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Jaymes Vaughan

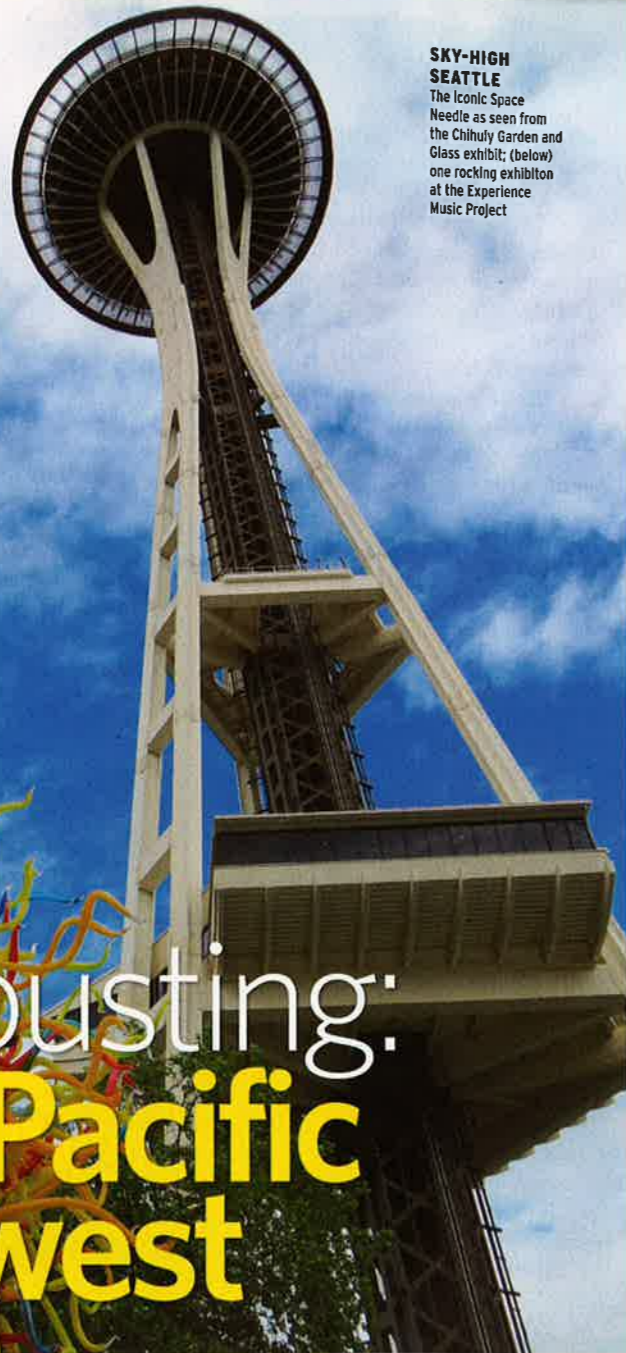
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OCTOBER 2012 \$4.95 USA/CANADA



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SKY-HIGH SEATTLE
The iconic Space Needle as seen from the Chihuly Garden and Glass exhibit; (below) one rocking exhibit on at the Experience Music Project

Cloudbusting: The Pacific Northwest

CUTE naked guys are everywhere, a girl serves pastel-colored cupcakes, and young, smiling hipsters—a fifty-fifty split of scruffy to clean-shaven, I'd estimate—happily take them while shimmying to '80s hits.

This is the retro-tinged Pony, one of Seattle's most exuberant gay spots. Mind you, those naked lads are actually blown-up images and pages culled from vintage porn magazines, covering most of the walls. A piñata dangles from above. A brass horse rests on the bar. I'm not sure what the deal is with the cupcakes, and before I can investigate—or get one, wahhh—the music stops and lights snap on, signaling the end of my bar crawl in the way-gay Capitol Hill neighborhood (the large Starbucks here is dubbed “Gaybucks”).

