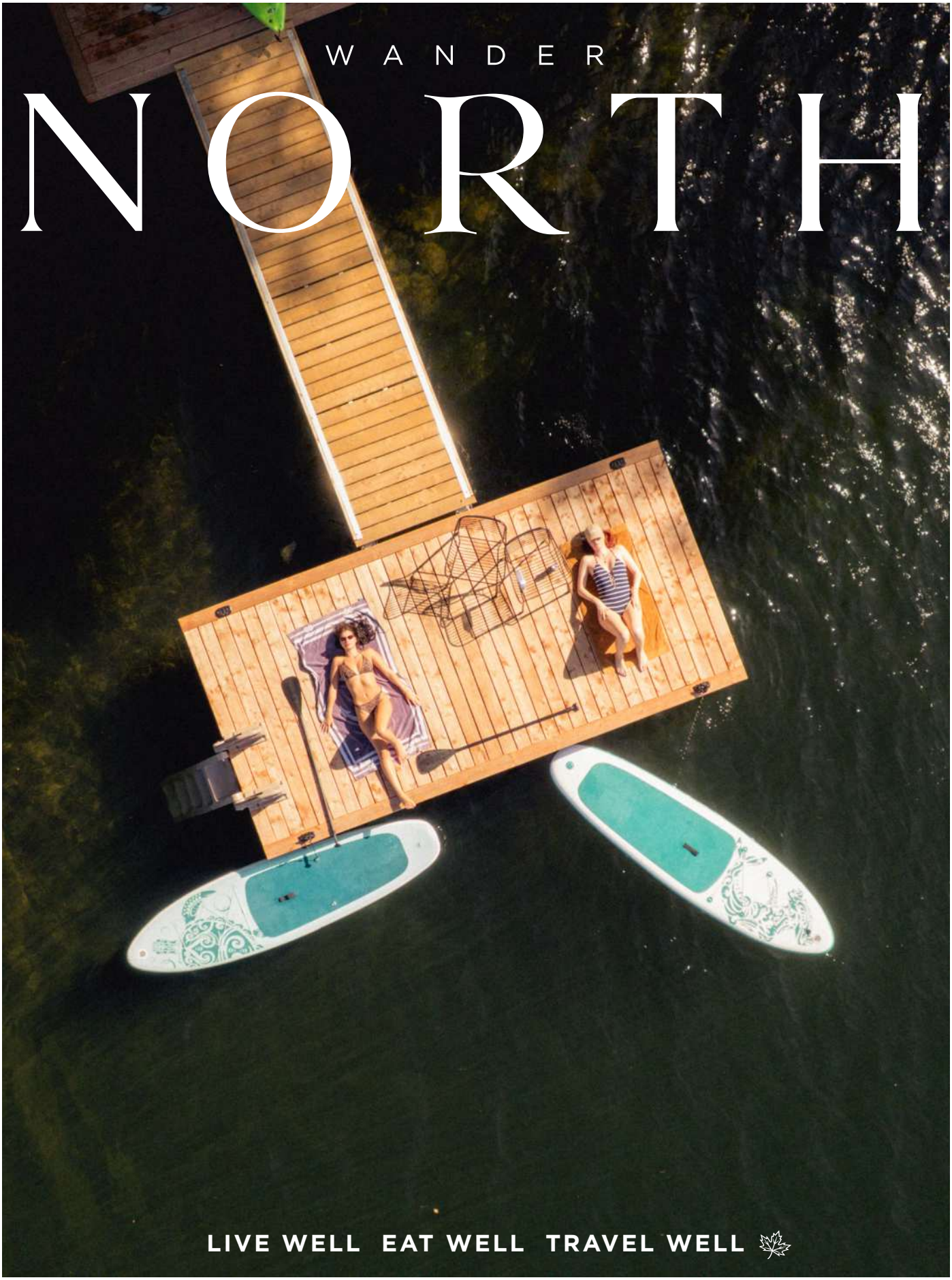

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

PUBLISHER & CO-FOUNDER
Matthew Ross

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF & CO-FOUNDER
Kristina Smith

WEST COAST BUREAU
Mark Stanton

PROOFREADER
C.J. Ross

CONNECT
north@wander-mag.com

CONTRIBUTORS
Anna Cipollone
Lauren Hambleton
Amanda Hardy
Brandon Houston
Maddie Johnson
Jill Kantor
Bonnie Schiedel
Kianna Sunshine

AD SALES
Virika Miller
virika@wander-mag.com

MARKETING & CREATIVE
Springfed Creative Inc.
design@springfedcreative.ca

Cover Photography
Camp Haliburton
by Wyatt Williams

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Someone asked me recently why we created Wander North. In a world of scrollable content, it's a fair question—why print? The answer is that, while I've been in publishing for over a decade, for me, digital just doesn't have the same *feeling*.

I wanted to hold something in my hands.

From initial themes to story development, photo shoots, and editing, the entire process brings me so much joy. I believe people don't just want to see a destination—they want to understand how it feels to be there.

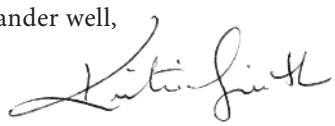
We're fortunate to meet people who are creating, learning, growing, and doing meaningful work in the world. It makes me optimistic about what's ahead.

In these pages, you'll follow the Blue Mountains Cider Trail and meet its passionate makers. You'll ride the Superior Rocket to Porphyry Island, wander through flower fields, and slow down at a lodge along the French River. You'll paddle Georgian Bay at sunrise and head into the woods in Haliburton for wild days that end in a cozy bed.

So why did we create Wander North? To tell stories that bring joy. To inspire discovery. Places to not just visit, but to immerse yourself in. Roads to wander, meals made with care, and small businesses worth supporting. Stories told a little more slowly.

That's why we created this magazine. And if you're reading this—thank you for being here.

Wander well,



Kristina Smith
Editor-in-Chief

THE LODGE AT PINE COVE

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CONTRIBUTORS

Wander North is shaped by voices from across Ontario. From northern forests to Georgian Bay shorelines, our contributors bring a deep connection to the places they write about.



Anna Cipollone is an experienced magazine writer based in Muskoka, originally from Toronto. Her work has been featured in prominent publications including Chatelaine, Yoga Journal, FASHION, and re:porter. A curious storyteller, Anna covers a wide range of lifestyle topics from interior design to wellness, food, art, and entertainment.



Lauren Hambleton is a baker, educator, writer, and owner of Red Hen Artisanale in Grey County. From her rural studio, she hosts hands-on workshops rooted in whole grains and sourdough. Through teaching and storytelling, Lauren shares a love of food, travel, and the vibrant characters found across the region she calls home.



Amanda Hardy is an Anishinaabe Kwe with familial roots in Temagami First Nation, raised and living in Northern Ontario. A mother, educator, and emerging writer, her work is grounded in land, community, and relationship. Through reflections on everyday rituals and environment, Amanda explores the connections that shape identity and belonging.



Brandon Houston is an entrepreneur, writer, and community builder based in Collingwood. As founder of The Collingwood Foundry coworking hub, he supports local entrepreneurs and small businesses. Drawn to wellness, food, and adventure, Brandon spends his free time exploring trails, cold plunging in Georgian Bay, and seeking out memorable culinary experiences.



Maddie Johnson is a travel specialist, writer, and editor with a passion for storytelling and place-based experiences. A creative entrepreneur, she works across travel, tourism, and marketing projects. When she's not crafting itineraries or writing, Maddie can be found road-tripping the Great Lakes region or advocating for conservation through her social enterprise, The Fresh Coast.



Jill Kantor is a wellness educator and retreat leader with more than 30 years of corporate experience. Drawing on Positive Psychology, Nordic lifestyle principles, and holistic living, she guides transformative wellbeing through workshops and retreats, helping others cultivate resilience, joy, and meaningful ritual in everyday life.

Photo: © Assiniboine Park Conservancy



Bonnie Schiedel is the founder and principal at North Star Writing and has lived in Northwestern Ontario for more than two decades. Currently based in Thunder Bay, she can be found writing, editing and producing content or exploring the exceptional boreal beauty of Lake Superior with her family.

Photo: © Kirvan Photography + Film



Kianna Sunshine is a Collingwood-based photographer and writer who pairs images and words to tell stories of homes, people, and community. Curious by nature, she enjoys uncovering the character behind every place and project. When not behind the camera, Kianna can be found exploring cafés, local food spots, and Southern Georgian Bay trails.



Glassy Mornings

A SUNRISE PADDLE RITUAL FOR BEGINNERS

By Kianna Sunshine





I thought balance would be the hard part. The first time I took a stand up paddleboard (SUP) out, I was humbled. Those first minutes feel wobbly, like your body learning a new language. What surprised me is how quickly it clicks once I stopped trying to be an instant expert.

That's what Georgian Bay at sunrise does. It meets you where you are. The water is calmer, the light is soft, and everything feels hushed, like the day hasn't fully arrived yet. Before boat traffic, before the wind picks up, and before your phone starts begging for attention, there's this brief quiet window where the bay makes you forget your to-do list.

I've come to think of sunrise paddles as a kind of cheat code for getting into SUP. When the water is glassy, confidence comes faster. You're not fighting choppy waves or second-guessing every movement with a shoreline full of bystanders. You can actually feel what the board is doing beneath your feet. You can breathe. You can look around. You remember that the point of this is not to perform or perfect; it's to enjoy being out there.

If you're trying it for the first time, the biggest favour you can do for yourself is to care less about distance and more about conditions. Beginners don't need epic routes; they need calm water. Wind and chop are what turn a dreamy paddle into an exhausting one, which is why early mornings are so forgiving. I always recommend starting on your knees to get a feel for the movement before attempting to stand. A short, peaceful paddle on calm water will teach you more than an ambitious one in the wrong conditions.



A few go-to spots around Georgian Bay can make a first sunrise paddle feel far less intimidating. Once you know what to look for, you'll start finding your own. Sheltered harbours offer calm water and easy launches—like the public launch at Collingwood Marina—while small-town beaches with gentle entry, such as Wasaga Beach Provincial Park, give you gradual shorelines and minimal early-morning boat traffic.

Inlets and protected bays, including Matchedash Bay in the Tay-Midland area, tend to have less chop and build confidence quickly. Marina-adjacent shorelines like Thornbury Harbour are ideal if you go early, before boat traffic picks up (with the added bonus of a pastry-and-latte stroll downtown after). Even quiet inland lakes near the bay, like Lake Eugenia, carry that same early-morning magic, often with even calmer water—an easy, confidence-boosting place to begin.

And then, the best part: the post-paddle ritual. A thermos of coffee in the parking lot. A bakery stop on the way home. Breakfast that tastes better because you earned it.

SUP has this sneaky way of changing your relationship with mornings. Sunrise also has a built-in reward system: you get the magic light, the quiet, and the feeling of doing something good for yourself before the day asks anything from you. It doesn't ask you to be extreme or elite. It asks you to show up. Sleepy, curious, maybe a little nervous, and it gives you something back right away: calm, clarity, and that steady confidence that comes from trying something new.

