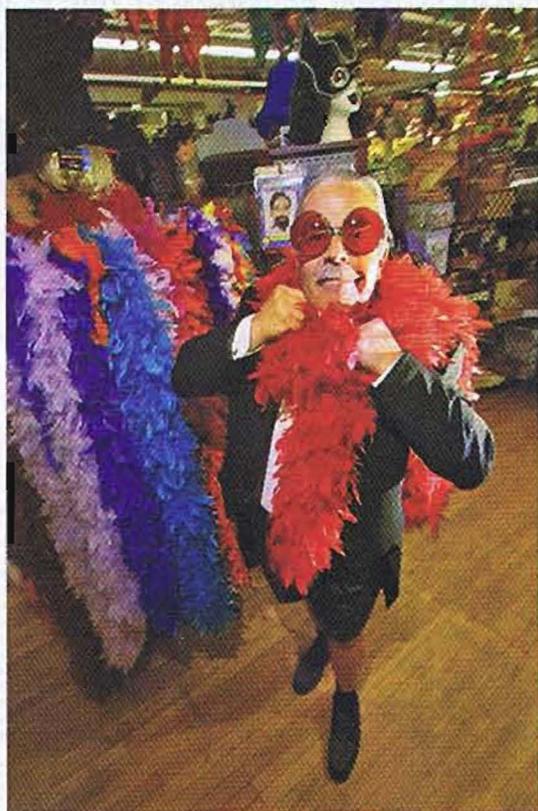


BELOW, Bruce Micklus has turned Rockin' Rudy's into a Missoula must-see. RIGHT, Charlie B's patrons make the bar a great place to be.

Missoula



A city's creative spirit bubbles beneath its Old West surface.
By Jeremy Saum

Inverted



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHAD HARDER

I HADN'T COUNTED ON spending my first night in Missoula at a performance-art showcase called *Monkey-Riding Buddhas*. Staged by a group known as the Open Field Artists, the show included sketch comedy, the tango, and plenty of audience participation. At one point, along with the 100 or so other attendees, I raised my arms and shouted "Tell me the truth" in Spanish. Later, I dropped a pinto bean into a hat. Neither activity had been on my to-do list. But as I walked back to my hotel after the show, it dawned on me: I had just experienced the Missoula Inversion.

Local people talk about the inversion as a meteorological occurrence. In the winter, thick

fog rises in the valley of the Clark Fork River, which runs through the heart of Missoula, and remains trapped for days beneath Mounts Jumbo and Sentinel, the peaks that preside over the city. I had cursed the inversion for closing the airport and delaying my arrival. But after one night in this community of 62,000 people, I realized that the Missoula Inversion was more profound than a change in the weather. It's a phenomenon that turns expectations upside down. A city that could easily recline in a comfy chair of Old West nostalgia instead refuses to sit still, exuding creative energy in places both likely—the Missoula Art Museum—and surprising—the



The ultimate expression of this art ethic of, by, and for the people is, of all things, a community carousel.

Jeannette Rankin Peace Center.

Missoula rose on the spot where C.P. Higgins and Francis Worden founded the Hell Gate Village trading post in 1860, and the Old West still defines much of the city's look. Higgins Avenue, downtown's main thoroughfare, begins at the 1901 Northern Pacific railroad depot and on its way across the river passes brick buildings like the 1902 Atlantic Hotel, designed by Missoula architect A.J. Gibson. That building now houses the Circle Square Secondhand store, where I found old wrenches, a purple-sequined flapper dress, and two framed portraits of Boy George. At Worden's Market, opened by city founder Worden in 1883, you can scoop peanuts from a barrel. But Missoula does not live in its past.

After the Open Field Artists' wake-up call, I should have known better, but when I walked into the Missoula Art Museum, I still thought I'd find pictures of cowboys, like the murals by Edgar Paxson in Missoula's Gibson-designed county courthouse. Instead, more modern voices join the conversation about Montana's art and history.

