



BEAUTY AND WONDER

Join us as we discover the many treasures Michigan has to offer

WORDS **Juan Carlos Hernandez**

The Kalamazoo Institute of Arts has showcased the works of Georgia O'Keeffe (pictured above) and cartoonist Dave Coverly. | PHOTO: KALAMAZOO INSTITUTE OF ARTS |

I-94. Its roar, its whoosh and the incessant zoom are the sounds of its life. It's an asphalt and concrete artery transporting workers, students, trains and trucks to every corner of the region along the 85 or so miles from Gurnee, through Chicago and out to Portage, Indiana.

It is, together with I-90, the Chicago region's true Main Street. It has a life of its own, but seemingly little magic. That is, unless you allow it to grab you and take you out of the city and over to the state of Michigan.

This autumn, allow the flow of our region's heartbeat to carry you away from the buzz and the hustle to a tranquil and relaxing respite before the winter settles here. Make it a three-day or a four-day weekend. Forget the agenda of TV sports, the same old bar or the tired trek to the mall. Pack a bag and go — many surprises await you just a few hours away.

Your first stop should be the Tabor Hill Winery & Restaurant, which lies about two hours from downtown Chicago. Going there was not so much an excursion as a revelation, a look at one of the treasures our region has to offer. Leave I-94 and get into some of the small towns, fields and hills of the Michigan countryside.

Lose yourself in autumn's beauty and try some of the finest wines in the Midwest. Tabor Hill's wines have won awards and fans throughout the country. After enjoying a tour of the vineyards, a glass of wine (there are 30 varieties available to suit any palate)

and a good meal, get back on the road.

Next up for this jaunt is Kalamazoo. What? Yes, Kalamazoo. It's the home of Western Michigan University and a perfect place to relax after the drive north and east from the Chicago area. Before you check into your hotel, head over to the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts where you can see some Georgia O'Keeffe originals or see her in photographs.

You can also catch the works by some of her contemporaries through Sept. 13 in the "Georgia O'Keeffe and Her Times" exhibition. But if you miss that, you can still catch

the work of cartoonist Dave Coverly, which runs from Sept. 5 through Jan. 10.

After a day of driving and sampling some art and wine, check into a hotel, then explore Kalamazoo's lively downtown. Its shops, boutiques and restaurants will provide a great way to end the day because, if you've brought the children or you're a child at heart, the next day can provide treats for both as you continue along the I-94 corridor.

TECHNOLOGICAL WONDERS

Begin the day at a zoo that has no cages or, for that matter, any animals. The Air Zoo, just south of Kalamazoo, opens the eyes to the power that flight has over the imagination and its strength to motivate human ingenuity.

From the outside, the main building looks like a warehouse, a big box and not much more, but the P-40N Warhawk airplane that greets you at the entrance hints at some of the treats to be found inside.

After you walk through a hallway of clouds, the ceiling opens up and you step into a grand hall where old planes rest. The world's largest indoor mural (according to the Guinness Book of World Records) not only decorates the walls, but takes you from the beginning of flight

to space travel. Don't miss the old biplanes, the F-14A Tomcat or my childhood plane of wonder and awe —the SR-71B Blackbird. They will wow your children or remind you of the dreams and fantasies of backyard play. And to live out those fantasies, make sure you get on the flight simulator. In celebration of the zoo's 30th anniversary, general admission is free through September 30.

From here, get back on the road, grab a quick lunch somewhere in Kalamazoo and head north of I-94 to the Gilmore Car Museum in Hickory Corners. It might be out of the way, but it's worth the trip

of beauties from the 1920s and the 1930s, making you wish cars were still made with such sensual lines.

The list of what to look for is long, but the museum is sure to bring out your love of cars as you walk through its pristine and manicured 90 acres. The museum closes for the winter on Oct. 31, so make sure you get up there while you can. Once you are done there, rest or continue on to another zoo, which, by the way, does have animals.

The Binder Park Zoo in Battle Creek is considered one of the top zoos in the country and offers what many zoos offer, and