If you've been waiting for a sign to get on the water this year, let this be it. Let Georgian Bay show you how gentle adventure can be. W

Gear Basics

You don't need fancy gear besides your paddleboard and paddle, just the essentials:

- A properly fitted PFD (life jacket), always
- A leash (so your board stays with you if you fall in)
- Layers you can get wet in—Ontario mornings can be chilly
- A dry bag for your phone/keys, and a towel for the car
- A headlamp if you're launching before full daylight
- Sunscreen (yes, even at sunrise)

Safety + Planning

- Check wind, not just precipitation. Wind is the main vibe-killer for beginners. If it's gusty, choose a more protected spot or go another day.
- Know your water temperature. Air can feel warm while the water stays cooler. Dress accordingly and stay close to shore.
- Tell someone your plan (where you're launching, when you'll be back).
- Stay within your comfort zone. Sunrise isn't the moment to test big crossings or open-water ambition.

Photography: (cover) **Sandy Beach** Darren McCristie Destination Ontario (page 9) top: **Maddle**, bottom: **Kianna Sunshine**; (this page) Destination Ontario


Northern SUP


Free Spirit Tours


Blu Wave SUP

Northern SUP © Northern Stand Up Paddle; Free Spirit Tours © Tim Sproll; Blu Wave © Town + County Collective

YOUR TURN | Learn to Stand Up Paddleboard

Ready to try it for yourself? A handful of local outfitters make it easy to get started, with beginner-friendly lessons, calm water access, and all the gear provided.

Most lessons include your board, paddle, and PFD (personal flotation device), along with on-land basics and guided time on the water—so all you need to bring is a swimsuit, water to drink, and a sense of curiosity.

Northern SUP
Barrie & Innisfil

A welcoming place to start, Northern SUP's 90-minute introductory lesson blends fundamentals with time to explore at your own pace. Expect a relaxed, supportive approach that covers safety, technique, and confidence on the board—ideal if it's your very first paddle.

Free Spirit Tours
Wasaga Beach (Nottawasaga River)

For a more nature-forward experience, Free Spirit Tours guides paddlers along a calm, scenic stretch of the Nottawasaga River. Lessons begin with the basics before heading out toward Jack's Lake, where calm water and the chance of spotting wildlife—from swans to eagles—make this feel more like a quiet adventure than a class.

Blu Wave SUP
Collingwood

Launching from Harbourview Park, Blu Wave's 90-minute lessons take place in the sheltered waters of Collingwood Harbour, with views of the terminals adding a distinctly local backdrop. Once you've found your footing, they also offer harbour and sunset tours for a more leisurely paddle.

NORTHERN ENTREPRENEURS

By Maddie Johnson

This issue takes us from the shores of Georgian Bay through Muskoka and over to Prince Edward County, and it never ceases to amaze me how much creativity exists across this province. What stood out most this time around is just how unplanned entrepreneurship can be. If you're willing to say yes and lean in when the moment arrives, it's pretty amazing what can happen. A climbing trip that turned into a move. A campfire mug that turned into a brand. A gutted resort that turned into one of the most talked-about properties in the province. None of these stories started the way they ended up, and that's exactly what makes them worth telling.



{ Shannon Hunter, Wander the Resort }





Photography: (cover) Kassandra Melnyk; (this page) top: Patrick Biller, bottom; Andrew Fearm

Wander the Resort

There's no straight line from cancer researcher to luxury resort owner. But then again, Shannon Hunter has never really done things the expected way.

After years in medical research and then interior design in Toronto, Shannon and her husband bought a small waterfront property in Prince Edward County in 2015 on a whim. She styled it, put it on Airbnb, and came back after the holidays to find the entire summer had booked. One property became five, and five became a question she couldn't stop asking: what if there was something here?

In 2019, Shannon and her business partner bought a tired lakeside resort in Bloomfield, gutted it, and started building something the County didn't have—a place rooted in simple luxury, where every detail, from the percolator coffee to the cedar-and-smoke soap made by a local artisan, had been personally chosen to make guests slow down and actually feel where they were.

Named best new hotel in Canada by Condé Nast Traveller in 2021, Wander the Resort is now home to ten Scandi-inspired lakeside cabins, a clubhouse and restaurant, beach club, and the newly opened Wander the Spa.

"Making a beautiful space gets people here once," Shannon says. "If they don't feel welcomed, they don't come back."

They keep coming back.







Lemonade Collective



Melissa Goldmintz will tell you she was never really a gym person. Which is exactly why she opened one.

After growing up in the Blue Mountains—she learned to swim in the very pool she now owns—Melissa spent years in marketing and events before a phone call from her mom changed everything. The building was for sale. She knew it well. She put in an offer, and just like that, she was a gym owner with no fitness industry experience, a gutted building in desperate need of love, and a COVID shutdown four months after opening. She navigated all of it alongside her husband and with a determination that, by all accounts, has never really let up.

Six years later, the community Melissa set out to build is thriving. The facility now offers a saltwater pool, gym, fitness studio, dry sauna, personal training, nutrition coaching, and an authorized Lululemon retail shop. The aquafit classes are always wait-listed, bachelorette bookings fill most weekends, and members drive in from as far as Owen Sound.

Whatever their day looks like when they arrive, they all leave the same way. “They’ll say, ‘I needed that,’” Melissa says. “And that makes it worth it.”



Photography: (page 14) grid: Town + County Collective; inset: **Melissa Goldmintz** Origin Films; (this page) Town + County Collective

Dags & Willow Fine Cheese and Gourmet Shop

Scott Irvine spent decades working for large corporations—CN, CP Rail, a string of U.S. companies—before finally doing what he always wanted: whatever the hell he wanted.

After buying and turning around a medical gas company during COVID, Scott set his sights on something with a little more soul. In 2023, he purchased Dags & Willow, Collingwood's beloved fine cheese and gourmet shop, and quietly got to work. He expanded its wholesale reach across Ontario, transformed the underused upstairs into the Willow Room—an intimate, European-feeling event venue—and started hosting everything from five-course Spanish dinners to micro weddings.

But to this day, Scott describes himself as more caretaker than owner, thanks to the dedicated following the shop had long before he took over.

"The people of Collingwood feel like it's their business," he said. "It's my responsibility not to mess it up."

What drives him isn't reinvention for its own sake, but something simpler: building a place where people love to work, and where the community feels a genuine sense of belonging. In Collingwood, it seems, they already do.

Muskoka Cup Co.



Jamie Burns was sitting around a campfire at Killbear Provincial Park when the idea came to her. A lover of beautiful, intentional things, she wanted a mug that matched the feeling of being up north, but she couldn't find one. So she decided to make her own.

That small act of creative problem-solving in the summer of 2017 became Muskoka Cup Co.

What started as hand-painted ceramics for friends and family has grown into a brand carried by over 150 retailers across Ontario. The six signature campfire mugs remain the heart of it, and each design—a wind-swept pine, a dockside Muskoka chair, an anchor at rest—tells a small story about life up north. The line has since expanded to include Cottage Clean, an eco-friendly dish soap made with Muskoka cranberry and wild blueberry extract, now sold through the Ontario Made program.

"I love being able to provide people with that in-between connection," Jamie says, "where they can experience Muskoka from no matter where they are."



Photography: (page 16) Michelle Delaney of Sisterhood Photography Co.; (this page) **Millard Bautista Designs** Chris Monette

Millard Bautista Designs

Mike Millard and Venecia Bautista didn't set out to build a furniture company—they set out to build a life. Mike left a career as an auto mechanic for the creative freedom of carpentry. Venecia traded tourism management for job sites in BC. Together, they founded Millard Bautista Designs in 2011 and moved to Clarksburg by 2016 after a single climbing trip to the Beaver Valley convinced them it was home.

"It's been the best decision of our lives," Venecia said.

Their work spans custom cabinetry and furniture for the cottages, chalets, and custom homes that define life in South Georgian Bay—built on a small-batch pre-order model, with sustainably sourced materials, and made to last. More recently, a request from a local bike shop sparked something new: a line of modular gear storage systems for bikes, skis, boards, and climbing equipment that has since caught the attention of outdoor enthusiasts and design-minded homeowners alike.

It's a natural extension of who they are—two people who spend their days building beautiful, functional things, and their evenings out on the trails using them.

