compact, fuel-efficient vehicle—however briefly—morphs into a vintage, high-powered machine able to take anything on the strip. Enjoy the ride!

**BEST PLACE TO DREAM IN TECHNICOLOR - TWO PALMS
MOTEL, 6924 WEST GRAND AVENUE**

Used to be you couldn't swing a dead cat in Phoenix without hitting a vintage neon beacon garishly announcing the presence of a roadside motel. Nowadays, the modest advertisement at the Two Palms Motel is the best Phoenix can offer—even though it's located just beyond the city limits, in Glendale. I pass the sign like clockwork around midnight every Tuesday night, convinced the sight of its neon glow adds luster to my unconscious palette.

**BEST PLACE TO CHANNEL THE RAT PACK - DURANT'S, 2611
NORTH CENTRAL AVENUE**

If you're looking for the spirits of Frank, Dean, Sammy and the rest of the gang—or simply good spirits—visiting this 1950s-era establishment with its dimly-lit, red velvet-paneled décor is a must. Decorum requires that you bypass the front door and suavely enter through the kitchen, situate yourself at the bar and start your séance with the assistance of some almost forgotten classic concoction, such as a Dubonnet Cocktail. Cheers!

