

COAST MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2022

PRECIOUS JEWELS OUTSIDE YELLOWSTONE

FOR THE BIRDS

Exploring Central Florida

ON THE WISCONSIN WATERFRONT

SUMMER DESTINATIONS

Rushmore Shadows
Resort
Rapid City, SD

Abita Springs RV Resort
Abita Springs, LA

Country Maples RV
Resort
Chemainus, BC



ON THE WISCONSIN WATERFRONT



Milwaukee River and RiverWalk



The Milwaukee RiverWalk and Fonzie statue

ON THE WISCONSIN WATERFRONT

Milwaukee's Riverwalk, Madison's Twin Lakes, and Door County's Great Lake Getaway

Story and Photos by Richard Varr

Skyscrapers tower over the gentle currents of the downtown waterway, my view draped by the purple-tinted petals shooting up from a flowerbed and the shimmering reflections of a modern cityscape. From my vantage point, the Milwaukee River looks more like a canal with a few sputtering motorboats and a string of decorative streetlights along the smooth-paved RiverWalk. Outdoor cafes, bars, and restaurants line the walking path, but it's not until I see a grinning Fonzie—double thumbs up, of course—that I feel the essence of the city.

Actually, it's a bronze statue of the iconic American greaser, spot-on with his likenesses—

leather jacket, blue jeans and slicked-backed hair—looking as he appeared on the *Happy Days* TV sitcom and the *Laverne & Shirley* spinoff about two roommates capping beer bottles in a fictitious Milwaukee brewery, the sitcom that helped put the city on the map for many, including me.

No doubt Milwaukee has come a long way from that image a half century ago. The view from the Lake Michigan waterfront, for example, reveals a skyline of glass and steel towers. The lakeside Milwaukee Art Museum sports futuristic architecture with its curving façade and enormous Brise Soleil rooftop wing flaps serving as sunscreens to regulate indoor temperature. And downtown's museum-like Saint Kate-The Arts Hotel mixes luxury and creative inspiration with specialty guest rooms smothered with local artists' designs. Lobby galleries showcase eclectic modern art and life-sized caricatures, oddly enough, sitting among those who stop by for a drink or dinner, often triggering a double take or two.

Yet Milwaukee is still beer and brats, cheese lovers, and "cheeseheads" and remains proud of its Harley-Davidson roots. The Milwaukee Brewers baseball team wows fans with its Famous Racing Sausages, where runners don bratwurst, hot dog, chorizo, and Italian and



Polish sausage costumes and race during games within retractable-roofed American Family Field. And with beers in hand, visitors can join 45-minute tours in and around the brewing tanks at Lakefront Brewery.

The city's most notable brewing legacy can be seen at the Pabst Brewery Complex, once the largest lager beer producer in the world. It's where 30 or so mid-19th to early 20th-century brick buildings, some with square towers and battlements, remain today, although now housing offices, retail businesses, and residential space. Similarly, the "Cream City brick" buildings in nearby Schlitz Park, once home to the Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company where "The Beer that Made Milwaukee Famous" was made, as the saying goes, also leases office space.

The Brewhouse Inn & Suites occupies the former Pabst brewery building—a spectacular reuse with the tops of original copper brewing tanks spiffed up and shining in the hotel's second floor atrium. Crushed beer bottles make up a lobby counter, with sharply-cut beer bottle bottoms studding the walls by the reception desk.

Born in Saxony, Germany, in 1836, Frederick Pabst came to America at 12 years old and eventually became a ship captain, thus earning a title he would use for the rest of his life. He married

a daughter of the president of Best Brewing Company and bought into his father-in-law's business, later renamed in Pabst's honor. Pabst's former corporate offices are now "Best Place," an event venue and gift shop named after brewery founders Jacob and Phillip Best. A statue of a goateed Captain Pabst stands in a courtyard. Owner Jim Haertel says Best Place looks like a 17th-century hall and calls it the "Sistine Chapel for Beer" because of the frescoes on the walls. "I love the history and the breweries," he says. "There's just a part of me that wants to preserve this piece of Americana and share it."