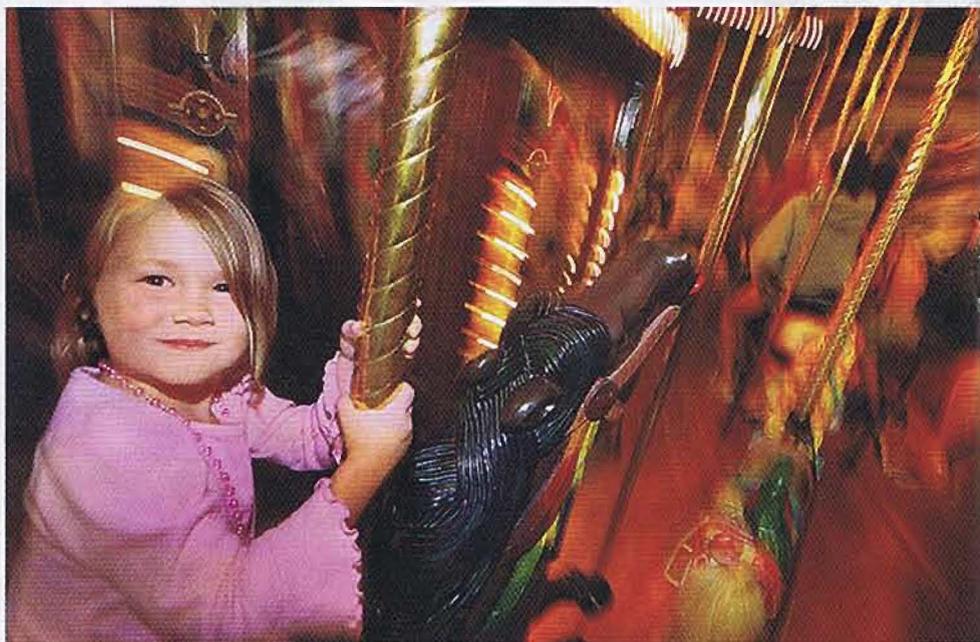
For example, the south gallery on the second floor is devoted to the museum's eclectic collection of contemporary American Indian art. The exhibits rotate (through February 9, you can see abstract paintings by local artist George Gogas), but it's safe to say you won't see many Charles Russell landscapes on the walls. "Russell is a hero in this state," says curator Stephen Gluckert. "But in many ways, [his style of] western romanticism is harmful to us. Our culture is not one thing, not one voice."

I encountered this same democratic and creative spirit repeatedly during my visit. Dining in the wine bar at the Red Bird, a restaurant recommended by near-

ly every Missoulan I talked to, I learned that Jadyn Fisher, the pastry chef who made my lavender crème brûlée, had also created the graceful ironwork on the deep red walls. Later, at the Break Espresso, I sipped a mug of Evening in Missoula tea—a blend created by the late Bruce Lee, founder of Butterfly Herbs, another inviting coffee shop just down Higgins. Next door at Charlie B's bar,

Kaparich, it was built in the early 1990s by a posse of volunteers—most with little or no experience—whom Kaparich inspired. "Most of them were people who at some point had been told that they didn't have any creative talent," says artist Larry Pirnie, who designed Paint, an intoxicatedly vibrant pony with purple hooves, orange legs, and a blue head.