This is the midpoint of my journey up the Pacific Northwest, from Portland to Seattle (with a quick border jump up to Vancouver). These are all

pro-gay, progressive, foodie- and bicycle-friendly cities that embrace a “think local” ethos, although eccentric Portland takes the handcrafted and microbatch mind-set to OCD levels, even when it comes to being a drunk (see sidebar pg. 36).

PORTLAND

MERE hours after arriving in Portland, encountering several OTT tattoo-covered hipsters (there's so much facial hair going on here) and eccentrics, I commented to my friend and fellow travel writer, Andrew Collins, that “this place is just like *Portlandia*.” The IFC comedy series is to Portland what *Sex and the City* is to Manhattan, with hysterically spot-on, albeit heightened, takes of its farm-to-table obsession (one butcher shop can tell you everything about

the locally raised chickens it sells, including their daily diet and habits), DIY goods that are the rule and not exception (yep, there is actually a shop where they “put a bird on it”) and vehicular etiquette so absurdly polite that while waiting to cross a street, a car stopped and honked at me because they insisted I go first.

I arrived at night, starving. Andrew, who recently launched the quarterly guide to Portland-Seattle-Vancouver, *OutCity* (outcity.com), picked me up at the airport. Happily, many Portland restaurants offer a late-night, cut-rate “happy hour” food menu, including several near downtown's Crystal Hotel. Home to a gay bathhouse and bars during raunchier decades past, this landmark has been transformed into a boutique hotel themed after bands and artists that played the nearby live venue, Crystal Ballroom, while a heated basement soaking pool—free to guests—retains a smidge of bathhouse realness. A few gay bars, including the unpretentious and fun Boxxes and Red Cap Garage, are just a block down the street.

Located in the artsy Central Eastside district, the Jupiter, a retro motor lodge turned sassy 81-room boutique, plays host to a number of annual LGBT events, including Latino Gay Pride and furry BearTown, and offers a “Keep Portland Queer” package for gay guests. The adjacent Doug Fir Lounge is a solid dining-and-drinks choice, with late night menus and concerts by local and international indie names to boot.

On my first morning, coffee is a priority, but my head nearly explodes when presented with the wealth of non-Starbucks choices and locals' divergent opinions on the best place to get it.

Portland's own Stumptown Coffee Roasters has started to kick Starbucks' ass—their cold-brew iced coffee is pretty awesome—yet there are plenty of smaller, indie, über-craft java joints.

Barista receives high marks, while I ended up trying (and enjoying) the everything-to-order, detail-intensive Courier Coffee. Outstanding.

Alas, brunch at Stumptown's latest spin-off, Woodsman Tavern, next door to Stumptown's original Division Street location and near the Berkeley-esque Hawthorne neighborhood, proved ho-hum in both overly simple organic food and liberal yuppified atmosphere. Conversely, Tasty N Sons rocks and buzzes thanks to a creative daily brunch menu (e.g. Moroccan chicken hash with harissa cream and over-easy egg or chocolate potato doughnut with crème anglaise). Expect a wait unless you get there godforsakenly early.

I spent a ridiculous amount of time eating and drinking, including lunch from Portland's multitudinous food trucks and carts. One truck cluster, known as a pod, is dubbed Cartopia and is located at SE 12th and Hawthorne. Open late and featured in a *Portlandia* episode, it's lusted after for Potato Champion's decadent poutine (french fries with cheese curds and gravy) and Pyro Pizza's wood-fired pizza (yes, a motherfuckin' fire oven in a food truck).

Speaking of, I loved the wood-fired pizzas—with toppings like octopus, pork belly and mascarpone cheese and honey—at the new Oven & Shaker restaurant from 2012 James Beard Foundation award nominee Chef Cathy Whims. The “Shaker” part is bartender Ryan Magarian's original and vintage concoctions like the Pepper Smash #2 (mint leaves, Krogstad aquavit, lime juice, maple syrup and yellow pepper juice).

