

Sunset

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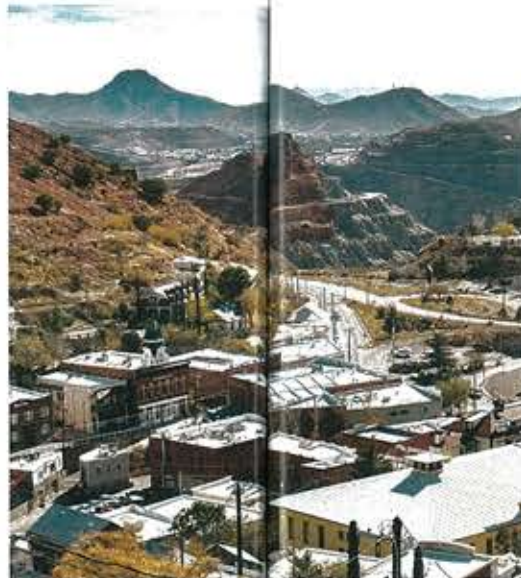


MAKE
OVER YOUR
MASTER
BEDROOM

3

BEST SMALL TOWN

BISBEE, AZ



THE MAIN APPROACH to Bisbee, southeastern Arizona's mining town turned arts colony, is through a tunnel in a mountain. Once you pop out on the other side, you've entered a funky Shangri-la, a free-spirited community marked by a tangle of narrow streets streaming down the canyon and 19th-century cottages clinging precariously to the hills, along with a historic Main Street bristling with galleries.

"With Bisbee, you either get it or you don't," says sculptor and gallerist Poe Dismuke, 62, who relocated here from the Bay Area in 2000 with his wife, painter Sam Woolcott, 60. "The town has this weird, fatal attraction. If you fall, you fall fast and heavy."

Dismuke isn't the first to fall fast and heavy for mile-high Bisbee. Prospectors discovered copper, then gold, in the surrounding Mule Mountains, and by the 1880s a boomtown developed, its downtown resplendent with

shops, theaters, saloons, and hotels—now part of Bisbee's Historic District. When the mines played out in the 1970s, counterculturalists, artists, musicians, poets, and writers moved in, drawn by the scenic canyon setting, cheap rents, and preserved-in-amber historic architecture.

That's when Bisbee coalesced into a proudly weird (to use a favorite local adjective) and quirky community—an outpost of liberalism in an otherwise conservative state. Local theater and a community radio station appeared. Yoga classes, reiki therapy, and vegan eateries took root here years ago. In 2013, it became the first city in the state to legalize same-sex civil unions. More recently, an art installation in a Main Street storefront offering an R-rated "dump Trump" political theme drew barely a shrug.

At the same time, Bisbee also evolved into a popular tourist destination. Galleries, pubs, boutiques, inns, and restaurants popped up. A monthly art walk, as well as

Clockwise from top, far left: The venerable Shell Station on Erie Street; the view across town to the Lavender Pit mine; the festive bar at Silver King Hotel; painter Sam Woolcott in her studio; downtown Bisbee scenes; shop owner Thomas Oatman in the historic downtown.



POPULATION	5,575
MEDIAN HOME PRICE	\$100,200
AVERAGE FEBRUARY HIGH	60°
AVERAGE JULY HIGH	87°



annual craft beer, blues, and Americana music festivals now fill the calendar.

Newcomers today are largely drawn by not only the boho vibe, but also by affordable housing. The recession hit Bisbee later, and the housing market is still recovering. With a median home price right at six figures, bargains can be had. While Dismuke and Woolcott could afford only to rent in California, they bought a house within six days of arriving in Bisbee. Their digs? "A classic Bisbee miner's house from 1906," says Dismuke. "Three buildings cobbled together, 900 square feet. It promises to be a lifelong remodeling project."

Ceramist Tonya Borgeson, 40, also felt the vibe—and the real estate attraction. A Minnesota native, she began coming to Bisbee to participate in community art events. Last year, she was smitten enough to get a gig as an adjunct art instructor at nearby Cochise College and buy a property that she plans to renovate into a studio and residence. "It's walking distance to everything," she says.