From the carousel, a short walk along

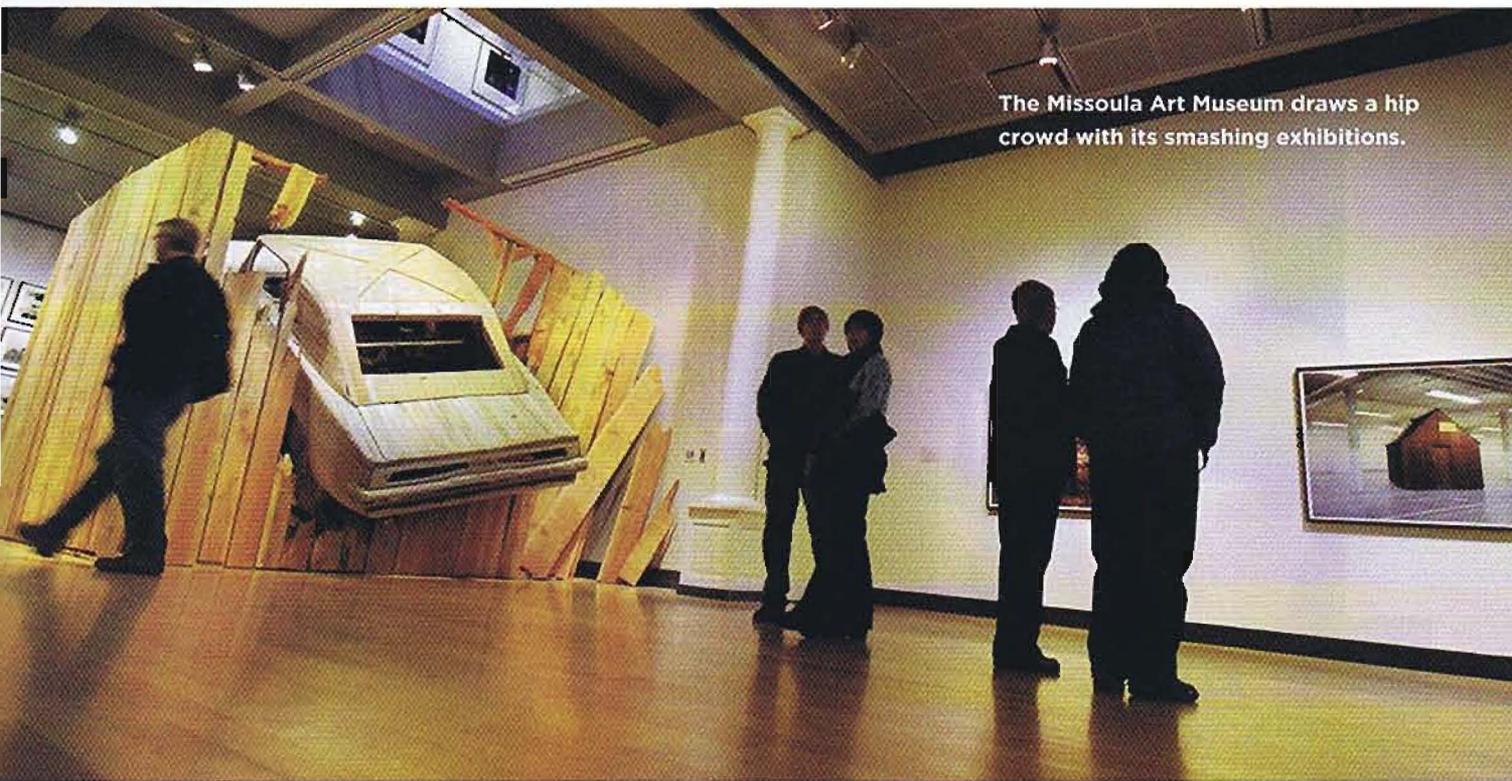


Missoula's beloved carousel delights riders with 38 hand-painted ponies.

the walls are hung with black-and-white portraits of regular patrons by photographer Lee Nye. I sat next to a musician named Larry who spends his summers in the Mount Union tower outside of town, where he practices the banjo and the saxophone while spotting forest fires.

The ultimate expression of this art ethic of, by, and for the people is the city's most beloved tourist attraction: A Carousel for Missoula, which carries kids and adults on some 220,000 rides a year. The dream of local resident Chuck

the river and over the Higgins Avenue Bridge takes you to the Hip Strip. The University of Montana lies a few blocks to the east, and a college-town funkiness pervades some of the shops. Everyone gets croissants at purple-doored Bernice's Bakery and \$1 copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the Jeannette Rankin Peace Center. Rankin was a Missoula native and staunch pacifist who in 1916 became the first woman elected to Congress, four years before women won the right to vote.



The Missoula Art Museum draws a hip crowd with its smashing exhibitions.

You can get pretty much anything else nearby at Rockin' Rudy's. Bruce Micklus opened the shop in 1982 as a place to rent records, most of them from his personal collection. It has since undergone what Micklus calls "a sort of cancerous growth" to become a sprawling emporium housing a comprehensive music department, a large selection of greeting cards, and gifts of all kinds, including pig-shaped

flashlights, a pop-up book of Graceland, and T-shirts promoting CITIZENS FOR A POODLE-FREE MONTANA.