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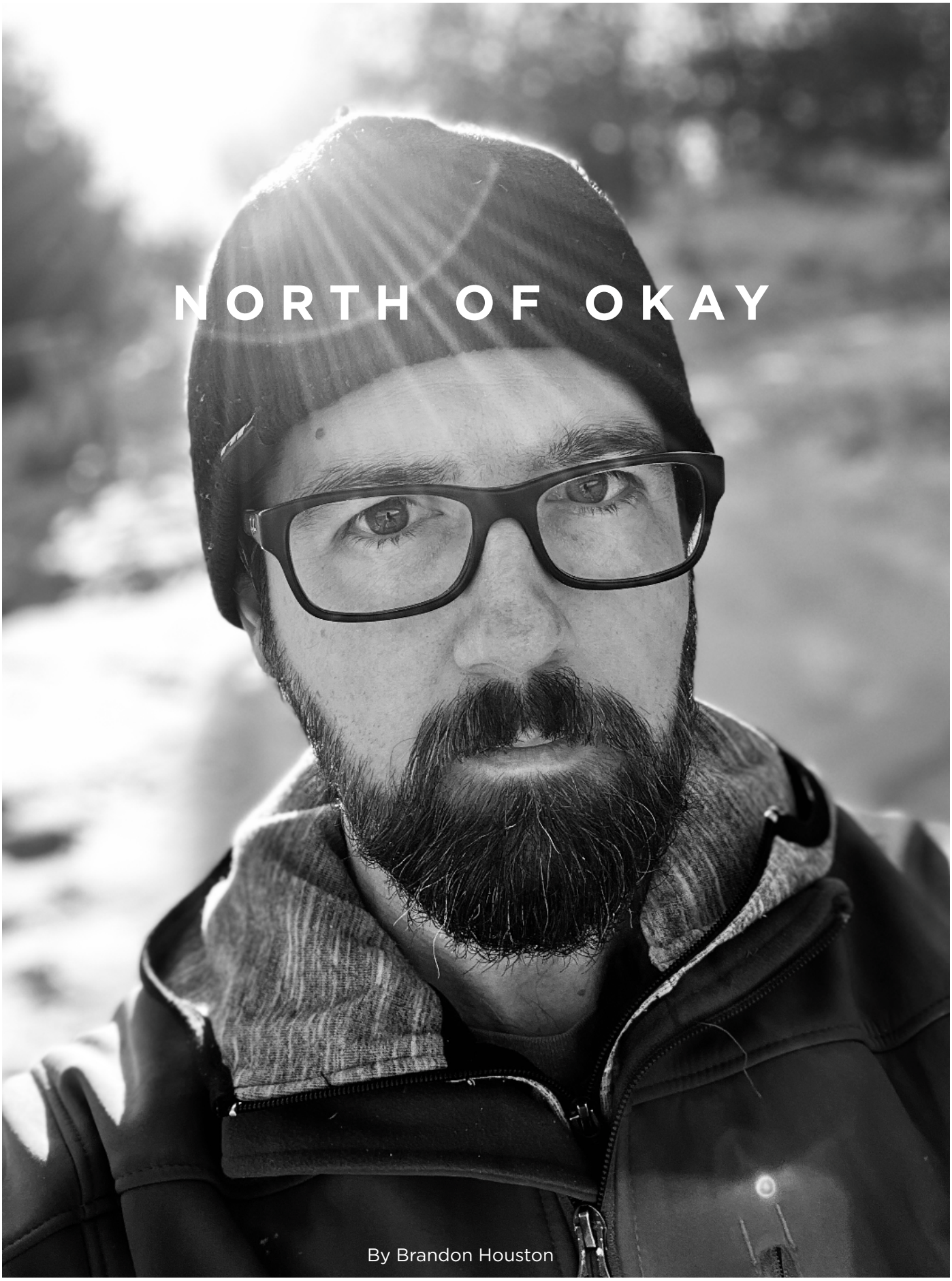
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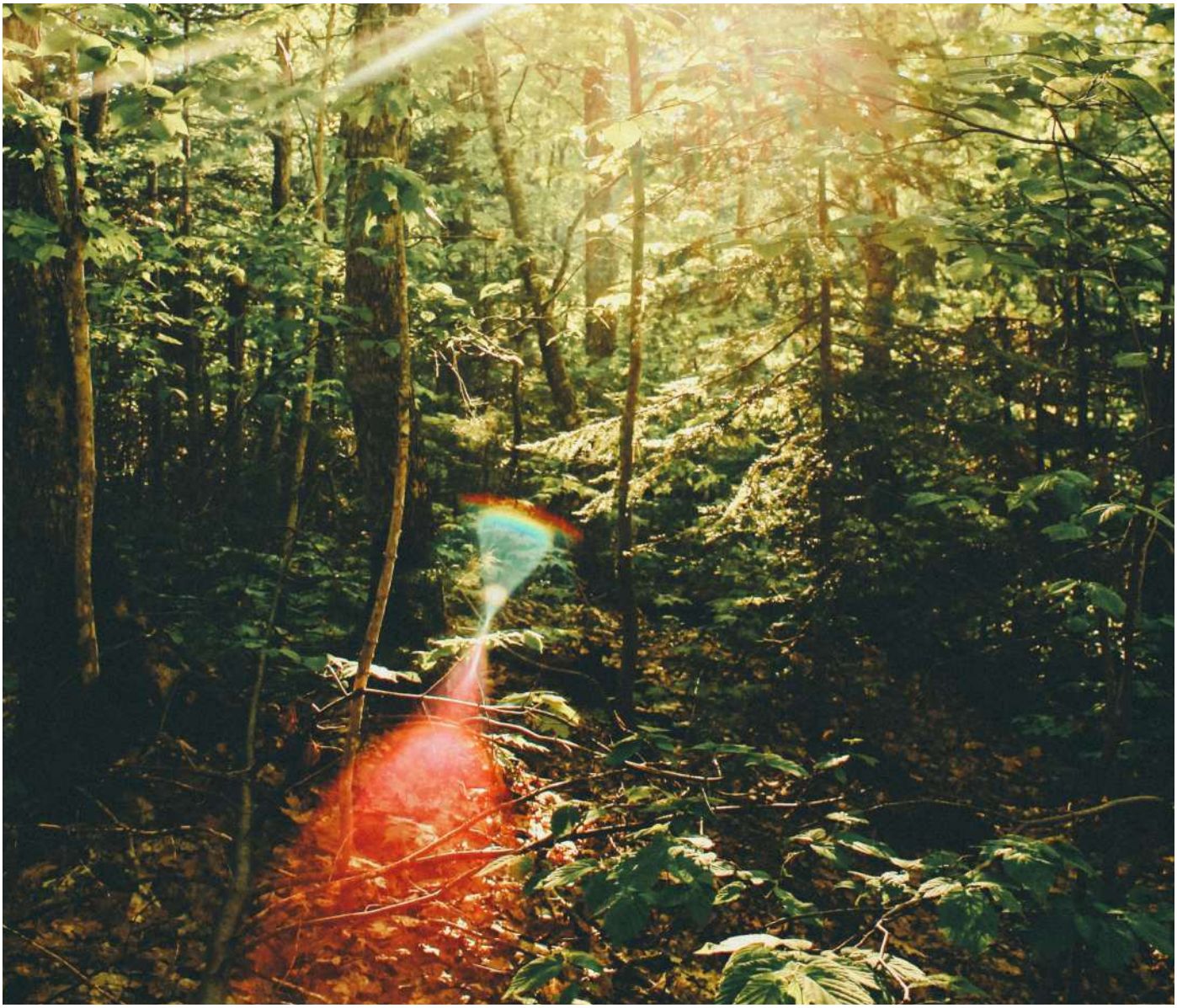
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NORTH OF OKAY

By Brandon Houston



I knew exactly what I should be doing. That's the frustrating part. The answer sat there like a light switch across a cold room I didn't want to cross.

Get outside. Move your body. Meditate. I've made this case for years in conversations at our coworking space, in newsletters, and with friends going through hard seasons. I had the playbook. I just couldn't open it.

My dad passed away not long ago. In the weeks after, business pressures that had been simmering boiled over. Admin tasks like paying bills were forgotten, a video project I'd been working on for a client fell behind, a consulting client's outreach email was forgotten. My normal 5 am alarm went off, and I knew a workout would help, and I just… didn't. I stayed under the warmth of the blanket, dreading the day. I told myself, tomorrow.

This went on for weeks. My phone lit up with text messages I didn't respond to. My inbox grew longer.

Most wellness writing is sent from the mountaintop. Find a routine, transform your life, here's what worked. That's not where I am.

I'm writing from the slope. North of okay, maybe, but not quite there yet. Showered and showing up, but not steady. Paying the bills but misplacing the keys.

The gap between knowing and doing is humbling. You'd think that having the tools would make hard seasons easier. In some ways, it makes them harder. You're watching yourself not do the things you know work, and the self-judgment piles on top of whatever you were already carrying.

I reached out to a friend of mine, Marc Champagne. Author, podcast host, someone who's spent years studying mental fitness, because I wanted to know if this was just me. Turns out it's not.

"This is more of a signal than a failure," Marc told me. "Something deeper is asking for your attention before you return to the actual doing."

Photography: (cover) **Brandon Houston**; (page 20) Hans; (page 21) **Marc Champagne**



That reframing helped. I wasn't broken. I was just trying to build on ground that was still shaking.

He warned against sprinting back to a full routine when you're depleted. "You need to find your non-negotiable," he said. "The smallest thing that brings you back into contact with yourself."

For him, it's being fully present with his first coffee in the morning. Not thinking or judging or worrying. Just watching the coffee brew. "When your system is overloaded, simplicity is what it can actually receive."

He also introduced me to the idea of mental nutrition. When you're depleted, sometimes what you need isn't more discipline. You need relief and replenishment.

Listening to something that makes you laugh. Reading a biography that reminds you others have walked through something similar and made it through. Not forcing momentum. Creating conditions where it can return on its own.

Last weekend, I finally forced myself outside. Nothing ambitious. Just a hike I've done dozens of times. The sunlight hit my face, and something small shifted. I wouldn't say it was a major transformation. Just a little crack of light. Enough to remind me that the door was still there, even when I couldn't make myself walk through it.

I've returned to my morning meditations since. I started in small 10-minute sits and slowly worked my way back up. Nothing groundbreaking, but my mind feels a little less like a browser with forty tabs open.

Marc shared something from his own practice that stuck with me. He's been working with what he calls a "Council". A group of mentors and thinkers he brings questions to, almost like sitting at a table with them. I tried it. I pictured my grandfather in his flannel, a former client whom I respect dearly, a poet whose lines I trust. I asked, What actually matters today?

The answers weren't mystical. Walk. Do some pushups. Get into nature. One of the perspectives that came back: "The smallest act of self-governance, even imperfect or brief, is not a stepping stone to wellness. It is wellness, in seed form."

I liked that because it lowered the standard to something that seemed more accessible. One minute of stillness. One walk around the block. One glass of water chosen with intention. These aren't substitutes for the "real" practice. They are the practice, compressed to what the moment can hold.

I'm not writing this because I've figured it out. I'm writing it because I think there are other people in that gap right now. Knowing exactly what would help, and being unable to make themselves do it. If that's you, I want you to know it's not a character flaw. It's information. Something deeper might be asking for your attention first.

Start smaller than you think you should. Even if the non-negotiable feels too big, open a window for just a moment and feel the weather. Drink water. Be easier on yourself than feels earned. And when you finally do make it outside, let the sunlight and cool air hit your face.

It's still there. You're still here. That's enough for now.

ESSENTIAL GOODS



© Town + County Collective





Kinfolk Tallow Balm
Inspired by slow days at Kinfolk Cabin, this all-natural tallow balm is infused with cedar from the family's own property. Gentle, nourishing, and made for everyday use, it's a simple ritual rooted in nature—and a reminder to take things a little slower.

The Cottager Shlips
After a day in the woods, these are the slippers you'll want waiting by the door. Made from 100% felted wool with a durable sole, they're warm, breathable, and built to last—thoughtfully designed for slow mornings and cozy nights in.

Greenify with Brad Cactus Clock
When you're unplugged in the woods—or just craving a digital detox—this playful analog clock keeps time the old-fashioned way. Designed and 3D printed by Brad using plant-based materials, it's a small, thoughtful reminder to slow down (and not take things too seriously).



Goodland Wood Burning Hot Tub
When you're back home from your wanderings, this is how you keep the ritual going. No plumbing or electricity required, this wood-burning hot tub heats quickly and settles you in just as easily—crafted in Canada for slow, soothing soaks, season after season.

© Scott Sporleder







Spy Distillery Mata Hari Aged Apple Brandy
When you're following the Blue Mountains Cider Trail, this is the bottle you bring home. Crafted from Georgian Bay apples and aged in cognac barrels, it's smooth and layered—burnt caramel, warm spice, and baked apple—made for slow sipping, neat.

Chef Patrick's Gourmet Foods
Served at The Lodge at Pine Cove, these hand-rolled croissants bring a touch of French pastry tradition to Ontario. Made in Rockford by a classically trained French chef, they're buttery, flaky, and worth lingering over—don't miss the pain au chocolat.

SADIE Pottery Vases
After a morning wandering flower fields, these one-of-a-kind vases give your wild picks a place to show off. Handmade by a Sudbury-based artist, each piece—part of a wider collection of home goods—is unique, with that beautifully imperfect, tactile feel.



Kawelä Beach Towels
From Sandbanks to Tobermory, this is the towel you'll want in your beach bag. Lightweight, sand-repellent, and quick-drying, these waffle microfibre towels are made for easy days by the water. And their bathroom towels? Easily the plushest you'll ever wrap yourself up in.