Come late evening, it's off to Eagle Portland, which has grown quite popular of late, even with non-bears and in-the-know scene queens. Established in 1967, Darcelle XV Showplace is an enduring drag cabaret with personalities like Poison Waters and Monica Boulevard. CC Slaughters is a busy mainstream gay dance club and bar—you probably have one just like it in your city. And one simply must ogle nude trade, ahem, dancers at Portland's infamous all-male go-go institution, Silverado. Alas, my

timing was off and I missed the zany alternative monthly Blow Pony party. Next time, Portland!

From Union Station, with a hangover, of course, I hopped Amtrak's Cascades train for a comfortable and complimentary-Wi-Fi-enabled ride up to Seattle.

SEATTLE

I CHECKED into downtown's Hotel Monaco, part of the progressive, pet-friendly Kimpton chain. This property has received a fantastic contemporary spruce-up, scrapping the Monacos' traditional circus stripe motif for modern colors, graphic patterns and lounge-style furniture. There are 24-hour fitness and business centers in house and comp Wi-Fi. Located on the southern edge of Capitol Hill, the eco-friendly, LEED-certified Hilton at Olive 8 is also contemporary in vibe and style. I savored a blissful signature massage at its Elaia Spa, which

utilizes organic products derived from regional plants, and swam in the indoor pool. Olive 8 is also within easy walking distance of Bauhaus Books and Coffee, which teems with gays, hipsters and gay hipsters (gipsters?).

Some of the city's best restaurants are overseen by talented LGBT chefs and owners. In Capitol Hill, Tamara Murphy's Terra Plata, opened in late 2011, embraces an all-local, organic, sustainable “earth-to-table” approach with equally modern, earthy, dark-wood interior. The menu of shareable plates is broken into categories of “earth,” “sea” and “land,” with seasonal dishes like fiddlehead ferns with shallots, thyme, poached egg and reggiano, and a water buffalo burger, while specialty drinks include a kombucha cocktail. It'll get you drunk—with probiotic benefits!

I had dinner at Poppy with its chef, Jerry Traunfeld, whose travels to India inspired him to present Northwest cuisine in Indian thali style (many small plates and tastes on a large tray). The interiors are pretty poppy as well, colorful and bright, while herbs are sourced from a lovely garden just out back. Meanwhile, Italian fare and fresh pasta rule at Chef Jason Stratton's modern-rustic Spinasse.

My friend Jason Plourde, of Three



PORTLAND PATROL
(from top) Get your sip on at House Spirits Distillery; good eats at Tasty N Sons; recreation at Multnomah Falls; (left) an Oven & Shaker cocktail



PHOTOS: LAWRENCE FERBER (UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

Dollar Bill Cinema, the overseer of the Seattle Lesbian and Gay Film Fest (2012's edition takes place October 11-21), drove me to the Ballard district. Once the domain of crusty Scandinavian-blooded old folks, it's now a young and trendy retail, culinary and barhopping destination, where we dined at Chef Maria Hines' Mediterranean-inspired Golden Beetle. One highlight was the "I'm In Your Hands" cocktail: choose your favorite liquor base, a few favorite adjectives or flavors, and the mixologist gets bespoke on your ass. We also stopped at Sonic Boom Records, where I discovered local electronica band Blg Spider's Back (they're in the vein of Washed Out and Cut Copy). iTunes it!

I also explored the quirky, boutique Fremont neighborhood, notable for its giant Lenin sculpture and "Fremont Troll," a giant monster carved from rock underneath a bridge, and the fantastic Theo Chocolates factory and shop, both loaded with free samples and limited batch specialties (ghost chill caramels—yum!). Quirkiest of all is Archie McPhee & Co., a massive, world-famous novelty shop boasting all sorts of weird and random tchotchkes, from Kim Jong-il centaur paintings to bacon-flavored everything.

