

GO EXPLORE

TOWERING ACHIEVEMENTS: Known as the “Venice of America,” **Fort Lauderdale** has long dripped with style and sophistication. Now W Hotels enters the waterways with the construction of **W Fort Lauderdale Hotel & Residences**, which is set to open in early 2008. The W’s two 23-story towers rest on 4.5 acres of oceanfront property and will include 171 condominium residences and 346 hotel rooms. Residents can take in the view from their balconies or lay out by either of the two heated pools. After a hot day, guests can sip a drink in the ocean-view cocktail lounge or eat dinner in the Stephen Starr signature restaurant. Travelers and locals alike looking to maintain their bodies can visit the W’s Sweat fitness center or the Bliss Spa. And if you find yourself needing something that isn’t already provided, W’s trademark Whatever/Whenever service is available to track it down. fortlauderdaleresidences.com

— *Lauren Knisely*

SAY CHEESE: A California tourism ad campaign declares “great cheese comes from happy cows.” Fortunately for turophiles, or cheese lovers, **Burlington, Vt.’s** cows are pretty cheerful too. In 1810, when William Jarvis imported two Holsteins and a bull from Holland, he had no idea of the long-term



effect it would have on the region’s economy. Today, more than 37 artisanal cheesemakers — specializing in cheese from cow’s milk, goat’s milk, and even water buffalo milk — are scattered across the state. Starting 50 miles ➤



Dome Redux

BASKETBALL GREAT LARRY BIRD got his start in French Lick, Ind., but over the last century, another local legend, the **West Baden Springs Hotel**, has cast an even larger shadow over southern Indiana’s Springs Valley. In the early 20th century, this massive domed building was one of the country’s most exclusive resorts, but it closed to guests during the Great Depression. This summer, the historic hotel is finally open again, and the building once heralded as “the Eighth Wonder of the World” is now being touted as the “Save of the Century.”

About 55 miles northwest of **Louisville, Ky.**, the resort towns of French Lick and West Baden Springs, Ind., catered to the well-to-do who flocked to the area to “take the waters” from local sulfur springs, which the local resorts claimed would cure everything from alcoholism to arthritis. Both the West Baden Springs Hotel, with some rooms facing into its six-story atrium and others looking out onto the property, and the French Lick Resort Casino, a neighboring resort (which reopened last year), hosted guests in opulent luxury for entire seasons at a time.

When it was built in 1902, the West Baden Springs Hotel’s dome — a glass and steel structure 200 feet in diameter — was the world’s largest. That the dome was bigger than those of the Pantheon and St. Peter’s Basilica mattered little to owner Lee Sinclair. More important was that his hotel be grander than French Lick’s, which featured a lavish 23.5-karat gold lobby. Twenty years later, Ed Ballard bought the dome from Sinclair’s daughter. But the good times didn’t last — as legend has it, the resort’s rooms all emptied within days after the stock market crash of 1929. The hotel stayed open, but after the private railroad cars stopped roaring into the valley, business never recovered. Ballard eventually sold the dome to the Society of Jesuits — for \$1.

The Jesuits converted the hotel into a seminary, but it was too expensive to maintain and literally began to fall apart. In 1996, the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana purchased the property and enlisted preservationists Bill and Gayle Cook to fund and manage its revival. Today, both the West Baden Springs Hotel and the French Lick Resort Casino have been painstakingly restored to their original glory. Only now they tout another unique feature — a history as dramatic as their architecture.

— *John Patrick Pullen*