THE WILLOW ROOM

COLLINGWOOD'S MOST INTIMATE EVENT VENUE

Perched above the renowned Dags & Willow Fine Cheese and Gourmet Food Shop, The Willow Room is Collingwood's most intimate and luxurious setting for private events and gourmet dining experiences.

Discovering the

BLUE MOUNTAINS CIDER TRAIL

By Maddie Johnson



THE [IN]CIDER REPORT





I've spent a lot of time in South Georgian Bay. Enough that I sometimes catch myself taking it for granted—the way the bay stretches along one side, the escarpment rising on the other, and some of the best apple-growing land essentially in my backyard.

But it wasn't until I started digging into the cider scene up here that I realized how much I'd been missing.

There are a lot of cideries in this area. More than most people know about, and more than I expected when I started making calls. So I packed up the car and set out to spend a weekend finding out.

There's a spot on Highway 124 coming into town where you crest the hill and suddenly all you can see is Georgian Bay stretching out ahead. It's one of my favourite views in Ontario, and a good sign you've arrived.

First stop: **Duntroon Cyder House**, a small family-run cidery located on 124 just outside Duntroon. Kimberly and Tim Schneider have been making traditional, preservative-free cider here for seven years. After a tough year off, they're back this spring and couldn't be happier.

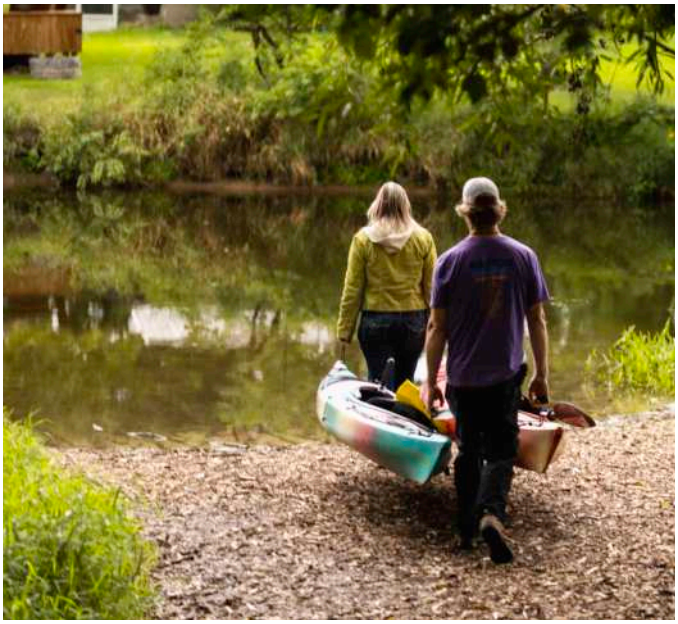
"What I missed most was the connection," says Kimberly. "The customers, the community, the people who've been with us from the beginning. That's what brought us back."

Dinner tonight is an easy choice. Justin's Oven in Kimberley is known for its wood-fired pizza every Friday. Owner Justin Howe has been running the place for over a decade, with a strong focus on farm-to-table ingredients sourced from nearby producers.

From there, it's a short drive to Brick & Beam, a new boutique hotel downtown Collingwood. Built in the late 1800s on Hurontario Street, the property has been carefully restored, with exposed brick, original timber beams, and four thoughtfully designed suites.

In the morning, head back to Kimberley, where Joel and Jennie Dawson have been running Free Spirit Tours for nearly 30 years. Their paddle-and-cider package is a must. You're shuttled upstream, then left to drift back down the Beaver River by canoe or kayak at your own pace.

"We started to see the opportunity to partner with the cideries and make it easy for people to enjoy everything this region has to offer," says Joel.









Photography: (cover) **Spy Cider House and Distillery** Christine Reid; (page 28) **Thornbury Craft Co**. Town + County Collective; (this page, clockwise from top left) **Free Spirit Tours** Town + County Collective, **The Brick & Beam Boutique Hotel** Town + County Collective, **Duntroon Cyder House** Charisse Ang, Metabolic Media Co., **Justin's Oven**

Then, head into Thornbury for lunch and a flight at **Thornbury Craft Cider & Brew House**. The building started as apple storage in the 1930s, became a cidery in 2007, and has since grown into one of the most impressive stops on the trail, with 18 ciders on tap, a full kitchen, and a patio that catches the afternoon sun perfectly.

"Between Thornbury, Meaford, and Collingwood, about a quarter of Ontario's apple crop is grown within a half hour of our building," says Derek Hammond, retail and hospitality manager. "You can have completely different cider experiences within an easy drive. That's pretty special."

So, the afternoon becomes a backroads loop to experience exactly that.

First stop: **Windswept Cider**, just outside Meaford, where Mark and Courtney Skinner run a small organic farm. Everything here is wild-fermented and bottle-conditioned, with fruit sourced not just from their orchard but from abandoned trees across the region.

"Every season, every bottle is unique," says Mark. "It's the land speaking for itself."

A short drive brings you to **Grey & Gold** in Clarksburg, where David Baker makes dry, minimal-intervention ciders in a 180-year-old barn. No frills, no fuss, just really good cider. This season, he's launching a sparkling rosé made from red-fleshed apples. *(continued on page 32)*





Photography: (this page) top: **The Port Tavern** Christine Reid, bottom: **Grey & Gold Cider**; (page 31) top left; A**rdiel Cider House at Georgian Hills Vineyards** Town + County Collective, bottom left: **Windswept Orchard Cider** Courtney Skinner







Whether you are planning a relaxed day trip or a weekend escape, the Blue Mountains Trail brings together curated cider experiences, local flavour and memorable scenery. And it does not end here. With trails across the province, there are plenty of places to Get Your Cider On in Ontario.

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Last stop is **Spy Cider House & Distillery**, just around the corner but a different experience altogether. Darcy and Ian Hagerman have built Spy into something well beyond a cidery, with live music, markets, and a growing events calendar. This summer, they're opening The Woodrow, a new 5,600-square-foot event space for weddings and retreats.

"When people come up here, they appreciate where they are," says Darcy. "When you're sitting here having a drink, looking at the orchard, there is something about that sort of respect for where it came from that just happens organically."

If you have one more stop in you, make the drive out to **Forbidden Cider at Coffin Ridge Winery** for a crisp, dry pour and some of the best views in the region.

Back in Thornbury, check into Penny's Motel. The roadside motel has been thoughtfully updated without losing its retro character, and it's one of the best spots to base yourself for a weekend like this.

Penny's has a great on-site restaurant, and if you feel like stretching your legs, it's an easy walk into town. Right on the harbour, The Port Tavern is a solid dinner choice, especially in summer when the patio is open and the menu leans into seafood and cocktails.

Sunday morning comes a little slower. Head into Clarksburg, grab a coffee, and take your time along Marsh Street. reDiscovered on Marsh is an antique and vintage shop owned by Kara and Dan Bowles, former teachers with 30-plus years in the industry and founders of a seven-stop Antique Trail.



"Community is important, and it comes through to your customers," says Kara. "When you collaborate, you make it easy for people to stay, and they come back because of it."

For lunch, continue down Grey County Road 2 to **Georgian Hills Vineyards**, home of **Ardiel Cider House**. Four generations of the Ardiel family have been farming this land, and their ciders reflect that history—classic, dry, and made from heritage varieties grown along the slopes of the escarpment.

The recently expanded patio is a good place to settle in and grab a late lunch.

No weekend up here is complete without a stop at Scandinave Spa. Tucked into the forest outside Blue Mountain Village, the spa's thermal journey is exactly what your body needs after a weekend of backroads and cider tasting. The perfect way to wind down before the drive home. W

Photography: (page 32) **Penny's Motel** Jenna Kitchings; (this page) **Scandinave Spa Blue Mountain** Town + County Collective













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Beach Bites

THE BEST SNACK STOPS FROM WASAGA TO TOBERMORY

By Lauren Hambleton





The sun is climbing higher, the days are getting longer, and beach season is making its return. Ontario is home to some of the most pristine waters and wild shorelines around, and whichever direction your beach adventures take you this summer, you're going to need snacks. Let me help.

Wasaga Beach—known as the world's longest freshwater beach—has a few can't-miss places to grab a bite, both in town and on the way. On your drive in, make a stop 20 minutes down the road in Stayner to pick up some road trip-worthy snacks.

Photography: (cover) **Sauble Beach** Brianne Farquhar; (this page) **Wasaga Beach** Simcoe County Tourism; (page 37) top: **Che Roba!**, right: Honey Monster, SmartShoot Inc., left: Pille R Priske

Do yourself a favour and get sushi to go at **Miso Hot**. You can't go wrong with whatever your taste buds gravitate towards, but might I recommend the Yama-Rama and the Dixie Roll to get your order started? Stock your cooler with a variety pack, and you're ready to find that shady spot in the sand.

Another Stayner hot spot is **Honey Monster**. They specialize in Fried Chicken: a classic picnic meal that travels well. It's great hot or cold, and Honey Monster does The Classic Chicken Sandwich right: the perfect amount of crunch and spice, layered high on a pillowy soft bun. You may want to share this one, it's huge!

Before popping up your umbrella and unfurling your beach blanket, make a pit stop at **Che Roba!** in Wasaga Beach proper. Here you'll find an array of sandwiches prepared with the fluffiest, freshest, home-made focaccia around. Or post-beach, grab an affogato—an elevated float of sorts, with a buttery, creamy scoop of gelato topped with a fresh pull of espresso. They also have a variety of imported Italian beers and wines to toast the beautiful day.













After Wasaga, Sauble Beach is the second longest fresh-water beach in the world. Soak up the sun, dip your toes in the warm waters of Lake Huron, or log a few kilometres on the sandy expanse before treating yourself to a beverage at **1858 Caesar Bar**. Steps from the beach, 1858 has over 45 signature Caesars, and the option to build your own if you know exactly how you like it. You can even get a Caesar on the go: a travelling adult juice box!

Without question, **Gigi's Italian** is a place worth visiting. The light and crispy calamari with bright, lemony aioli is complemented by their friendly service. Their namesake Pizza Gigi is their take on the Hawaiian: sweet pineapple pieces and just the right amount of smoked bacon are balanced with pickled onions on a thin, tender crust. The decor is welcoming and cozy, like dining in your modern, stylish, Nonna's home.

Tobermory—at the tip of the Bruce Peninsula, between Lake Huron and Georgian Bay—is a wildly popular spot to explore beautiful rocky beaches with the most crystal clear waters. While it might be the destination you have in mind, don't pass up the abundance of coves and beaches that are a short detour off the main road. On the East side, Little Cove is a true gem mere steps from the Bruce Trail.

On the West, Singing Sands has some of the warmest, shallowest waters in the area. Along the way, you'll want to take a break in Wiarton to fuel up and explore, so plan to pop into **Howell's Fish**. Throughout the summer, this fish market offers a takeout menu. Locals rave about their delicately crisp fish and fresh-cut fries. They sell a variety of fresh, frozen and smoked fish, caught by Indigenous Fisherfolk on Georgian Bay and Lake Huron.