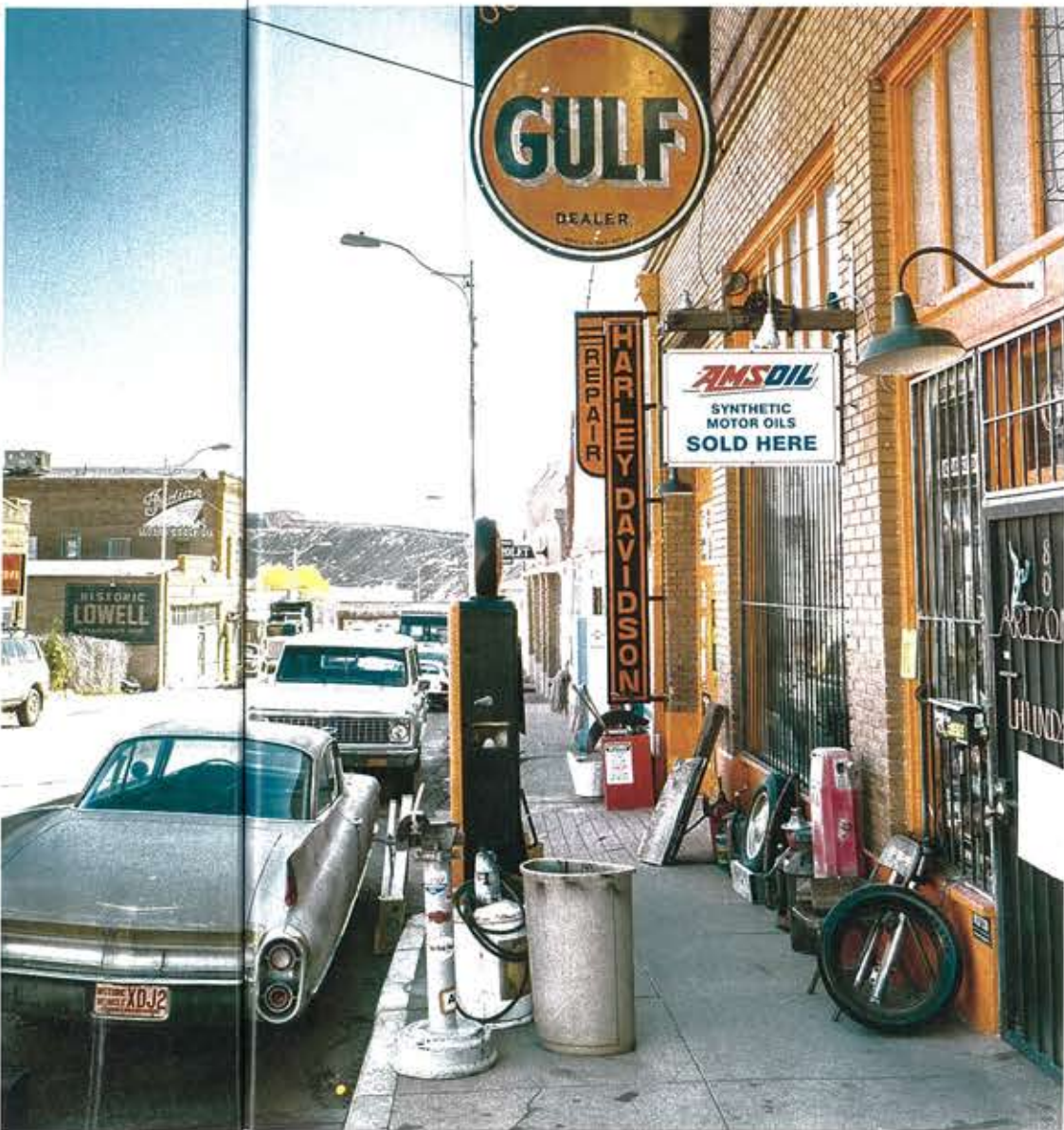
Bisbee's sense of community is also a big magnet for those considering relocating here. "Bisbee was love at first sight," Borgeson admits. "Then I started meeting intelligent, creative individuals. I find myself stimulated by conversations I have with people I don't even know, on a hike or at the Bisbee Food Co-Op." Borgeson makes a point of participating in yoga classes, art lectures, and events to form connections, as well as meeting pals at pubs to listen to live music.

Dismuke also felt the love. "We were embraced from the day we moved here. We were invited to people's houses for dinner so often that we were almost worn out. In the Bay Area, we hardly knew the people on our block." Dismuke and Woolcott have immersed themselves in community events, like fund-raising for the town's library, organizing an annual artists' soapbox derby, and trekking to the Saturday farmers' market.

Still, Bisbee's not for everyone. Job options are mostly tourism-related, with government, medicine, and schools also offering some employment. For families with young children, school choices are limited. Major medical facilities and mainstream shopping are 30 miles away in Sierra Vista.

But on a recent sunny afternoon, as locals kibitzed over iced kombucha and hearts-of-palm salad on the patio of the High Desert Market and Café, an orange and blue PT Cruiser festooned with plastic owls cruised by slowly. Nobody batted an eye. This is, after all, weird Bisbee. —N.B.T.

Clockwise from top, near right: The view from High Road; downtown Bisbee with its historic façades; sculptor Poe Dismuke; the Shady Dell; Bisbee's Erie Street; downtown local color; musician T.S. Henry Webb.



RUNNERS-UP

Port Townsend, WA

If you like boats, arts, Victorian architecture, and incredible access to the outdoors, this Olympic Peninsula town is a little bit of heaven. Alongside the highly browsable indie shops and restaurants packed with local food, residents get to enjoy Fort Worden, an early 20th-century army base turned state park that boasts a plentiful event calendar thanks to local arts organization Centrum. Port Townsend's Wooden Boat Festival, held each September, is the best in the world, and The Great Port Townsend Bay Kinetic Sculpture Race is not far behind. Plus the misty peaks and rain forests of Olympic National Park are only an hour away. **POPULATION:** 9,255. **MEDIAN HOME PRICE:** \$364,000.

Lander, WY

This town in the shadow of the Wind River Range is a melting pot of cowboys, Northern Arapahoe and Eastern Shoshone tribes, artists, and outdoor enthusiasts—the famed National Outdoor Leadership School was founded here. Although not as ritzy as Jackson (and proud of that fact), Lander has its share of upscale dude ranches, and the area's peaks are second to none. In fact, nearby Gannett Peak is, at 13,809 feet, the highest in the state. Another source of local pride is Lander's surprisingly lively downtown. **POPULATION:** 7,642. **MEDIAN HOME PRICE:** \$191,400.

Whitefish, MT

An influx of summer residents has given Whitefish its share of second homes—some of them large lakefront estates and 5,000-foot "cabins." But the people who live here year-round know that Whitefish is a town for all seasons. The skiing's great at Whitefish Mountain Resort; nearby Glacier National Park awes anytime. Plus Whitefish's low-key, friendly vibe and walkable downtown are downright charming. **POPULATION:** 6,864. **MEDIAN HOME PRICE:** \$305,900.