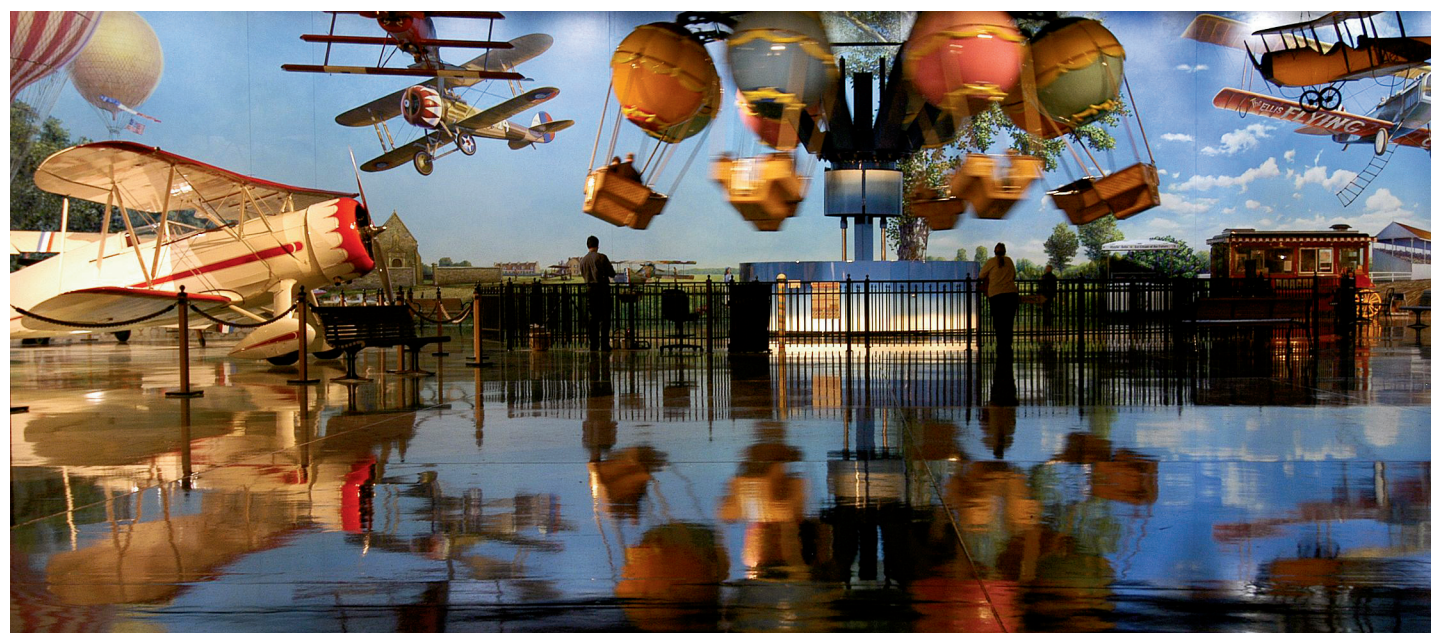
more: In 1999, the zoo opened its 50-acre Wild Africa exhibit where you can see giraffes, zebras, storks, ostriches, waterbucks and gazelles out in open territory. Buy some romaine lettuce to feed the giraffes and get some great pictures of these gentle animals up close, all among the autumn foliage. Then, head back to the other side of the zoo for more traditional fare.

Continue along I-94 with a visit to the Sandhill Crane Vineyards not too far from Ann

Arbor, where you can rest for the day. Or take it slowly and stay somewhere near Jackson and visit this winery in the late morn-



The old biplanes at the Air Zoo will remind you of the games you played on your backyard as a kid.



The Air Zoo celebrates the power that flight has over the imagination and its influence over human ingenuity. | PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AIR ZOO |

ing after breakfast. Whatever you choose, this winery will capture your heart with its family feel. Heather Price, the winery's executive director, says it has been their aim to keep that spirit. And so it has.

As you drive up to the simple house, you will think you took a wrong turn off the road. Not so, the house is the place where Price and her family invite you to sample some wine and enjoy their many festive events. You might want to make it to the Raspberry Festival on Sept. 12 or the Cranes, Colors and Cabernet Festival on Oct. 18. Remember to get a bottle or two for your friends and family back home.

Finally, allow art to lead you into

Detroit for your final stop on this journey. Spend a day in the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA), where you can stand under Diego Rivera's "Detroit Industry" fresco, the one he considered his most successful project.

It is easy to see why. Rivera's stunning work is an achievement of skill, beauty and visual poetry. Created between April 1932 and March 1933, it is an overt tribute to the auto worker and a subtle allegory about the creative and destructive potential of industry and technology left me speechless and enraptured.

I could have spent an entire day studying Rivera's fresco, but I did get away in order to see some of the other great art

the DIA has to offer. Its collection holds more than 60,000 pieces of art from around the world. Walking in those halls provided the perfect close to the trip and sent me home happy, exhilarated and knowing that those images would remain with me through the winter and beyond.

And so, once the cold winds blow and the short days are eternally gray, print out some of the pictures from your trip and paste them on the wall of your office, your cubicle, your bedroom or keep one in your car. When the days are too short or you're stuck in traffic on I-94, remember that you can quickly escape to places of fun or subtle and sublime beauty. ●



At the Binder Zoo's Wild Africa exhibit you can see animals in open territory. | PHOTO BINDER ZOO |

FIND OUT MORE ON THESE SITES

- Tabor Hill Winery: www.taborhill.com
- Kalamazoo Institute of Arts: www.kiarts.org
- Air Zoo: www.airzoo.org
- Gilmore Car Museum: www.gilmorecarmuseum.org
- Sandhill Crane Vineyards: www.sandhillcranevineyards.com
- Binder Park Zoo: www.binderparkzoo.org
- Detroit Institute of Arts: www.dia.org