Once you've wound your way up the Peninsula, what better way to celebrate than by grabbing a fresh pint at the **Tobermory Brewing Company?** Secure a spot on their front patio for the best vantage point of the busy harbour—the boats coming and going, and the cotton candy streaked sky as the sun is setting.

Pack your sunscreen, take the scenic route, and enjoy every delicious bite this summer has to offer!

Photography: (this page) **Gigi's Italian** Justyna Charette Photography, Farrah K, **1858 Caesar Bar**; (page 39) **Tobermory Brewing Co.** Momentum360 Marketing


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STAY A LITTLE LONGER

If you're heading up the Bruce Peninsula for a day of beach-hopping, consider stretching your stay just a little further.

Just south of Tobermory, Lion's Head offers a quiet place to land—where limestone cliffs meet the clear waters of Georgian Bay, and the pace feels slower. It's an ideal home base for groups looking to explore the Peninsula, with easy access to the Bruce Trail, hidden coves, and long, unhurried evenings by the shore.

Grey Bruce Cottages manages a collection of thoughtfully maintained homes across the region, many of which are suited to larger groups. Expect fully equipped kitchens, fresh linens, generous outdoor spaces, and layouts that allow for both gathering and retreat. Their concierge team ensures everything is ready before arrival, and, if you want help planning your time, they can point you toward local hikes, kayak rentals, and local shops and eats.

For those planning a group getaway, it's worth noting that Grey Bruce Cottages is fully licensed through the Travel Industry Council of Ontario (TICO), offering an added layer of confidence when booking.

Come for the beaches—but give yourself the time, and space, to stay awhile.

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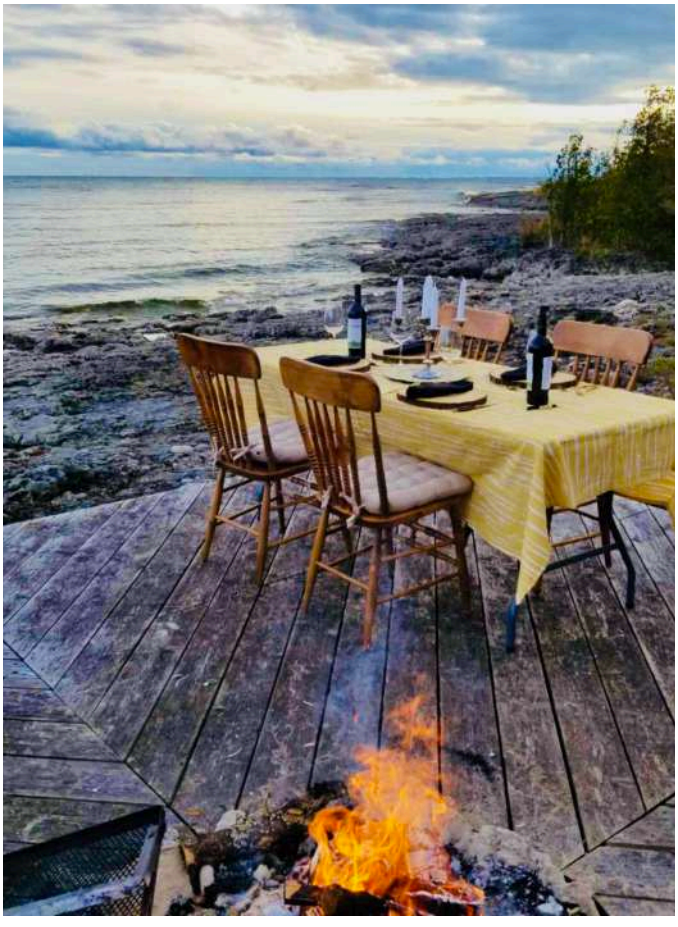
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FROM THE ASHES

By Matthew Ross









Not very many positive stories start with COVID. This one is an exception.

Paul Laforet, Co-Owner & Executive Chef of Orillia-based Laforet Catering, was forced to make drastic changes to deal with the shutdown of the food and hospitality industry.

A professional chef with twenty years' experience in top kitchens suddenly found himself laid off and behind the wheel of a delivery truck, figuring out what came next. Amazon by day. Catering by night.

Glen Oro Farm, just outside Orillia in Hawkstone, became the starting point for that next phase. In December 2020, Paul catered his first over-the-fire experience there.

Glen Oro was "an amazing springboard," he says. "You have this captive audience because of COVID, who were just so excited to go to Glen Oro, plus have a private chef cooking over the fire."

"It worked out so well, it was like lightning in a bottle. I've done a lot of events there over the last five years, and it's led me to meet a whole pile of different people and clients."

For Chef Travis Barron of Bluebird Catering Co., it was the aftermath of COVID. A veteran of Collingwood's vibrant food scene, Travis found himself rethinking things as well. The restaurant business was no longer what it once was. It had become harder to navigate and no longer as inspiring.

"I went back to what I enjoyed most: on-site catering. Those odd jobs where we'd cook in a field, at a house, at an event. I loved it. I needed to see if I could do it on my own—and it turned out to be the best decision of my career."

Photography: (cover and page 44) **Laforet Catering**; (this page) **Travis Barron** JY Photography - Jamie Churchward



"Restaurants are static—you know, repetitive. Go, go, go all day," Travis says. "Now, you actually have a bit of time to step back and plan."

While their paths were different, the outcome was strikingly similar. The pandemic released them from the confines of the kitchen. It sparked renewed interest in a less formal, more primal way of connecting with the ingredients of the food and with the people eating.

That said, creating events and cooking outdoors has also come with its challenges.

Chef Paul keeps his gear to the bare minimum—a grill to go over the fire pit, a folding table for preparing food, a cart, and whatever is on the menu. Intentionally light comes in handy when you have to haul your gear in, but it also leaves you exposed to the elements.

"I've cooked in blizzards and ice, storms and thunderstorms, and all sorts of strange weather," says Paul. Most notably? In early spring 2025, Ontario experienced one of its most severe weather events ever. This historic ice storm caused widespread damage, with Simcoe County among the hardest hit.

And Paul was in the thick of it—hosting an event at Glen Oro Farm.

"No matter what the weather is, you're going to be out there and you're going to be cooking, that's the deal. There are trees falling down every few minutes, like gunshots going off everywhere. It was pretty wild."

For Travis, it is all about creating the event. The menu might call for multiple food stations, barbeques, or onsite smokers, but it is these challenges that make this kind of gig all the more interesting.

"To do on-site events well is challenging because there are thousands of things you have to be in control of when you do it. It brings a different level of intensity to cooking and the entertainment of feeding people at the same time."

For both chefs, it is about the experience that they deliver to the diners.

"Cooking over the fire, there's just something so magical about it," says Paul. "Not to be cliché, but the flavour of the wood and the smoke. There's something really special about being outdoors and eating by the fire, and for clients to see how the food is prepared."

"I've been cooking my whole life, and ever since I started cooking outdoors, it feels like it's reignited a passion in me because it's so new, fun, and exciting. There is something about the wood and the setting that really affects the food."

For Travis, it's the interactive approach to each event. "I love talking with customers and showing them what we're doing. My approach to food is more of a simplistic approach instead of being too pretentious with it, so it gives you a little more time to have fun and talk with guests."

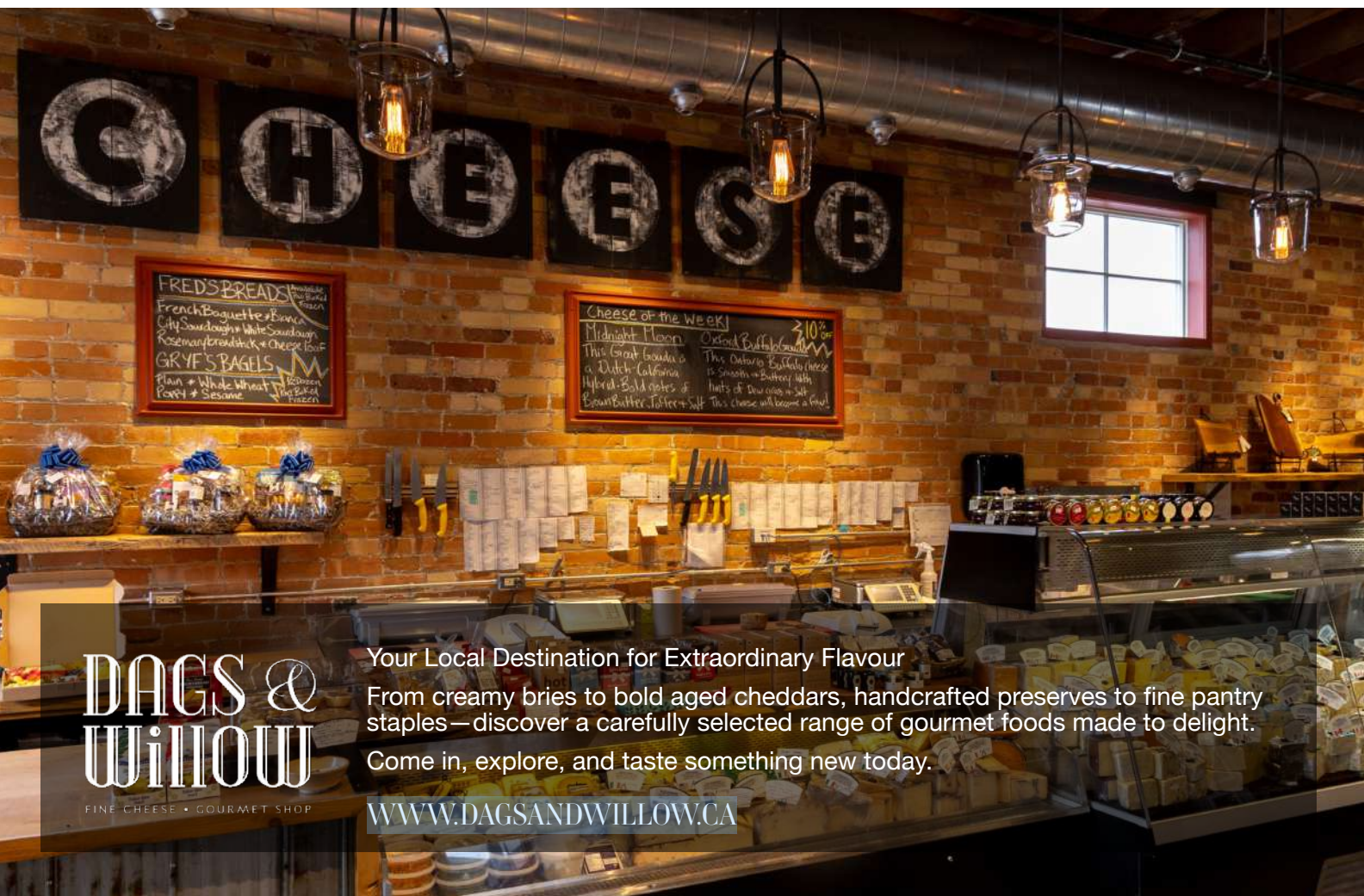
Laforet Catering continues to flourish, from private chef experiences and small gatherings to large-scale events. The goal is simple: to bring people together through exceptional food, warm hospitality, and meaningful moments.