I continued letting Missoula's charm beguile me, but the scenery just beyond the city limits could be ignored only so long. So I drove 15 minutes north, past new subdivisions, to the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area. I walked along the quiet, snow-packed trail and

dipped my finger into the cold, clear water of Rattlesnake Creek as it flowed over purple, red, and orange stones. A doe crossed my path and then flashed her fluffy white rear as she sprang up the slope to my right. She watched me pass, and I found myself wishing the fog would come back to close the airport and keep me here awhile longer. Even my feelings about the inversion had inverted. ●

If You're Going . . .

Pick up the AAA *Idaho, Montana & Wyoming TourBook* and *Idaho-Montana* map. Contact the **Missoula Convention and Visitors Bureau**, (800) 526-3465, www.missoulacvb.org. Area code is 406.

TO DO AND SEE

A Carousel for Missoula 101 Carousel Dr., in Caras Park, 549-8382, www.carrousel.com. **Jeannette Rankin Peace Center** 519 S. Higgins Ave., 543-3955, www.jrpc.org. **Missoula Art Museum** 335 N. Pattee St., 728-0447, www.missoulaartmuseum.org. **Missoula Children's Theatre** 200 N. Adams St., 728-1911, www.mctinc.org. **Missoula County Courthouse** 200 W. Broadway. **Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation** 5705 Grant Creek Rd., 523-4545, www.rmef.org. **Roxy Theater** 718 S. Higgins Ave., 728-9380, www.wildlifefilms.org. **Wilma Theatre** 131 S. Higgins Ave., 728-2521, www.thewilma.com.

