

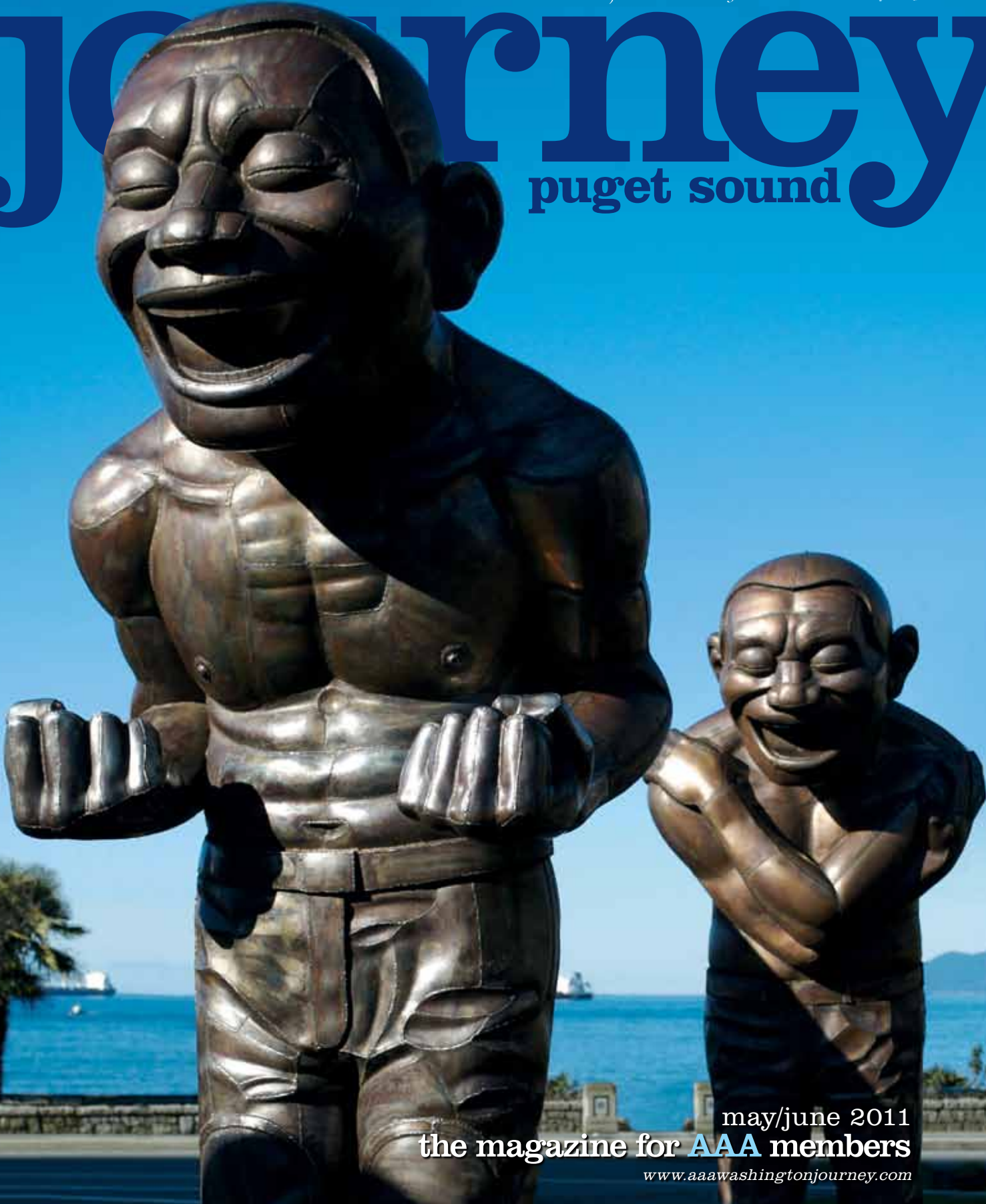
A SLICE OF
THE WILD
Alaska's Kenai
Peninsula PG. 26

48 HOURS
in Vancouver, B.C. PG. 36

ROAD
TRIPPIN'
To the weird
and wacky PG. 32

journey

puget sound



may/june 2011
the magazine for AAA members

www.aaawashingtonjourney.com

48 hours in VANCOUVER, B.C.