And this year, Bluebird Catering has added a full commercial kitchen to the mix, giving Travis more flexibility in delivering unforgettable culinary experiences to his growing roster of clients.

A rare kind of COVID story—one that ends not in loss, but in reinvention. And for both chefs, it's just the beginning. W

Photography: (this page) **Travis Barron** JY Photography - Jamie Churchward, (page 47) Laforet Catering




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Rosemary Breadstick • Cheese Focaccia
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WILD STAYS

By Kristina Smith





There's something quietly special about the Haliburton Highlands. Just a couple of hours from the city, the landscape shifts. Roads wind deeper into the trees, lakes stretch out in every direction, and the pace softens.

The Haliburton Highlands feels like cottage country the way many people remember it—quieter, wilder, and just a little harder to stumble upon by accident.

Across the region, a handful of owner-driven stays are reimagining what it means to spend time in the woods. From treetop forts and off-grid cabins to rustic log stays and modern lakeside retreats, each offers its own way of bringing you closer to the wild without asking you to leave comfort behind.

Photography: (cover) **Cabinscape** Taylor Yhap; **FORT Treehouse Co. Hårtwood** (page 50) Ian Patterson, (this page) Allan Glandield

With **FORT Treehouse Co.**, the experience begins not on the ground, but in the trees.

Suspended among the canopy and bordering a protected 500-acre nature reserve, Hårtwood offers a first glimpse of what "wild" can feel like in Haliburton County—immersive, restorative, and just removed enough from the everyday to shift your perspective.

Designed as a small-scale treetop hotel, Hårtwood brings together three private treehouses and a shared gathering space—The Hydda—where a wine bar and coffee counter invite guests to settle in.

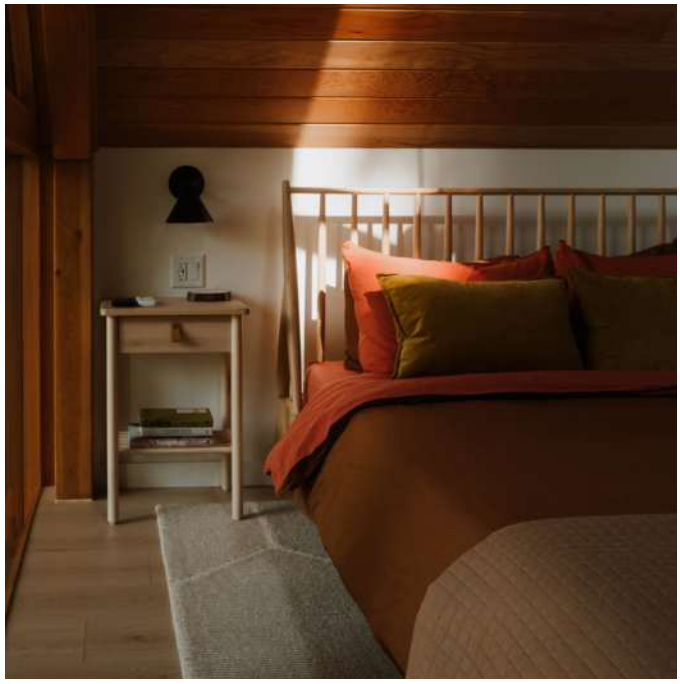
Guests can book a single treehouse for a quiet retreat or reserve the entire site to come together with friends or family, sharing meals, slow forest hikes, and time outside under the stars. "You can get eight to twelve friends together and have this really intimate experience," says co-founder Lauren Green.

Each treehouse is carefully built into living trees, shaped first by the natural landscape and then by architecture. Expansive windows blur the line between indoors and out, while details from radiant floor heating to spa-inspired bathrooms bring quiet luxury to the experience.

"The goal was getting deep into nature, but having this very comfortable experience," Lauren adds. "Like a portal to nature for people who don't always feel comfortable in nature."

Elsewhere in the region, "wild" takes a more grounded form—one rooted as much in memory as in place.







For **Camp Haliburton** owner Cathy Cicchini, that connection started early. "My father was a scout leader, so every summer we'd go up to Haliburton. My mom would drop off my dad and my brothers, and they'd go scouting for a couple of weeks. I was always jealous—girls weren't allowed."

Now, that early pull to the region has come full circle.

Perched above the shoreline of Long Lake, this modern Scandinavian-style cabin is clean-lined and light-filled, with natural materials and large windows that draw the outdoors in.

Here, the rhythm of the day is simple: morning coffee on the deck, afternoons lounging on the dock, a swim when the mood strikes, followed by a sauna to welcome in the evening.

While the setting feels peaceful and tucked away, it's not remote in the traditional sense. The surrounding area is gently populated, offering a stay in nature that doesn't require going without a latte, with Haliburton Village just twenty minutes away.

What began as a personal retreat has evolved into something more, drawing not only couples, but families and solo creatives. "I've had a musician stay for a few days just to write," says Cathy. "You smell the air, you're in the forest, you hear the birds. It's a reset."

Photography: (this page) **Camp Haliburton** left: Wyatt Williams, right: Alyssa Naylor; (page 53) **Cabinscape** Taylor Yhap



For those looking to go deeper into the woods, **Cabinscape** leans into a more remote kind of stay.

Tiny, off-grid cabins are placed where traditional builds simply can't go—tucked into quiet clearings, along winding backroads, and in pockets of forest that are largely untouched. Designed off-site and transported in, each cabin is set with minimal disruption to the land.

"That gives us the opportunity to put our cabins in areas that most people can't build on," says co-founder Laura Mendes.

Across the Haliburton Highlands, cabins are thoughtfully ranked by remoteness, allowing guests to choose a stay that matches their comfort level. Some offer seclusion within reach of nearby roads, while others require a 4WD or short hike in, rewarded with complete privacy—sometimes a lake entirely your own.

Rooted in their own love of backcountry camping, Cabinscape was born from a desire to find solitude that felt increasingly hard to come by—places not just near nature, but fully within it. Solar-powered and intentionally pared back, each cabin is equipped with just what you need—and little more.

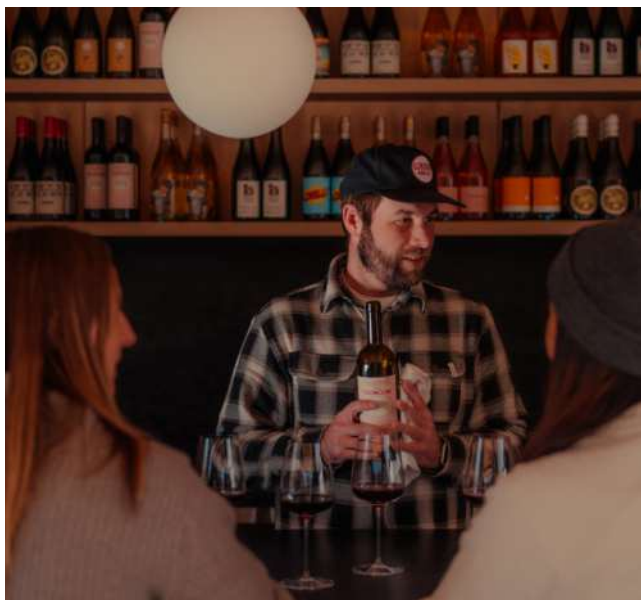
"We really wanted to offer that feeling of seclusion and privacy," Laura says, "but with the comfort of a bed and running water." In its quiet simplicity, the experience feels deeply personal.

Elsewhere, the idea of "wild" shifts again—less about going further out, and more about settling in.






stay a while







Photography: grid clockwise from top left: **Cabinscape** @Kodagoeswild; **H2H Cottage Co.** @jonanthonyjames; **Camp Haliburton** Alyssa Naylor; **H2H Cottage Co.** Christine and Sarah McClean, Wellness Travelled; **FORT Treehouse** Ian Patterson; **H2H Cottage Co.** Hugo Aviles & Natasha Crisp









Tucked into the forest, **Wild Kabin**'s handcrafted cabins are built using log kits milled in Haliburton Forest and finished with stone, barn board, and warm wood interiors. The aesthetic is distinct, tactile, and intentional.

"I'm more of a rustic person—I'm always like stone, wood…bring the outside in," says co-founder Cassidy Frijio. That balance—between craft and comfort, nature and stillness—is what defines Wild Kabin.

At Skelwood, that connection is especially felt. Set on a quiet lake within a designated dark-sky preserve, the experience shifts in subtle but meaningful ways. "It's a motor-free lake, so it's really quiet. There are no boats, just kayaks," Cassidy explains.

Days unfold gently here, while evenings deepen into something else entirely, as the sky opens up—clear, uninterrupted, and full of stars in a way that feels increasingly rare.

There's a sense of ease to it all. The cabins are welcoming and lived-in (in the best way), designed for real life—whether that's a quiet couple's escape or a few relaxing days with your crew and dogs in tow.

And then, there's the view.

Photography: (this page) **Wild Kabin Co.** top & right: Cassidy Frijio, left: Sean Davidson I Davidson Photography; (page 57) **H2H Cottage Co.** Christine and Sarah McClean, Wellness Travelled



At **H2H Cottage Co.**, the feeling of "wild" opens up—most notably at its Kennisis Lake Cottage, a light-filled retreat perched high above the water. With floor-to-ceiling windows, expansive decks, and sweeping treetop views, it's a place where the landscape feels both vast and close, especially in the early morning as the sun rises over the water.

Originally built by owner Laura Jewell as her own home, the space carries a personal imprint shaped by creativity and a desire to create something grounding and restorative.

"I was a yoga teacher, so it's very Zen and relaxing," she says. "There are lots of areas for couples to snuggle up with a book or with a glass of wine."

Inside, natural materials sourced from the region—granite, wood, and locally crafted furnishings—anchor the space, while a calm sensibility runs throughout. There are places to gather, and to retreat, including a hammock "jungle" suspended among the trees.

Outside, a winding path leads toward the lake, with quiet pauses along the way—a fire patio, soft lighting—inviting you to slow down rather than rush through.

"When people come here, they can just sit on the deck and enjoy nature...watch the otters playing on the shoreline, and the migratory birds in the trees," Laura adds.

Each of these stays delivers its own interpretation of "wild," but they share the same invitation: step away from the noise, breathe in the forest air, and see just how restorative a few days in the Haliburton Highlands can be. W





Full Speed to Porphyry: THUNDER BAY'S WILDEST DAY TRIP

By Bonnie Schiedel





Red survival suit: zipped. Goggles: on. Smile: ear to ear. When you're skimming over the deep, cold waters of Lake Superior in a small rigid-hull boat, en route to a historic island lighthouse, you dress for adventure, and getting there is definitely part of the fun. Thunder Bay's Sail Superior has been offering group day trips like this one to Porphyry Island for several years now, along with sailboat tours, and either form of transportation is an exceptional way to get to know the lake in a whole new way.