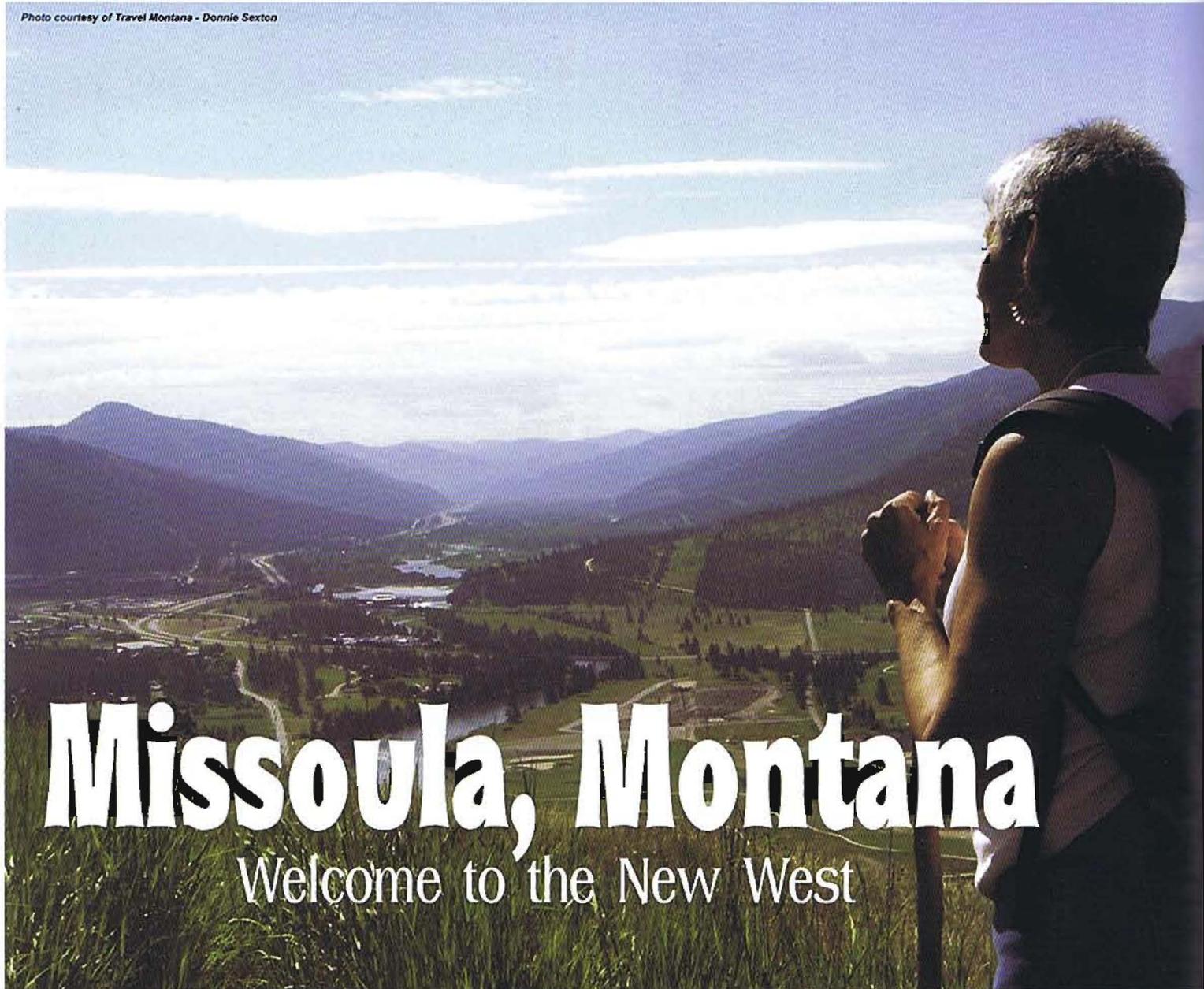
EATS

Bernice's Bakery 190 S. Third St. W., 728-1358, www.bernicestbakerymt.com. **Break Espresso** 432 N. Higgins Ave., 728-7300. **515** 515 S. Higgins Ave., 327-1515, www.515restaurant.com. **Red Bird** 111 N. Higgins Ave., Ste. 100, 549-2906, www.redbirdrestaurant.com. **Scotty's Table** 529 S. Higgins Ave., 549-2790.

SLEEPS

You'll find major midlevel chain hotels downtown. For variety, try: **Blossom's Bed and Breakfast** From \$100. Enjoy an organic breakfast in a restored 1910 Craftsman house. 1114 Poplar St., 721-4690, www.blossomsbnb.com. **Goldsmith's Bed and Breakfast Inn** From \$89. A 1911 house on the riverfront across from the university. 809 E. Front St., 728-1585, www.goldsmithsinn.com.

Photo courtesy of Travel Montana - Donnie Sexton



Missoula, Montana

Welcome to the New West

A hike up Mt Jumbo gives way to significant views of the Missoula valley.

Sure Missoula has cowboys – but that’s not all they have.