This seductive city casts its spell on Crai S. Bower

Anyone who's passed into downtown via the Granville Bridge knows the Yellow Brick Road ends in Vancouver. Surely Dorothy and Toto would agree had they paraded into this city of glass. Though set against familiar mountains and the sea, traipsing about "Van-groovy" feels different than exploring Seattle. The diverse population here combines West Coast laissez-faire with unmistakable élan, the result of living in a city that most travel pubs consistently rank among the best burges in the world.

Cupid pierced me from atop Grouse Mountain so long ago I'd have thought my wound would have healed by now. Yet Vancouver still ensnares me for a half-dozen weekends every year.

The famous Gastown
steam clock.





Dine al fresco on Granville Island.



Chic boutique: Opus Vancouver Hotel.



Peruse the Vancouver Art Museum.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP-LEFT: STUART DEE/THE IMAGE BANK/GETTY IMAGES; MADIA HUNG; COURTESY OF OPUS HOTELS

Finding the time to sleep will prove

11 a.m. Arrival: Lunch and shopping in Kitsilano

While the Granville Rise provides a great entry point into the city, I usually head over to West Fourth Avenue in the “Kits” neighborhood when I arrive to town. The combination of independent cafes and boutiques suits me fine, whether I plan to grab tea at 49th Parallel Coffee Roasters Cafe or settle into more sumptuous fare at Trattoria, an Italian restaurant that feels like it’s been in the neighborhood for decades.

2 p.m.: Walk along Kits Beach

Like every great city, Vancouver is best explored on foot. Though the seawall is the city’s best-known track, walking the beachfront path through Hadden and Vanier parks during summer volleyball season reveals the best views, including the downtown core of crystalline condos and skyscrapers framed by the North Shore Mountains. Though I may never mistake the Kits beachfront for Rio, the fun-in-the-sun energy is spot on, as is the adjacent Watermark restaurant’s wine list.

4 p.m.: Shopping and tea on South Main

Used to be Main Street was Vancouver’s dirty little secret, home to the underside of this glistening metropolis. And, while sketchy stretches remain, South Main, aka the Mount

Pleasant neighborhood, has emerged as a bohemian oasis of affordable housing, colloquial pubs and start-up designers. After browsing the sartorial panoply at Front and Co. and Eugene Choo, I pause for a pot of Darjeeling at Shaktea before taming my sugar fix across the street at the quaint Liberty Bakery, and OK, I admit it, Chocolaterie de la Nouvelle France, if only to pretend I’m in beloved Montreal for a moment. (And to sample a chili truffle.)

6 p.m.: Here a boutique hotel, there a boutique hotel

It’s a straight shot downtown along Main Street via the Georgia Street viaduct to a vast array of lodging options. Fortunately, I’ve stayed in well over a dozen properties and have never left disappointed. So whether you choose über-chic Opus, artsy Listel, opulent L’Hermitage, the cozy Loden or one of the too-many-to-mention larger hotels, finding the time to sleep will prove to be your greatest challenge in Vancouver.

7 p.m.: Gastown dinner at L’Abattoir

To say Gastown, once Vancouver’s skid row, has transformed is an understatement, at least along Water Street, the current epicenter for high-end style and hard-to-get



Walk the seawall to Science World.



Dish delish at L'Abattoir.



Kits Beach is THE beach.

your greatest challenge in Vancouver.

dinner reservations. L'Abattoir, adjacent to Blood Alley, wowed diners when it opened in July 2010 and hasn't stopped. I begin with head barman Shaun Layton's "Donald Draper" cocktail, an alchemist's blend based on bourbon and vermouth, bitters and absinthe, and step into confit of tuna in pork roast fat before rounding out dinner with roasted scallop and oxtail dumplings, the *jus* just hefty enough for the delicate scallop. 'Nuff said.

10 p.m.: Speaking easily at The Diamond

With a speakeasy behind every pantry door today, I'm glad no one's slipped away from The Diamond, where co-proprietor and former back-to-back "Vancouver Bartender of the Year" Josh Pape practices bar alchemy in this brick-walled, floor-to-ceiling windowed room on the second floor overlooking the statue of "Gassy Jack" Deighton in Maple Tree Square.