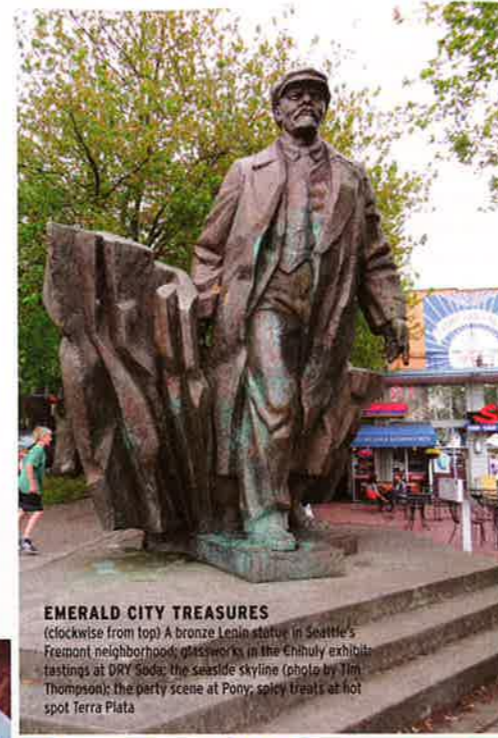
Starved for more cocoa, I took Savor Seattle Food Tour's two-hour Chocolate Indulgence walking tour, which included a swing by decadent Dahlia Bakery (the coconut cream pie and chewy chocolate truffle cookies are insane), Fran's Chocolates (home to the Obamas' favorite caramels) and the first Starbucks location—with its original naked mermaid emblem—at the bustling Pike Place Market. If I may lapse into superficiality, boy, do some cute gay boys work at these shops!

Other iconic, cool attractions include Seattle Art Museum, the Space Needle and, directly underneath and brand-spanking-new, the Chihuly Garden and Glass exhibit, dedicated to the native son's otherworldly blown-glass creations.

Come Friday evening, it's homo nightlife hop time. We began with CC Attle's, an erstwhile French bistro turned friendly bar with pool tables

and plenty of mingling space. The crowd is mixed in age and demographics: I spotted cliques of gipsters, gaysians, bears and others I lack convenient labels for. Opened in 2012, dance club and lounge the Social is Seattle's newest (and most social-media savvy) addition to the scene. It's glamorous and chic with a see-and-be-seen-ness, so we lowered our social strata a touch by hitting the Crescent. "It's where former alcoholics go to relapse," Jason's friend quipped. While predominantly gay, with some young *Glee* central casting types (e.g. a barely legal Kurt look-alike with bow tie, red button-down and skinny jeans), a number of straight hipsters also gravitate here. Karaoke was already in full swing, and, 10 minutes in, a guy singing Jethro Tull effectively gave us our cue to move on.

The nicely designed, two-level Lobby Bar brought us back to homo-professional realness, and it's also host to drag shows. Opened in 2011, Diesel is a pretty cool bear bar decked out in



EMERALD CITY TREASURES

(clockwise from top) A bronze Lenin statue in Seattle's Fremont neighborhood; glassworks in the Chihuly exhibit; tastings at DRY Soda; the seaside skyline (photo by Tim Thompson); the party scene at Pony; spicy treats at hot spot Terra Plata



OH, CANADA!
(from left) The Yaletown scene; the Opus Hotel's living room and garden terrace room (here); Vancouver street art.



aluminum with a touch of Hawaiian flavor. Aloha, cubs! Another beloved Seattle bear hangout, the Cuff, adds leather queens and several other demographics to the mix. From there it was on to Pony, while Jason mentioned that two parties worth seeking out include the monthly Comeback and annual-ish Trannyshack.

Following a tasty fried-chicken-and-waffles brunch at the Coterie Room—sister to incredible technique-driven, molecular venue Spur, where I had one of my favorite Seattle dining experiences—and a free soda tasting at DRY Soda (love the lemongrass!), I hopped Amtrak's bus to Vancouver. It's a scenic ride, with a stop at the Canadian border's duty-free outlet. We lucked out and customs took all of 20 minutes. There is also a Cascades train service, but it actually takes longer and only offers early morning or early evening departure times.

VANCOUVER

WITH gleaming, future-forward glass high-rises juxtaposed against mountains, water and nature, Vancouver is a truly stunning combination of outdoorsy and urban. Both visually and in its significant Chinese immigrant population, it calls to mind Hong Kong; in fact, it's sometimes called Hongcover.