The 1892 Pabst Mansion, a grand Flemish Renaissance Revival-style home with 37 rooms and 14 fireplaces, remains open today. Its lavish interior includes gold-leaf woodwork and moldings in Mrs. Pabst's French Rococo-style parlor used as a ladies' retreat after dinners, and Captain Pabst's "Smoking Room" with oak and walnut decorative German Renaissance panels as a tribute to his heritage. "Milwaukee was 60% German and this street was about 90% German," notes tour guide Gary Strothmann. "There were about two dozen German newspapers to about a dozen English-speaking. So, this was kind of like living in Germany."

Milwaukee also boasts its proud heritage founded in the city: Harley-Davidson



A life-size statue of Fonzi at the RiverWalk



Serial Number One in the Harley Davidson Museum



Bobbleheads in the National Bobblehead Museum

Motorcycles. At the Harley-Davidson Museum, the first thing I notice are the pristine white tires of “Serial Number One,” circa 1903. Looking more like a belt-driven bicycle, it’s the oldest Harley-Davidson in the world and perhaps the crowning jewel of the museum’s 140 displayed bikes on two floors. “You know how those old cars would start by cranking the handle to kick-start the engine—same here,” explains museum tour guide Christina Grev. “You put the kickstand down and peddle really hard to kick-start the engine and the belt would go around.”

The motorcycles with their shiny wheel guards, gas tanks, steel exhaust pipes, and tires still brimming with thick tread—even the old bikes—are mostly brand new. That’s because starting in 1915, the company took a bike off the assembly line every year. “It’s pretty amazing that the company so early on decided to build and start their collection,” notes Grev. That collection includes Harley-Davidson’s iconic 1936 EL model with its cream-colored fenders and the 1954 KH model painted in bright “Anniversary Yellow” to mark 50 years in business. At the end of the tour, visitors can sit on brand new Harley-Davidsons and imagine revving them up while posing for photos.

Milwaukee’s quirky side emerges with a visit to the National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and

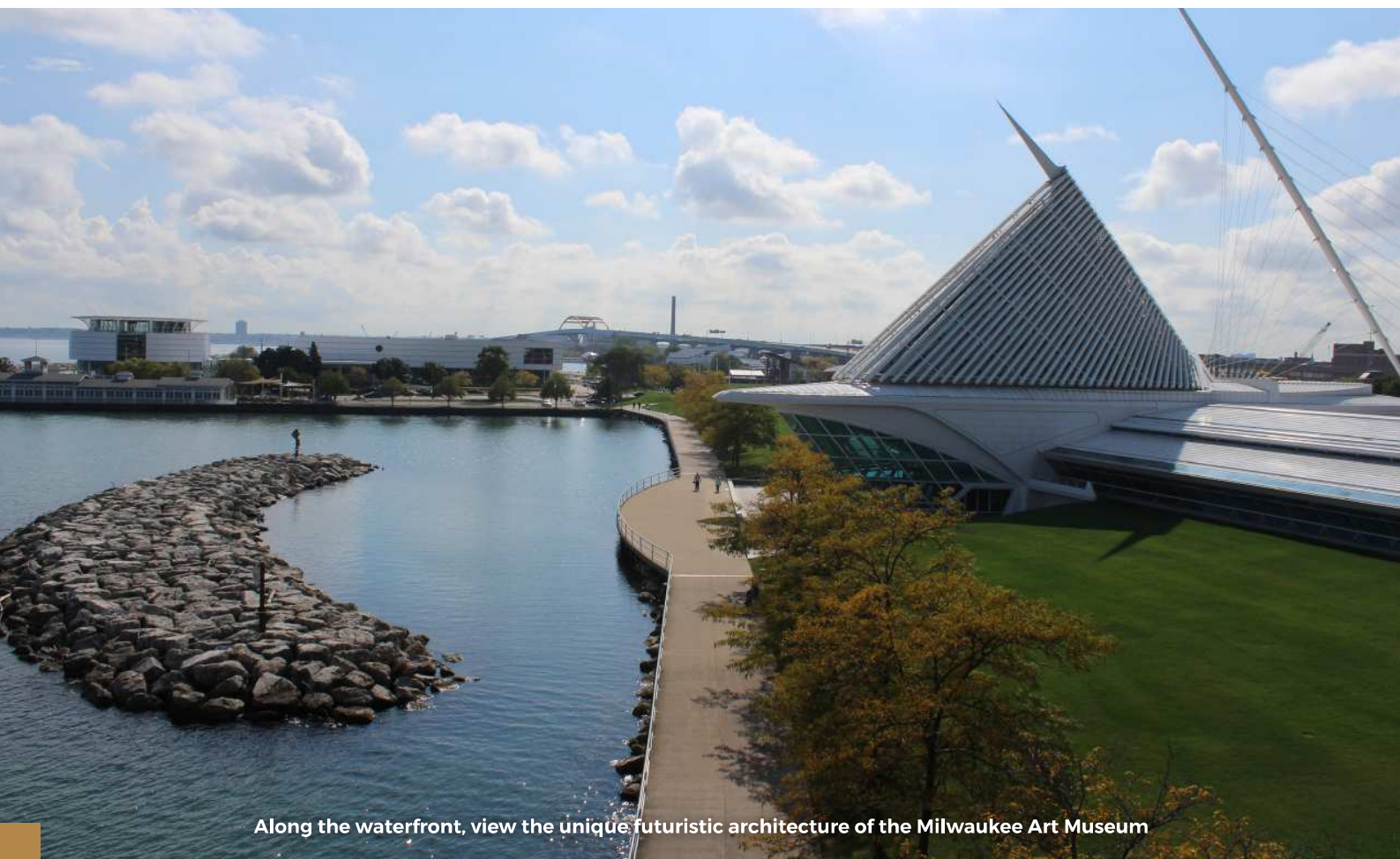
Museum featuring the world’s largest collection of up to 10,000 dolls. “Who doesn’t like a bobblehead?” exclaims museum co-founder and CEO Phil Sklar. “They have that motion that gives them that extra aspect of fun—part of pop culture—and they’ve remained the same since they were introduced.”