An island and a lighthouse are an undeniably romantic mix, and Porphyry (say: pour-free) Island delivers that mystique, with its rich history, volcanic black-sand beaches, rare plants, and stunning views. About 40 kilometres by boat from Thunder Bay, Porphyry is flanked by Sleeping Giant Provincial Park to the west and Michigan's Isle Royale National Park to the south. Getting there a hundred years ago meant climbing aboard a supply ship that regularly stopped to provision the lighthouse keeper and his family, but today I'm making that trip in a 12-person high-speed vessel called the Superior Rocket.

The Rocket departs from Sail Superior's base at Prince Arthur's Landing on Thunder Bay's waterfront, heading out across the bay at about 65 kilometres per hour (hence the goggles), with the world's largest freshwater lake (hence the survival suits) sprawled before us. For our captain, Sail Superior's owner and founder Greg Heroux, the journey is part of the appeal: "We're not just boating straight out to Porphyry," he says. "We're gonna have a real cool adventure." When you cruise out of the bay, everyone's eyes widen. He adds, "You think, wow, this is a lake. You see the magnitude of this lake on this trip."

En route to Porphyry, he slows to do a bit of storytelling about the area's must-see sights: the iconic Sleeping Giant rock formation, with Thunder Cape Bird Observatory at its tip, the distinctive silhouette of Pie Island, the soaring sheer rock cliffs of Sibley Peninsula (among the highest in Ontario at 290 metres), and the Sea Lion rock—all must-dos for many TBay visitors.



Then, it's off to Porphyry, which has its own fair share of stories. The lighthouse was established in 1873, making it the second-oldest on Lake Superior, and that history is practically palpable when you explore the island and its structures. It's automated now, but light-keepers and their families lived here for more than a century, tending to the light that guided generations of ships and planes along this vast inland sea. A number in my group are fans of Jean Pendziwol's historical fiction bestseller, *The Lightkeeper's Daughters*, set right here on Porphyry, and we quickly peel off our survival gear and head out to experience some of the book's elements in real life: to feel the heat of the black sand beach lapped by dazzling clear waves, spot the tough, tiny arctic plants growing in the rocks and the spiky devil's club shrub that grows here and nowhere else east of the Rockies, and explore the island's meandering dirt trails. There are even monarch butterflies dipping along the breeze.

Photography: (cover) **Superior Rocket** Thunder Bay Tourism; (page 60) **Porphyry Island Lighthouse** Thunder Bay Tourism; (page 61) **Silver Islet** Destination Ontario; (page 62) **Sea Lion Rock** Thunder Bay Tourism; (page 63) **Silver Islet** Destination Ontario





Volunteer host keepers, here thanks to the efforts of the Canadian Lighthouses of Lake Superior organization, take us up the steep, narrow steps inside the wooden lighthouse tower, which stands 12.5 metres tall and is outfitted with a lantern that flashes a dazzling light every 15 seconds. Since we're lucky enough to be here on a sunny summer day, the water below looks Caribbean-turquoise and the red-topped roofs of the island's buildings gleam. A pair relaxing in Muskoka chairs on the point have rented the 1940s-era light keeper's dwelling for a couple days, and further up the trail, the artist in residence cheerfully chats about how the island's hues have inspired her work. A guided yoga practice on the black sand beach isn't available on this trip, but is a popular option later in the season.

A trip to Porphyry lasts five to six hours, including an hour or so on the water both ways, as well as a stop at Silver Islet, once home to the world's richest silver mine, and now home to the world's most delicious homemade butter tarts and cinnamon buns. This quaint community has original miners' cottages from the 1870s clustered along the shoreline, along with an iconic bright-blue general store and tea room.

After refuelling with pastries, we don our boating gear one last time and head back to the Thunder Bay shoreline, thrumming with a mix of exhilaration and contemplation after this most memorable day. A peek back at Porphyry shows it fading into a dream-like grey-and-green smudge against the waves. W

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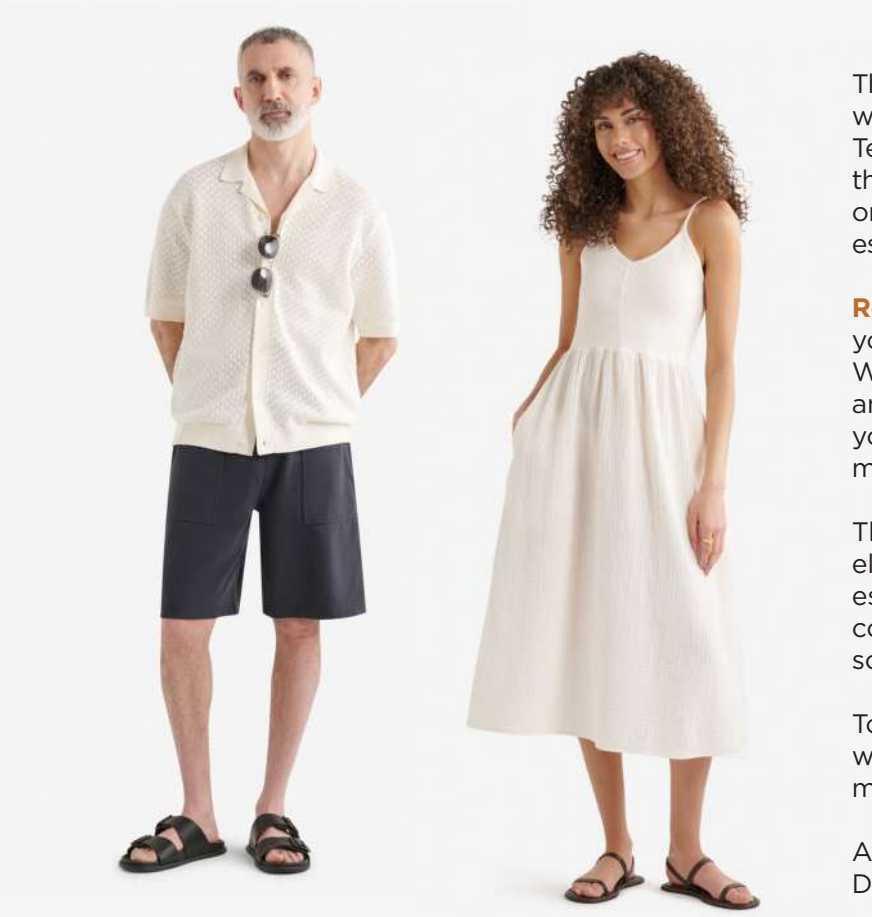
ESSENTIAL GOODS



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The **Roots Cloud** collection, now reimagined for warm weather. Crafted with lightweight French Terry, these breathable pieces move easily through shifting temperatures. Comfortable on their own or worn layered, these everyday essentials have an effortless feel.

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The new **Isla Collection** introduces an elevated take on summer staples. These airy essentials are crafted from 100% organic cotton gauze that is naturally breathable and softly structured for your everyday.

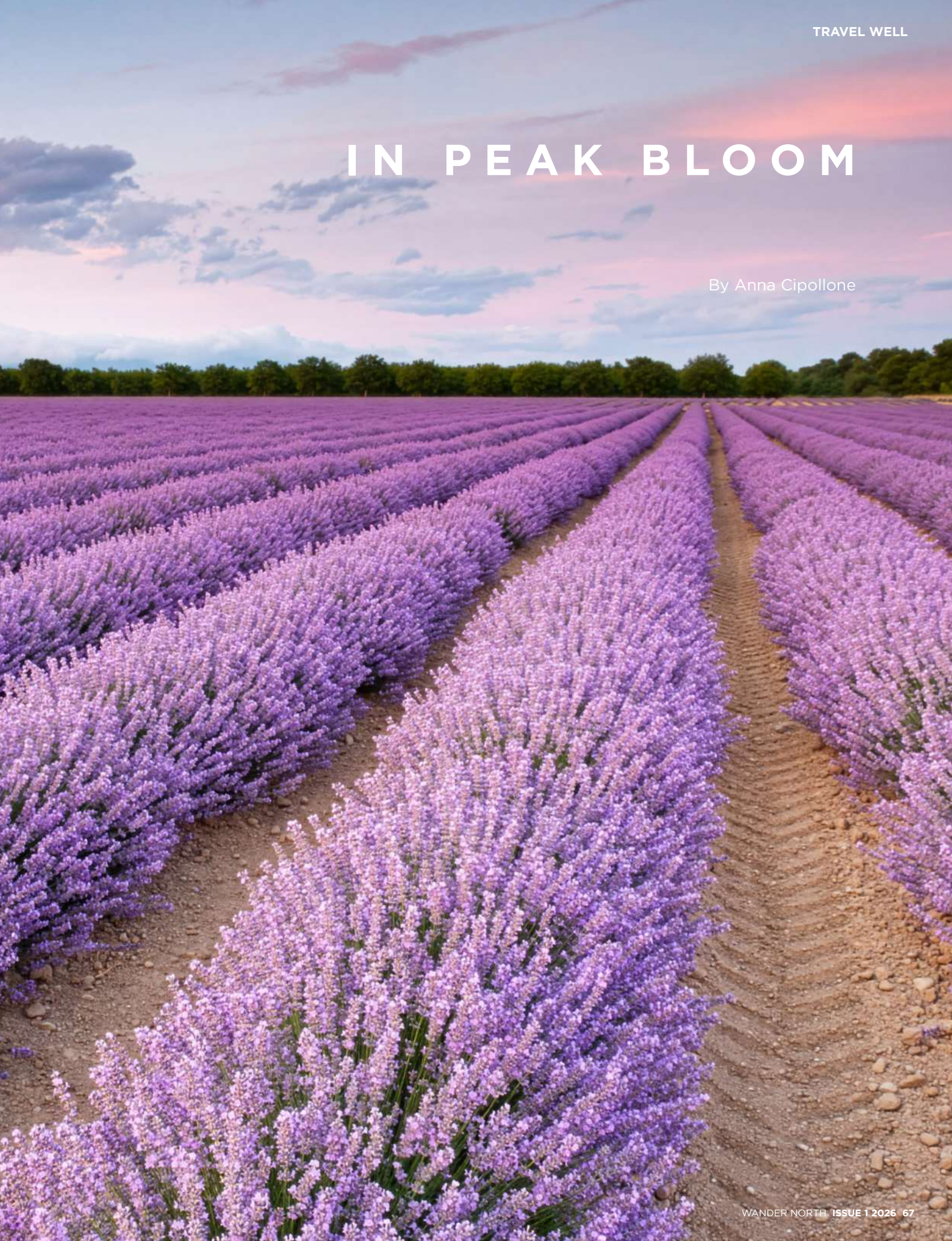
Together, this capsule delivers fresh, warm weather ready silhouettes designed for ease, movement, and everyday versatility.

Available in men's, women's, and kids' sizes. Discover the Summer Edit at **roots.com**



IN PEAK BLOOM

By Anna Cipollone









Photography: (cover) Ontario Lavender Association; (page 68) **Three Birds Flower Farm** Sarah Stevenson Photo; (this page) top: **Sanctuary Flower Fields** Mary Zita Payne Photography bottom: **Heritage Blooms** Scott Murdoch

With a growing appreciation for locally grown flowers, farmers are opening their fields for visitors to stop and smell the roses. Many of the region's cut flower farms offer tours of their fields and pick-your-own experiences. From wildflowers to carefully cultivated blooms, every farm invites you to bask in the aroma of carefully selected varieties, where scents hitchhike on the breeze, and radiant hues offer an opulent visual treat.

