

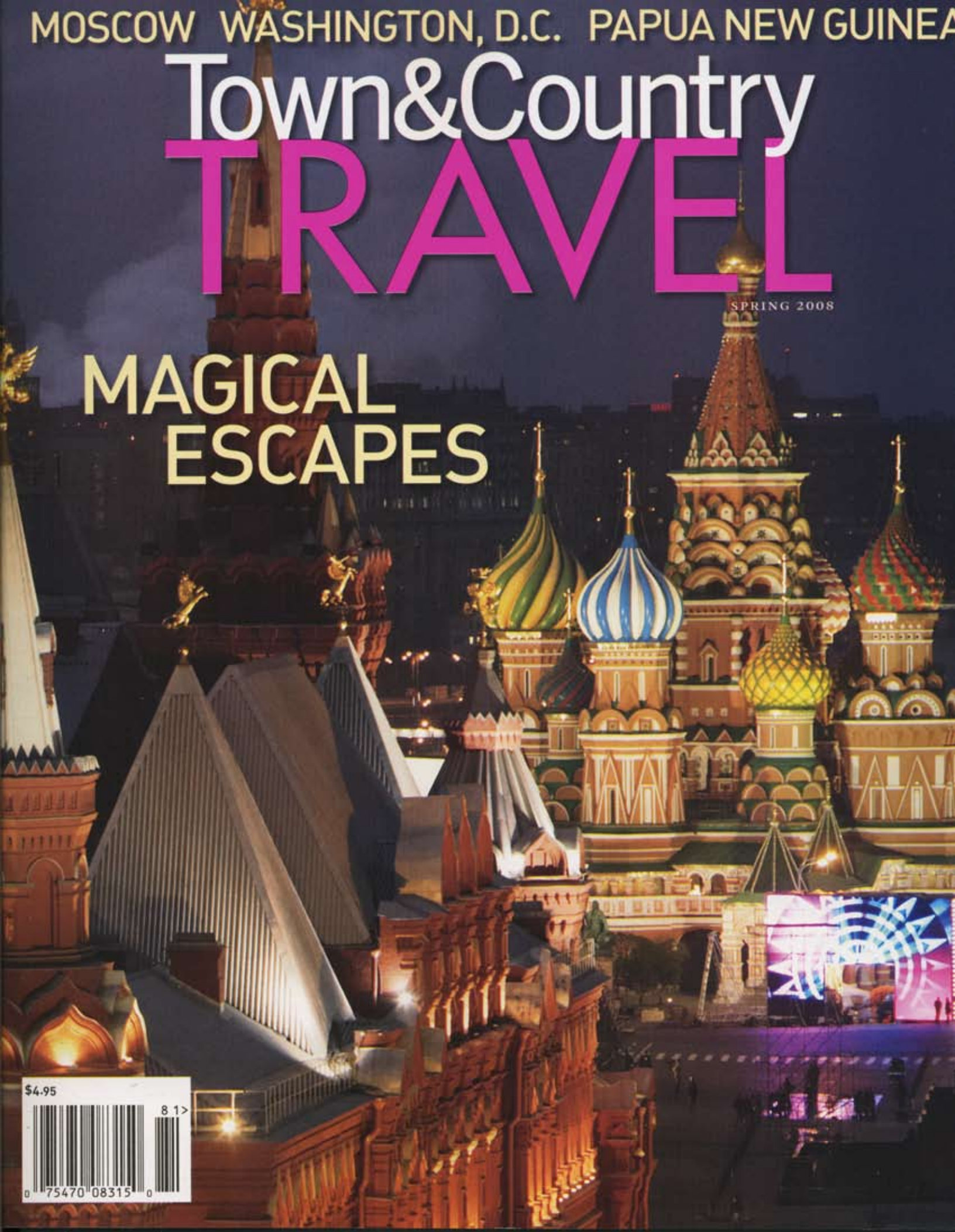
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LETTER FROM DENVER

TO ANYONE GROWING UP IN COLORADO IN THE 1970S, Denver was never anything more than a cow town. About the only reasons my family and I ever ventured from our mountain home to go “down the hill” were for a school field trip to the U.S. Mint and an outing to watch the Broncos football team lose. In the following decades, the Denver Center for the Performing Arts began bringing in notable talent; the great quarterback John Elway moved in; and a gleaming international airport opened to much fanfare. But the long-promised renaissance never quite materialized.

All that is about to change in a big way. The year 2008, the occasion of Denver’s 150th birthday, could easily be considered the city’s contemporary debut. And when the Democratic National Convention comes to town, in August, the country will be paying attention. For starters, the VIPs will be able to stay in the city’s first world-class hotel: the highly anticipated **Ritz-Carlton, Denver** (double rooms from \$249, suites from \$349; 1881 Curtis St.; 800-241-

3333; ritzcarlton.com), a 202-room affair with typical Ritz flair and decor. Following suit just a few blocks away, Four Seasons hopes

The Denver Art Museum’s angular new addition, designed by Daniel Libeskind.

to break ground for a hotel soon. These developments, to no one’s surprise, have stirred other establishments, such as the 116-year-old **Brown Palace Hotel and Spa** (double rooms from \$280, suites from \$520; 321 17th St.; 303-297-3111; brownpalace.com), to go into major renovation mode. No longer coasting on its colorful past—everyone from Teddy Roosevelt to the Beatles has spent the night—the Brown is in the middle of an \$8 million room revamp.

It’s in the visual arts, though, that the Mile High City has really come of age. Leading the way is the **Denver Art Museum’s** dynamic new wing (100 W. 14th Ave. Pkwy.; 720-865-5000; denverartmuseum.org), the first structure in the United States designed by the renowned architect Daniel Libeskind. The stunning \$110 million, 146,000-square-foot titanium, granite and glass addition, which resembles a ship’s prow, provides a unique showcase for works by artists as diverse as Frederic Remington and Andy Warhol.

The DAM treasures its few paintings by Abstract Expressionist guru Clyfford Still, but its collection will soon be rivaled by that of the **Clyfford Still Art Museum**, due to open next door in 2010. In the face of stiff competition from other cities, arts-focused mayor John Hickenlooper convinced Still’s widow that Denver was the proper place for what will be the nation’s only Still museum.

It may be hard to believe, but the weird, wonderful glass building housing the **Museum of Contemporary Art Denver** (1485 Delgany St.; 303-298-7554; mcdenver.org) really did start as a sketch on a napkin, during a meeting between executive director Cydney Payton and British “starchitect” David Adjaye, known for the Nobel Peace Center, in Oslo. The result is Adjaye’s 27,000-square-foot, LEED-certified structure (also his first in America), understated and a bit eccentric, with five distinct galleries that define how art should be displayed in this century.

Denver’s restaurant scene is also waking up, with places worthy of attention from James Beard acolytes. Under the watchful eye of chef-owner Jennifer Jasinski, a Wolfgang Puck disciple, **Rioja** (1431 Larimer St.; 303-820-2282) serves excellent Mediterranean-inspired food. **Tiny Fruition** (1313 E. 6th Ave.; 303-831-1962) is equally superb, featuring delicious American and French dishes by chef Alex Seidel.

Word is that Hermès will open a store in Denver’s Cherry Creek North neighborhood later this year, bringing chic saddles and riding wear to upscale cowpokes. Finally, even those like me, who will always think of Denver as a haunt more of Wyatt Earp than of Jasper Johns, have to admit that the city’s Wild West image is headed north of cool. —DIANE TEGMEYER