Yankee sluggers clutch bats and Star Wars caricatures grasp their lightsabers, while past presidents with their beards and long coattails stand side by side with modern day politicians and first ladies. Sport figures dominate the collection, including Milwaukee Brewers and Bucks bobbleheads, but shelves also feature the likes of Marilyn Monroe, the Three Stooges, Flintstone characters, Reformer Martin Luther, and even Jesus.

Another quirky attraction is the venue that makes the Dairy State’s famous wedge-shaped hats, where visitors can make one, too, from liquid polyurethane. “We have the original cheesehead hat that you see at the Green Bay Packers games,” says Peter Waldron, Director of Tours and Corporate Sales at the Foamation Original Cheesehead Factory. “It’s just a quirky fun thing.” Wisconsinite Ralph Bruno started the company in 1987 in response to the somewhat derogatory name becoming popular with local sports fans. “Ralph invented his cheesehead hat



Along the Lake Michigan waterfront with downtown views including the Milwaukee Art Museum



Along the waterfront, view the unique futuristic architecture of the Milwaukee Art Museum



Making souvenirs and Cheesehead hats for sale at the Original Cheesehead Factory and Retail Store



Farmers' Market around the State Capitol on Saturday mornings

just as a joke and it became a business,” adds Waldron.

There is no shortage of cheeseheads in Madison, the state capital and one of the nation’s most prominent college towns, a straight shot of 80 miles west along I-94 from Milwaukee. Although landlocked, Madison also boasts scenic waterfronts with its downtown stretching along a narrow isthmus separating Lake Mendota to the northwest and Lake Monona to the southeast.

I arrive on a Saturday morning, just in time for the city’s Dane County Farmers’ Market encircling the white-domed Capitol aglow in late morning sunlight. Wisconsin-grown produce stacks stall after stall—in particular, heaps of seasonal pumpkins and gourds on this warm October day. “We’ve been here for close to 40 years,” says vendor Lottie Stenjem. “It’s the people and the camaraderie of the vendors. We’re all just one big happy group that we can work together and we can show what we grow here.”

Reminding me of the U.S. Capitol, the state Capitol has the nation’s only granite dome. It stands 284 feet tall up to the fingertips of the 15-foot gilded bronze statue “Wisconsin” atop the dome, her right arm pointing upward as she holds a sculpted eagle on a small globe

with her left hand. Inside, murals, mosaics, and Italian marble columns decorate the walls of the chambers and conference rooms.