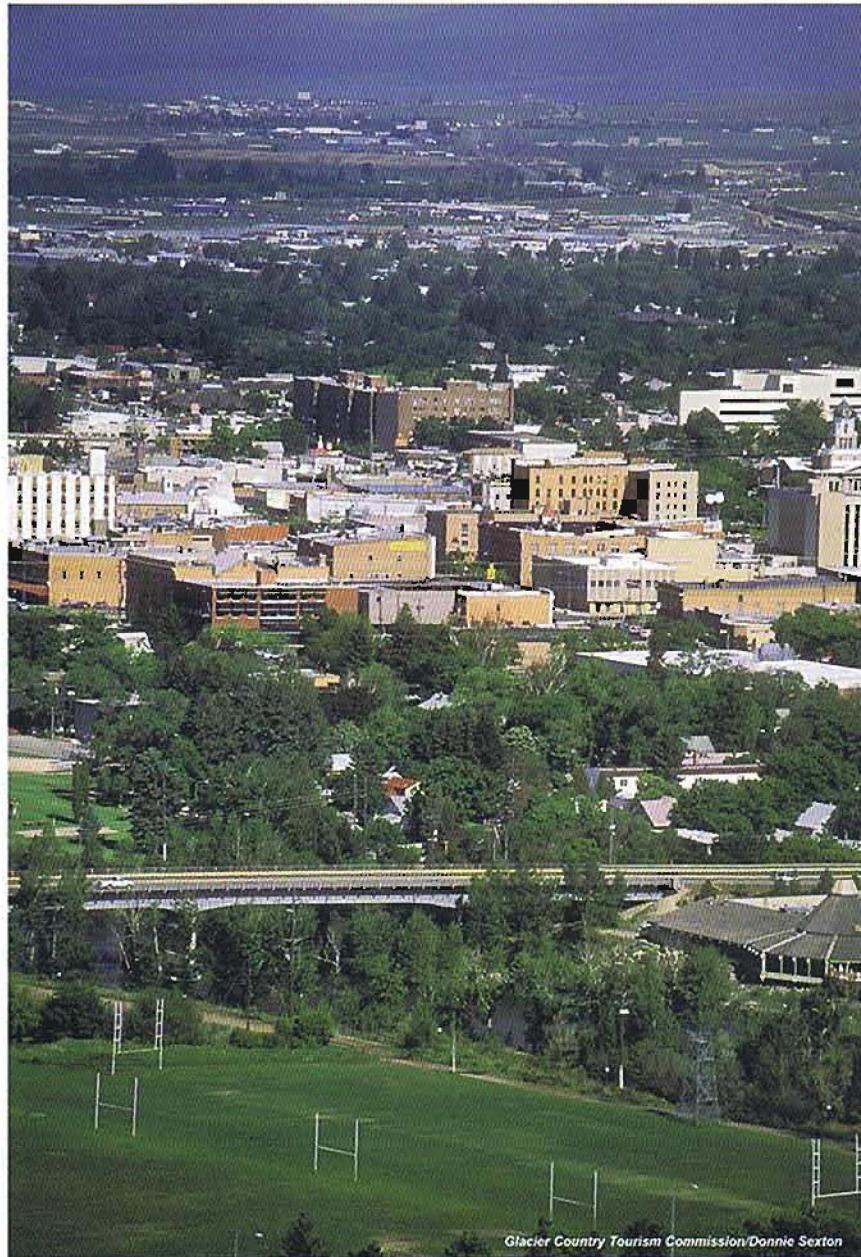
Wonderfully diverse, Missoula has professors and students, artists and musicians, businessmen and scientists, foresters and loggers, writers and actors – reflecting a multi-faceted community of people that stimulates the mind, the spirit and economy of this progressive Western town.

Located at the center of the Rocky Mountains, near the confluence of three rivers, at the center of five valleys, and within 100 miles of seven wilderness areas; this stunning town is like a jewel-studded treasure chest. The area’s outside beauty will impress you, but just wait until you dive into the treasure chest.

Missoula earns its name “The Garden City” with an abundance of gardens, landscaping, and forestland, and a milder mountain climate compared to other locales at this latitude.

Inspired by Mother Nature, community members have added their own interpretation of beauty in art, architecture, music, and design throughout this dynamic town. The imaginative energy of those inspired to call Missoula home, is reflected in bright-colored murals, in sculpture gracing local parks and businesses, in eclectic and charming shops, and in carefully preserved historic buildings.

Stroll through downtown and discover shops and customers who reflect a broad range of taste and styles from hippie chic, to vogue elegance, to outdoorsy hip.



Downtown Missoula is the hub of the city's cultural and business scene.

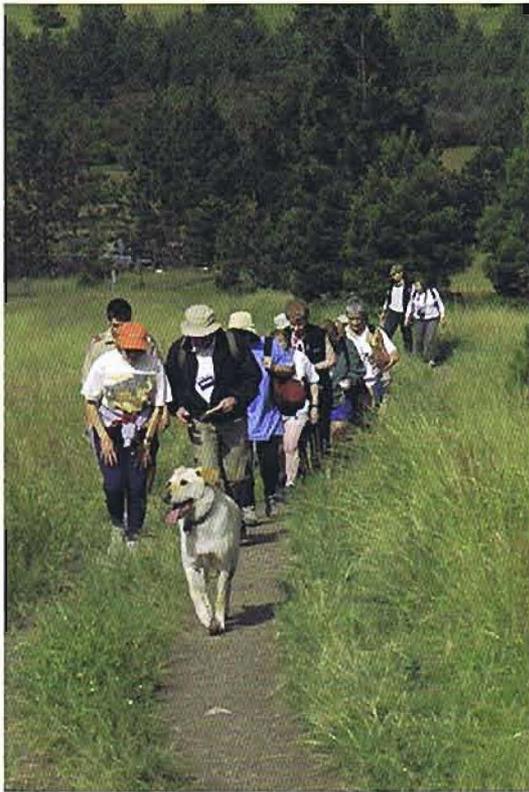
Those expecting a local style limited to Wranglers, pick-ups, and steak and potatoes will be pleasantly surprised at the international and cosmopolitan flavor found in local restaurants, shops, galleries and pubs.