Alas, despite the mid-June timing of my visit, the weather was largely chilly, cloudy and rainy. "They call it June-uary," a local friend noted, adding that July and August are the sunniest, warmest months. Great. I prayed for a little summer so I could finally spend quality time on a bicycle—rentals are plentiful, and in the case of superb boutique hotels the Loden and the Opus, available to guests for free.

The latter property, located in swish

Yaletown, lavishes guests with trendy perks and technology, including iPads loaded with fun apps, music and walking maps. The rooms are modeled after five "muses," one being "Mike The Gay Doctor From New York," with décor and iPads reflecting that personality. (No surprise, the music selections on Mike's iPads are the best of the lot.) Opus is also located on the southeast end of Davie Street, Vancouver's gay village.

1181 is amongst Davie's best bars, a modern lounge with a lively, well-groomed crowd and impressive cocktails. For dancing, Numbers rules the strip. However, the typically mixed, cavernous downtown nightclub Five Sixty goes full-on gay Saturday nights and hosts world class DJs and performances (UK electropop duo Hurts played the night I went), while Thursday night's Chocolate Milk @ Shine Nightclub brings the hip-hop, house and indie realness big-time. Fun!

I also spent a few nights staying on the other side of Davie at Times Square Suites, comfy serviced apartments (with full kitchens, washer/dryer and comp Wi-Fi!) located right above a predominantly gay Starbucks. Bonus: Whole Foods is a few blocks away while the incredible, always busy Kintaro Ramen Noodle is just across the street. Their cheese ramen with fatty pork is an unholy sounding but mind-blowingly delicious, rich fusion with a brick's worth of savory, stringy cheese on top. Think ramen meets French onion soup.

While wintertime is ski heaven, July and August are traditionally clear-skied, warm and unbeatable for biking around the city. And from Stanley Park to the yuppified yet cute Kitsilano, its neighboring beach, and the clothing-optional Wreck Beach, Vancouver guys take their shirts off at the drop of a sunbeam.

Despite the June-uary rain bullshit, I enjoyed

a couple of sunny days exploring the Gastown district's upscale shops and picking up a fantastic porchetta sandwich at Meat & Bread. Ayden Gallery spotlights contemporary, Asian-influenced multidisciplinary artwork, and it's easy to spend a day browsing the southern strip of Main Street—from East Second to 33rd Avenue—dubbed South Main. This is essentially Vancouver's Portland, riddled with local-centric, well-curated shops and crafted goods, small galleries, great food and coffee spots and, of course, beard-bearing hipsters. Check out shopmain.ca for a directory. Put a bird on it, eh?



VERY VANCOUVER
Vancouver Biennale installation "A-maze-ing Laughter" by Yue MinJun; (below) cheese ramen at Kintaro



MADE FOR ENTERTAINING

Seattle by night (photo by Tim Thompson); (below) a beer flight available at Portland's Commons Brewery