From golden sunflowers to therapeutic lavender, here's a sampling of flower farms to tour this season for a hands-on practice rooted in mindfulness.

Lush seasonal blooms await at **Three Birds Flower Farm**, a 4-acre micro farm run by sisters Jackie and Leslie Brunton. Sustainably grown in Bracebridge to support soil health and an ecosystem for pollinators, birds, and wildlife, shades of pastels pop in sweet peas and dahlias for a romantic selection of florals that embody Muskoka's rich plant biodiversity.

In the Kawartha Lakes, Norwood's **Heritage Blooms** began in 2021 as a family-run cattle farm and later expanded to include you-pick tours during its open hours. With 96 acres, bring your own pruners and bucket for a change of tempo as you leisurely admire hundreds of flower varieties. Vivid colours of dahlia tubers and seeds are also on offer to inspire new additions to your home garden.

With flowers serving as a gentle reminder of impermanence, a visit to Ennismore's **Sanctuary Flower Fields** is a ritual in present-moment awareness. What began as paramedic-turned-grower Kelly Convery's personal healing journey is now a floral safe haven with a wellness menu of yoga classes, art workshops, and flower experiences. From August to September, guests are welcome to book a session and pick their own bouquets of whimsical blooms like dahlias, cosmos, marigolds, and peonies.









At **The Fieldstone Barn** in Elora, bright and bold sunflowers take centre stage from early August through the end of September. Drop-ins are welcome to enjoy the fields, wander the corn maze, connect with the alpacas, and stay in glamping tents overnight. With over 30 varieties grown, sunflowers run the gamut from pale lemon queens to fluffy teddy bears and moody red velvet blooms.

At the base of the Bruce Peninsula, **Blue Water Lavender** in Wiarton sustainably grows 5 varieties of English and French lavender. Take in the powdery-sweet scent of nature's most calming bud—the farm is open to the public every weekend from June to Labour Day. Visit the adjacent shop for a finely crafted collection of handmade products like culinary lavender, soaps, and body butter.

In the Owen Sound area, Markdale's **Twig & Brindille** exhibits stunning Grey County florals grown organically with regenerative practices. Whether you'd like to book a tour guided among the hoop house or explore the aisles of flower fields solo, discover a rich seasonal mix featuring everything from spring anemones to summer zinnias and fall lisianthus.

The Willows Flower Farm and Market in the Bay of Quinte is a family-run operation where you can visit with alpacas, chicks, sheep, and a beehive before a flower-picking experience at either sunrise or sunset. Roam rows upon rows of tulips, zinnias, and lavender as you handpick your preferred blooms.

Whether you come for the flowers themselves or the quiet rhythm of being in the fields, these farms offer a simple kind of reset that lingers long after the blooms are gone.

Photography: (clockwise from top left)
Fieldstone Barn; **Twig & Brindille Flower Farm**;
The Willows Flower Farm; **Bluewater Lavender Farm**







Botanical Art

From floral-dye textiles to bouquets fossilized in resin, cherished memories live on in heartfelt pieces that reinvent the fleeting lifespan of florals.

Fibre artist Brittany Piper grows natural dye plants for hand-dyed textiles at her Chesley studio, **Everwilde**, where she also hosts summer workshops. Her affinity for plants that lend themselves to art-making is at the root of her growing philosophy. “Natural dye plants invite slowness with their quiet, subtle beauty,” she says. “There’s something deeply grounding about tending a plant for months and then witnessing the colour it offers.” Every textile is part of a full-circle creative process where the fruits of labour hold months of tending, weather, patience, and care. “I measure success not by how much I harvest,” she says, “but by the richness of the soil, the hum of insects, and the promise of next year’s growth.”

Olivia Leigh preserves floral keepsakes in mediums like resin or arranged in shadowboxes at her Hastings studio, honing in on the tiny details that highlight every stem’s elegant charm. “Little curls of a petal, or textural details of a piece of greenery take centre stage and are frozen in time forever,” says Leigh. Transforming intimate items like bridal bouquets into functional pieces to be looked at daily inspired her to start teaching the medium through in-person consultations and remote workshops on floral drying, preservation, and resin casting.

Hygge Bloom Florals’ Jessica Jennett is a Muskoka-based wedding florist and floral preservation artist. Working with florals from beginning to end reflects the cyclical nature of the occasions they’re used for, such as celebrations of life, baby showers, and weddings. “I get a second chance to work with these curated blooms again after all the planning that went into making the day memorable,” she says, giving back a tangible heirloom piece. “I always hope my clients pass the frame in a room, smile and remember their day and all the love that came with it.”

Photography: (clockwise from top right)
Olivia Leigh Designs @maryzitapaynephotography;
Hygge Bloom Florals Jessica Jennett;
Everwilde Kelsey Davis

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As My Wings Inflate

By Amanda Hardy

Don't look for me.

I've swam through waves,
and danced upon reeds in rain showers,
Floated down streams and rode rocky currents.
These ponds, rivers,
lakes, bogs, and creeks
Hid me well.
Kept me safe.

Unseen.
Unnoticed.
But not anymore.

I was
Born in a world I long to leave.

I slide onto a stone
out on a bank,
leaving these cold, familiar waters,
into the sun-drenched air

and my body stiffens.
My skin?-
It splits.

Exposure -

is vulnerable.

Uncomfortable.

I'm hardened;
yet delicate,
and the north's not gentle on creatures like me-
slow,
soft,
and unsteady.

Patience.
as my wings inflate
no hurry
no help.

I will get out
a quiet ending

shhhh
the water is holding;
air, inviting.

Not only grow,
an iridescent beginning,
catching the sun's glow.

© Stefan Cosma





Where the River
SETS THE PACE

By Jill Kantor





Photography: (cover & this page) Jacob Markowiak, Pumpkin House Photography; (page 77) Rob Stimpson Photography



I remember the drive into the lodge. The road dips, the trees open, and suddenly the French River is there. Somewhere along that stretch, I noticed my foot had eased off the gas. The rush of the day had disappeared without my realizing it.

When I stepped out of the car, the air felt cooler than it had a few kilometres earlier. A wide bay of calm water stretched across to a sandy shoreline backed by a wall of tall trees. I simply stood there, letting my eyes adjust.

The Lodge at Pine Cove sits along this historic waterway, a system of interconnected lakes that stretches for more than one hundred kilometres. Once travelled by the Voyageurs and still used by the local Ojibwa community, who have lived here for millennia, it is not hard to imagine that movement continuing through time, the same passage connecting generations.

A wooden bridge carries visitors from the mainland across to the island where the cottages are scattered among the trees. Crossing it feels less like arriving somewhere new and more like passing through a small threshold, leaving behind whatever pace you arrived with.

On one side of the property sits a swimming area known simply as the cove. A floating dock rests in the middle, drawing your eye across the water. Even in the cooler months, you can imagine the rhythm of summer there, people swimming out to the dock or sitting with their feet in the water. A panoramic sauna is planned near the shoreline, close enough that the shift between heat and cold will be only a few steps.

Inside the cabins, nothing feels staged. The fireplace is the first thing you notice, a real wood stove giving off steady heat. The bedding is thick and heavy in the way you hope for when you arrive somewhere after a long drive, and lamps cast a softer light than the bright overhead fixtures you see in most places. There's a Canadian rustic feel to the space, but nothing about it feels rough or overly styled. The wood, the stone, the fire in the stove—everything feels like it belongs there.

Some of the cottages include hammered-copper soaking tubs placed beside wide windows that face the river. It's the kind of detail you notice right away, the kind that makes you pause for a moment when you walk into the room.



Cottages also include screened porches, and it quickly becomes clear why guests spend time there. Sitting outside, you can hear the wind through the trees and the movement of water.

Mornings begin with wicker breakfast baskets that appear at cottage doors. Inside are croissants, fruit, and berry compote prepared in the lodge kitchen, along with juice and, if requested, eggs or crêpes. Guests carry the baskets outside with coffee and begin the day slowly.

Dinner can follow a similar rhythm. The lodge restaurant offers a delicious seasonal menu from Chef Eric, who is well known for his culinary expertise. If you feel like staying in, BBQ hampers can be delivered to your door, with ingredients ready for grilling, along with prepared salads, desserts, and more.

Like everything else at the lodge, dining is designed to give you time for yourself, without the feeling of being on a timetable. After a day or two, the cottage stops feeling like accommodation and begins to feel more like a space that truly belongs to you.

That feeling continues through the main lodge with its three stone fireplaces, well-stocked library, and elegant copper-topped bar. A large screened porch and quiet places to sit and look out over the water make it easy to settle into a peaceful pace. Just outside, a fire pit sits close to the water, where evenings often wind down with chairs pulled close and water lapping at the shoreline.

One experience many guests return for is the river tour with Alex, the owner. He takes small groups out on his pontoon boat for a couple of hours, sharing stories about the river and its past. Even longtime visitors sign up again, because each trip reveals something slightly different about the landscape.

Alex describes himself as an innkeeper, a word that stayed with me because it captures the spirit of the place. The staff are present when needed, but the experience always feels guided by the guests themselves rather than by a schedule.

Along the shoreline, kayaks and canoes rest near the water, waiting for anyone who feels inclined to push off and explore the French. From the bay where the lodge sits, there are almost endless paddling opportunities along granite shorelines that rise from the water, unchanged for centuries.

Somewhere between arriving at the lodge and enjoying the fire in my cabin, I noticed something simple.

I had stopped hurrying. W

Photography: (this page & page 79, top, right, left) Jacob Markowiak, Pumpkin House Photography; (page 79) middle: Hannah Lane, Wildlife Lane Photography









Your Turn

If the French River is calling, here are a few details to help you plan your stay.

Location: Set along Ontario's French River, about 1.5 hours drive north of Parry Sound

Cottages: Private, four-season cabins with wood stoves and screened porches, with some featuring copper soaking tubs

Dining:
- On-site lodge restaurant (seasonally available)
- Breakfast baskets delivered to your door
- BBQ hampers with ready-to-cook proteins, sides, and desserts for relaxed evenings at your cottage

Experiences: Guided river tours with owner Alex, plus complimentary access to kayaks and canoes

Wellness: A panoramic sauna is planned for the 2026 season, located steps from the cove for hot–cold contrast

Housekeeping: Daily upon request. Many guests opt for fresh towels or coffee refills rather than full service, preserving a more private, uninterrupted stay



Drake Devonshire Prince Edward County
Photo courtesy: DESTINATION ONTARIO


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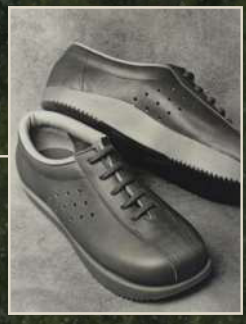
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