From the State Capitol, I head down State Street lined with bookstores, pizzerias, restaurants, bars, and shops catering to swarms of University of Wisconsin students. The so-called “State Street Mall” leads directly to the grassy campus center bordered by the columned Wisconsin Historical Society building, the red-brick and castle-like “Red Gym,” and the Memorial Union. The Union Terrace’s multi-level patio decked with tables and chairs overlooks an often boat-filled Lake Mendota—a must stop on a nice afternoon or festive night with live entertainment.

Across the isthmus, I gaze upon peaceful Lake Monona from the Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center, its design first drafted by American architect icon and Wisconsin native Frank Lloyd Wright in 1938. A fountain centers the Rooftop Garden, a courtyard of sorts, with splendid views of the lake, downtown Madison, and the Capitol. A plaque in one corner memorializes soul singer Otis Redding who died in a plane crash on the lake in 1967 while en-route to a Madison gig.

For a quirky side trip, the National Mustard Museum in nearby Middleton features more



Along the RiverWalk



State Street Mall looking toward the State Capitol

than 6,000 bottles from all 50 states and more than 80 countries. There's "Moosetard" from Alaska, Maui Onion Mustard from Hawaii, Louisiana Gourmet Cajun Mustard, and Vermont Maple Mustard, to name a few.

Wisconsin's summer getaway—reminding me of New England's Cape Cod towns or the New Jersey Shore minus the boardwalks—is Door County, a peninsula jutting out 70 miles into Lake Michigan, and just over two hours up the coast from Milwaukee on Interstate 43. Along its western Green Bay shoreline, the enchanting towns of Egg Harbor, Fish Creek, Ephraim, and Sister Bay feature boutiques, restaurants, theater performances, and soda shop-like eateries off Highway 42.

Park benches offer splendid views over the sailboat-filled marina of Egg Harbor, a town named shortly after—as one tale tells it—dueling boat crews hurled their cargoes of eggs to settle a dispute in 1825. And I would go out of my way to see the goats grazing on the sod roof of Al Johnson's Swedish Restaurant in Sister Bay, a tradition started with a prank. The cherry-topped pancakes with Swedish meatballs are worth the stop as well.

Door County's moderating lake-effect climate has made it an ideal place to grow cherries, apples, and other fruit, and thus the abundance of cherry pies, cherry-cheddar cheeses, and sweet cherry wines. But no visitor should miss a traditional Door County fish boil established



Traditional fish boil at
White Gull Inn, Fish Creek



Cana Island Lighthouse

years ago as an economical way to feed hungry anglers and lumberjacks. The recipe includes adding potatoes to a boiling cauldron over a wood fire, and when cooked, adding chunks of locally caught whitefish. At nightfall, we stop by Fish Creek's White Gull Inn to watch the preparation resulting in a dramatic fire flash when kerosene is poured onto the fire to burn off fish oils surfacing to the top.

For great waterside views, I walk the winding ramp up Eagle Tower at Peninsula State Park overlooking Green Bay with Horseshoe Island and distant Chambers Island. For Lake Michigan views, the Cana Island Lighthouse can be reached with a tractor-pulled pedestrian wagon over an often-flooded gravel causeway. Farther south, Whitefish Dunes State Park has the state's largest sand dunes and Native American village ruins.

In downtown Sturgeon Bay, the newly built 10-story Door County Maritime Museum Lighthouse Tower overlooks the harbor and scenic bridges connecting the peninsula's northern part to the mainland. The museum showcases the area's shipbuilding heritage and Great Lakes commerce history with exhibitions of model boats, lighthouses, and more. Visitors can explore the crews' quarters and twin diesel engines of the restored 1919 Great Lakes tugboat John Purves.

It's in Door County where I finally become a true Wisconsin cheesehead. At Renard's Artisan Cheese store in Sturgeon Bay, I sample fun string cheese and squeaky—yes, it squeaks—yellow cheese curds. "The fresher it is, the squeakier it is," explains Renard's Director of Sales Franca Bueno. "The proteins are tightly bound on the cheese curds so when you chew them, they rub against your teeth."

"I like to say it talks back," she adds, "and it talks backs really loud."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

visitmilwaukee.org

visitmadison.com

doorcounty.com



Al Johnson's Swedish Restaurant with goats grazing on the grassy roof



Scenic country barn at the at Lautenbach's Orchard Country Winery & Market near Fish Creek, offering apple picking, winery tour & tasting