9 a.m.: A seawall cycle around Stanley Park

Stanley Park, the 1,000-acre, Olmstead-inspired design, is favored by beluga whales (at the Vancouver Aquarium) and eight-time Olympic medalist Apolo Ohno, who told me he found solace here during international short-track speed-skating competitions. I prefer to explore the park

on a rented bike along the 5.5-mile perimeter seawall segment sandwiched between old-growth forest and ocean.

11 a.m.: Yaletown brunch

I forgo cycling the seawall all the way to Yaletown. (Vancouver offers 249 miles of bike paths.) Instead I jump on Skytrain's Canada Line at the Waterfront Station to the Yaletown stop, where I settle onto Glowbal Grill's loading dock-patio for a luscious brunch. The recently constructed Canada Line carries passengers from downtown to the Vancouver International Airport in 25 minutes.

1 p.m.: Granville Island

Though the ways to spend a Vancouver afternoon span the cultural (Vancouver Art Gallery) to the brainy (Science World) to the brawny (Vancouver Whitecaps, inaugural MLS season), Granville Island remains a requisite and repeat visit destination. At the base of Davie Street I board a water taxi, reason enough to take the trip, and set about exploring the island's artisans, street entertainers and permanent public market.

5 p.m.: Fairmont Pacific Rim snazz

Like New York City for Americans, Canadians emigrate



Three-tiered decadence at the Blue Water Cafe + Raw Bar.



The Capilano Suspension Bridge.

Getting There

*Take the **Amtrak Cascades** train: inexpensive, easy border crossing, enjoy the scenery while someone else drives.

*Hop a quick **daily flight** into Vancouver International Airport from most Washington and northern Idaho commercial airports and ride the Canada Line into the city.

***Drive.** Crossings include Peace Arch (Interstate 5), Pacific Highway (SR 543), Lynden/Aldergrove (SR 539) and Sumas/Huntington (SR 9).

to Vancouver to reinvent themselves. Nobody's makeover looks as good, however, as the venerable Fairmont Hotel and Resorts', which opened the contemporary cool Pacific Rim Hotel just prior to the Olympics. The sleek white Lobby Lounge features live entertainment six nights a week and has reshaped the city's après-work landscape.

7 p.m.: Dinner at Blue Water Cafe + Raw Bar

Vancouver remains a restaurant town, second only to San Francisco on the West Coast. Faced with such award-winning options as West, Chambar, and Market, my seafood cravings win the day as I return to Yaletown's Blue Water Cafe + Raw Bar to sample two dozen varieties of oysters and ascend the "Seafood Tower" of seared albacore tuna, smoked salmon, jellyfish and other Ocean Wise provender.

10 p.m.: Party night in Canada

Vancouver's nightlife spills into the streets most evenings, from the Opus Hotel's lobby bar (aka the Opus Bar) to the Donnelly Group's clubs and pubs. I always take a look at who's performing on stage in town as well because many international bands that play here skip the visa hassles of performing in the United States. Check out *The Georgia Straight*, a free weekly, for the best nightlife information. Of course, the most prized ticket in town remains the high-flying Canucks of the NHL.

9 a.m.: Up Grind and Over Bridge

Believe me, traveling just a little north to go south makes sense given the North Shore's natural attractions. Vancouver's topped *Condé Nast Traveler's* survey of Best City in the Americas in five of the last six years, but the only list active Vancouverites care about includes those who've climbed "The Grind." Achieving Grouse Grinder status requires summiting one-half mile of elevation change in less than two miles of hiking through the trees. Those of a more restful persuasion may also ascend the Grouse peak, source of greater Vancouver's best vista, via the Grouse Mountain Skyride, North America's largest aerial tramway.

About five minutes away, the Capilano Suspension Bridge also entices visitors into the North Vancouver cedar forests. "Treetops Adventure," a series of bridges strung among the giant trees, and the aptly named "Cliffhanger" tour demonstrate nature's ability to create adventure without a joystick in sight.

With an active weekend behind me, I feel I've earned lunch in the nearby Lonsdale Quay Market. As I settle into my greens at the Waterfront Salad Garden, I observe downtown from across Burrard Inlet, the opposite perspective of the same magnificent city I peered into from Kits Beach, about 48 hours ago. **■**