



photo by Christopher Saustio

Stepping Up

While touring the Cheong Fatt Tze “Blue” Mansion in Penang, Malaysia, Ellen Reich noticed that the first three steps of the mansion’s ornate staircase were made of stone rather than carved wood. In Chinese lore, this symbolizes a promise that those who walk the stairs will have “solid footing for a good journey,” she says. Reich’s online store, **Three Stone Steps** (www.threestonesteps.com), which launched in late 2007, aims to capture this sentiment. The store carries bags, scarves, and accessories made by a group of artisans in Penampang, Cambodia. Reich bills the goods as fair-trade and eco-friendly, and works with the designers to create original accessories with hometown appeal. The printed silk “Little Bit of Everything” bag is a perfect cosmetics case. The durable messenger bags—such as Reich’s personal favorite, the Mingus bag, made out of woven recycled garbage bags—are handy for carrying everything from school books to laptops. Items are available online and at select Baltimore businesses and festivals listed on the website.

—Hannah M. Spangler

Honeymoon Suite or Skybox?

Convention planners searching the country for the perfect place to corral a few thousand sales reps just got three hundred million reasons to put Baltimore at the top of their list. That’s the price tag on the new **Hilton Baltimore Hotel** (401 W. Pratt St.; 443-573-8700 www.hilton.com), which opened August 22. Designed to lure more events to the Convention Center, and the money spent on food, lodging, and entertainment that come with it, the Hilton has a fully enclosed, air-conditioned bridge to the center. It also boasts more rooms (757) and ballroom space (the 25,000-square-foot Francis Scott Key Ballroom can accommodate two thousand people) than any hotel within the city limits. But the best feature is the view: Just yards from Camden Yards, many of the windows on floors four through nineteen offer a perfect perspective on Orioles baseball games. So, when you’re out and about downtown, be extra friendly to the men and women in corporate polos, especially if their rooms face south. See website for pricing and availability.

—Lionel Foster



photo by Ellen Reich

Get Yours

At the **YOURS Store** (822 W. 36th St.; 443-418-5230; www.theyoursstore.com) in Hampden, kids do all the work. And they like it. Young employees drum up business by hula-hooping on the front porch, distributing fliers that advertise their handcrafted T-shirts and art—and even attending Merchants’ Association meetings. The nonprofit **YOURS**, or Youth Organizing Urban Revitalization Systems, began three years ago as an outreach program for at-risk high schoolers. Then, armed with a \$15,000 grant from the Will and Jada Smith Family Foundation, and powered by entrepreneurs-in-training from Frederick Douglass and Independence high schools, it blossomed into a student-run retail store. About ten artists and groups sell their work, including aspiring fashion designer Anthony White, a tenth grader at Independence High School who offers T-shirts emblazoned with his “Fresh Robot” design. **YOURS** executive director Najib Jammal calls the store a “model for economic self-determination.” Down the road, he would like to offer microcredit loans to help **YOURS** students who graduate from college start their own businesses—and in turn, become mentors for a new generation of entrepreneurs.

—S.G.