THE NITTY GRITTY

STAY

The Crystal, Portland
mcmenamins.com/
crystalhotel

The Jupiter, Portland
jupiterhotel.com

Hotel Monaco, Seattle
monaco-seattle.com

Hyatt at Olive 8, Seattle
olive8.hyatt.com

Opus Hotel, Vancouver
opushotel.com

The Loden, Vancouver
theloden.com

Times Square Suites, Vancouver
timesquaresuites.com

EAT

Oven & Shaker
ovenandshaker.com

Tasty N Sons
tastynsons.com

Golden Beetle
golden-beetle.com

Beaker & Flask
beakerandflask.com

Spinasse
spinasse.com

Poppy
poppyseattle.com

Spur
spurseattle.com

Terra Plata
terraطلا.com

Kintaro Ramen Noodle Sake Maker
788 Denman St.,
Vancouver

Meat & Bread
meatandbread.ca

Osake Artisan Sake Maker
artisansakemaker.com

PLAY & BE MARY

Barista
baristapdx.com

Boxxes
boxxes.com

CC Slaughters
ccslaughterspdx.com

Darcelle XV Showplace
darcellexv.com

Eagle Portland
eagleportland.com

Silverado
silveradopdx.com

Savor Seattle Food Tours
savorseattlestours.com

Archie McPhee & Co.
mcphee.com

Artusi
artusibar.com

Bauhaus Books & Coffee
bauhauscoffee.net

C.C. Attle's
ccattles.net

The Crescent
1413 E. Olive Way

The Cuff
cuffcomplex.com

Diesel
dieselseattle.com

The Lobby Bar
thelobbyseattle.com

Pony
ponyseattle.com

The Social
thesocialseattle.com

1181
1181.ca

Ayden Gallery
aydengallery.com

Chocolate Milk @ Shine Nightclub
shinenightclub.com

Guilt & Co.
guiltandcompany.com

Crafty Drunks

WHEN even the sketchy liquor stores stock organic, family-made microbatch vodka, you know you're in booze connoisseur territory. That's exactly the situation I found in Portland while hunting for a simple bottle of Absolut or Stol. "There are

gin (choice of most local mixologists) and delectable Stumptown-coffee-infused coffee liqueur, and New Deal Distillery's chili pepper-infused Hot Monkey vodka, amazing in Bloody Marys or with pineapple juice.

Located near the popular restaurant and retail strip of NW 23rd Avenue, Clear Creek Distillery produces amazing grappa, pot-distilled brandy, and liqueurs, including one with a whole pear inside (a time-consuming process where the bottles are actually placed over juvenile buds, which eventually mature to size inside), and truly unusual, naturally green-

Trimmer and OOLA gins, respectively, and you'll certainly find plenty of craft brews and cocktails. Acclaimed gay chef Jason Stratton's Italian aperitivo bar Artusi, adjacent to his Spinasse, features a frequently changing "Artusinal Slush"—it's a sophisticated, Italian-inspired take on frozen drinks—and creations like the Averno Smash (Knob Creek bourbon, Averno, walnut oil, muddled amarena cherry and orange, and Fever Tree bitter lemon soda).

David Wolowidnyk, bar maestro at Vancouver's upmarket West restaurant, snagged Bombay Sapphire's "World's Most Imaginative Bartender" honors for his Beldi, comprising saffron- and ginseng-infused gin, green tea and mint steeped Martini Bianco vermouth, cinnamon syrup, bitters and a spritz of toasted coriander mist and lemon peel. That's just the tip of his high-maintenance, delicious, binder-bound cocktail menu's offerings. The Gastown district is home to a couple of hip, notable cocktail spots like Guilt & Co. Yet the sophisticated, international boozehound should make a tasting at Granville Island's Artisan Sake Maker a top priority. Here, Masa Shiroki microbrews a handful of incredible rice wines and uses the kasu—leftover mashed rice—to create awesome dressings, sauces and heavenly nonalcoholic (*gasp!*) apple-yuzu juice.

tinted eaux-de-vie infused with Douglas fir. It's got a fresh, wintery quality. For trying area wineries, EverGreen Escapes (evergreenescapes.com) offers a "Columbia Gorge Wine and Waterfalls Tour, combining gorgeous scenery and tastings. Be sure to request their handsome, in-the-know gay guide, Kieron.

EverGreen also offers Seattle-area winery tours. *Seattle Met* magazine's blog, Sauced (seattlemet.com/blogs/sauced), is dedicated to local booze culture. While Seattle's distillery scene is still developing, Capitol Hill's Sun Liquor and OOLA Distillery produce the tasty Hedge

a lot of ex-alcoholics here," a local lamented. "Ex?" I thought. Between the region's multitudinous breweries, wineries, distilleries and tasty, inventive mixologist creations, it's a wonder anyone stays sober anywhere in the Pacific Northwest. And what else can you do when it's raining, right?

Located close to the Jupiter Hotel, Portland's Distillery Row is home to a number of small-batch boozemakers. Tasting packages and tours via pedicab—you receive a passport, stamped at each participating Row distillery—are available. Some must-tries include Eastside Distilling's ginger rum, House Spirits' wildly popular Aviation

