

## **The point about Five Points**

by Gillian - Monday, April 06, 2015

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**The Five Points area of Tucson is on the up and up, and it's thanks to a handful of trailblazers.**  
Gillian Drummond reports.

The recently opened Downtown Clifton. Photo by Gillian Drummond

It's little documented or lauded, a place to pass through rather than end up. Its main claim to fame, geographically and historically, is that it is a gateway to other parts of the city - namely the historic Tucson neighborhoods of Armory Park, Barrio Viejo, Barrio Santa Rosa and Santa Rita Park, and also Tucson's downtown.

The area of Tucson known as Five Points - the junction around West 18th Street, Stone Avenue and South Sixth Avenue, and the strips north and south of it - has been somewhat invisible. Until now.

The main junction at Five Points, which brings five Tucson neighborhoods together. Photo by Gillian Drummond

"It really is this overlooked, neglected, unloved little area. It's an area people have somewhat ignored," says Monique Lane, who lives in nearby Armory Park.

Monique didn't ignore it though. In fact, she coveted it. It has been her walking route for years and she says simply: "I have a crush on it."

Inside the Downtown Clifton. Photo by Colleen Loomis.

She also has plans for it. Moniqua, a former lawyer who has turned her attention to property development, wants to help make Tucson "the best place it can be". A native Tucsonan, she gets tired of two things: seeing "interesting, intelligent, community-minded people" leave Tucson for places like Portland and Austin; and people coming to Tucson and calling it the next Portland or Austin. "I want Tucson to be what it is," she says. And it seems, to her, that Five Points is a great place to start.

Moniqua has put her first stamp on the Five Points district with the recently opened [Downtown Clifton](#) hotel on South Stone Avenue, a place she co-owns with partners Phil Lipman and Clif Taylor. Clif used to live across the road on Kennedy Street two decades ago, and saw the building go through various states of disrepair. (It was formerly an apartment building and possibly a motel. Historic records on the 1948 building are sparse, says Moniqua.)

Inside the Downtown Clifton. Photo courtesy of The Downtown Clifton

Inside the building was "like a little treasure box", says Moniqua: ceilings intact, concrete floors in need of just a polish, immaculate original bathroom tile. The exterior, though, was bland. "It was one of those buildings that just had no personality. So we decided to up the ante a bit and give it personality," says Clif. If one were to describe that personality, it would be someone who loves the downtown scene but can never hang up his cowboy boots or his Stetson. A partyer and a cowpoke. An urban cowboy. In other words, Clif himself.

A mural by Tucson artist Danny Martin at the Downtown Clifton. Photo courtesy of Downtown Clifton

Clif took the property's mid-century bones and ran with it. His vision seems to have been years – decades, even – in the making. An artist, filmmaker and musician who often performs under the name Chick Cashman, Clif grew up on “a pretty insane piece of ranch property” here, and that was the feel he was going for with the hotel. “It’s definitely got that little dude ranch in the middle of the city feel, without going too far. I didn’t want it to be precious and kitschy. I wanted to have it be this funky little outpost.” The ten rooms keep things simple, a mix of western and vintage, with Navajo-style blankets and mid-century modern furniture and accessories. On its website are the words “amigo friendly, rascal ready”. And, yes, the hotel is named after Clif.

Inside the new Bon boutique. Photo by Gillian Drummond

Much as she has had her eye on the Five Points area, Moniqua says firmly: "We are not pioneers." The pioneers, the ones who saw the potential of the area several years ago, were Beth Jones, her sister Brooke Molla and Brooke's husband Tellahoun Molla. Together they bought the building on the corner of Stone Avenue and West 18th Street that has been responsible for making Five Points a destination rather than a route. At the time, 2005, the building, a former rag factory, was condemned. Brooke and Tellahoun opened Ethiopian eatery [Cafe Desta](#) in 2008. It now also houses [5 Points Market and Restaurant](#) and [Bon](#) boutique.

"It was a very cool building," says Beth, a real estate agent who lives just down the alley from it. "And I knew it was a matter of time before this part of the city became what it is today." But it took time for their vision to unfold. There was remodeling needed, and a search for just the right tenants. Taking their time was deliberate. "We had the luxury of really making sure that whatever we put in would benefit the building and the neighborhood."

The opening of 5 Points Market and Restaurant has created a buzz. Photo by Gillian Drummond.

Beth showed the property to Brian Haskins and Jasper Ludwig, who had moved here from the Pacific Northwest. They were initially interested in opening their own restaurant, then got cold feet. "We had just bought our house and I'd never bought a house before. I felt like stability was important," says Brian.

Photo courtesy of 5 Points Market & Restaurant

Then came a boat trip in the Grand Canyon. Brian and Jasper came back re-energized and newly ambitious. “We were like ‘We should do cool things with our lives, we should strive to be who we want to be,’” says Brian. 5 Points Market and Restaurant happened a matter of months later. Not only has it got visitors salivating over its brunches and googly-eyed over its stark but inviting interior of wood, steel and exposed brick, but it's created a buzz. Two of 5 Points' regulars, Crystal Flynt and her mother Bonnie, loved this street corner so much they recently relocated their [Bon boutique](#) to a spot just two doors away. Bon was formerly in Broadway Village. The same weekend as Bon opened, The Downtown Clifton had its opening party.

Photo courtesy of 5 Points Market & Restaurant

Crystal Flynt says neighbors have been popping in daily to thank them for moving here. "It's definitely a great spot. It's so diverse and it just feels very exciting," she says of Five Points.

"When I was living here 20 years ago I always felt like this area was going to do something. It always looked like something could happen," says Clif of the Five Points area. He witnessed two or three restaurants open and close and "a bunch of failed dreams". But he felt like there was a will for it to succeed. He credits Café Desta and 5 Points Market and Restaurant with being catalysts. "5 Points Market and Restaurant is a very big reason why. 5 Points is so young. It really let people know you can let stuff happen here."

Bon boutique moved to Five Points from Broadway Village. Photo by Gillian Drummond

You can bet that Moniqua Lane will be behind much of the stuff that happens. She and Phil also own a lot adjacent to their new hotel, on which they plan to build single family housing. And she wants to expand further up and down this Five Points strip.

Businesses in the area say neighbors have been mainly positive, although there have been some complaints about parking. Work is underway through the City of Tucson to improve sidewalks and pedestrian lighting at the Five Points intersection, and a \$400,000 public art project has been approved. Clearly, the area is on its way.

Corky Poster, an architect and historic conservationist and principal of [Poster Frost Mirto](#) in Tucson, has been working on mixed income housing projects in the area and is helping 5 Points Market and Restaurant, Bon and Cafe Desta to transition into urban business parking zoning. "I think people are looking for another sub-center outside of downtown that becomes an extension of downtown," says Corky. "Plus the land values are lower. There's still going to be lots of small-scale neighborhood-friendly new development north of 18th Street on Stone and south on Sixth Avenue," he predicts. "It's the beginning of some substantial growth."



Photo by Gillian Drummond.

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