This international flavor can be partially attributed to the influence of a college town. More than a quarter of the student population at the University of Montana is from out of state and many are from cultures throughout the world, representing over 60 countries.

No longer undiscovered, Missoula has an impressive brag list – *Men's Journal* listed it the best small town under 100,000 people in America and *Sunset* magazine declared Missoula, "Best Community in the West." *Forbes Magazine* ranked the town 11th on the 2003 list of the "Best Small Places for Business and Careers" and *Rolling Stones* called the University of Montana campus the most scenic in America.

The source of Missoula's popularity is largely because of the way she looks. Surrounded by the Rocky Mountains, and laced with rivers and streams, the town has also kept nature in her midst with tons of parks and trails scattered throughout town along the river and tucked into neighborhoods.

Not only is she very pretty, the Missoula area hosts a wide variety of recreational choices for the outdoor enthusiasts – primo fly-fishing in Rock Creek just outside Missoula and adrenalin-soaked kayaking and whitewater rafting in the Blackfoot River and Lochsa River. Just 20 minutes from town is the Snowbowl Ski Area with one of the longest vertical drops in the nation. Hikers can stretch out on one of the many off-street trails, neighboring hills, or in one of seven wilderness areas. Bicycling wears two hats, serving the purpose of both transportation and recreation in Missoula with bicycle paths that



*Left: Hikers enjoy a beautiful day with peaceful and serene surroundings as the hike up Mt Jumbo
Right: Bike enthusiasts find enjoyment with a ride up Mt Jumbo.*

extend from downtown to mountain trails. Missoula, like much of Montana, has gained prestige in the golf community in recent years and offers several golf courses right in town.

This is a community who knows how to have fun. Besides oodles of recreational activities, Missoula reflects a love for the arts. The Missoula Symphony just celebrated its 50th anniversary and the town is host every three years to the International Choral Festival attended by choirs from dozens of countries.

Music lovers choose from a broad range of live music concerts featuring jazz, rap, country, rock and roll and classical music and Missoula is the host of big-name concerts year-round. Concert events in 2005 included rock star, Sting; the classic rock and rollers, Crosby, Stills and Nash; and country favorite, Willy Nelson.

Live adult and children theater productions occur year-round and Missoula is home to the International Wildlife Film Festival every May.

Enthusiastic Missoula sports fans have helped support an expanded stadium at the University of Montana and a new downtown stadium near the river for the Missoula Osprey baseball team.

Food lovers can choose from a wide variety of ethnic food including French, Persian, Indian, Thai, Chinese, Mexican, and American.

Lodging choices range from the charming downtown bed and breakfast at the historic Gibson Mansion to the Hilton Garden Inn, a new conference facility outside of town.

This is a community who treasures its past but looks to the future in its effort to enhance the quality of life. Not only is the town green in color, but green in their conservation efforts. Public transportation on the Mountain Line is a conscious effort to preserve air quality in a valley where air inversions are common.

This proactive approach is reflected in Missoula's Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Elk Country Visitor Center, an international home for a foundation working to ensure the future of elk and other wildlife and their habitat. A new facility was recently completed, which includes the Elk Country Visitor Center, the Volunteer Service Center and the international Support Center. The Elk Visitor Center showcases an impressive exhibit of trophy elk and other wildlife.

A love and respect for history is demonstrated in a number of museums and historical sites. Fort Missoula Historical Museum lies on 32 acres of the original fort site. The site also houses the Rocky Mountain Museum of Military History and a collection of historic structures and artifacts. The Museum of Natural History just relocated to a larger location on Hickory Street and the downtown Missoula Art Museum has a changing exhibition of regional and national art.

The health and vibrancy of the downtown area created a symbiotic relationship that helps insure the future of the historic buildings.

Right
The Rocky Mountain Elk
Foundation Wildlife
Visitor Center

Over two-dozen buildings and sites are listed on the National Historic Register. A self-guided walking tour is included in the Guide to Downtown, widely available at newsstands and at the Missoula Convention and Visitor Center.

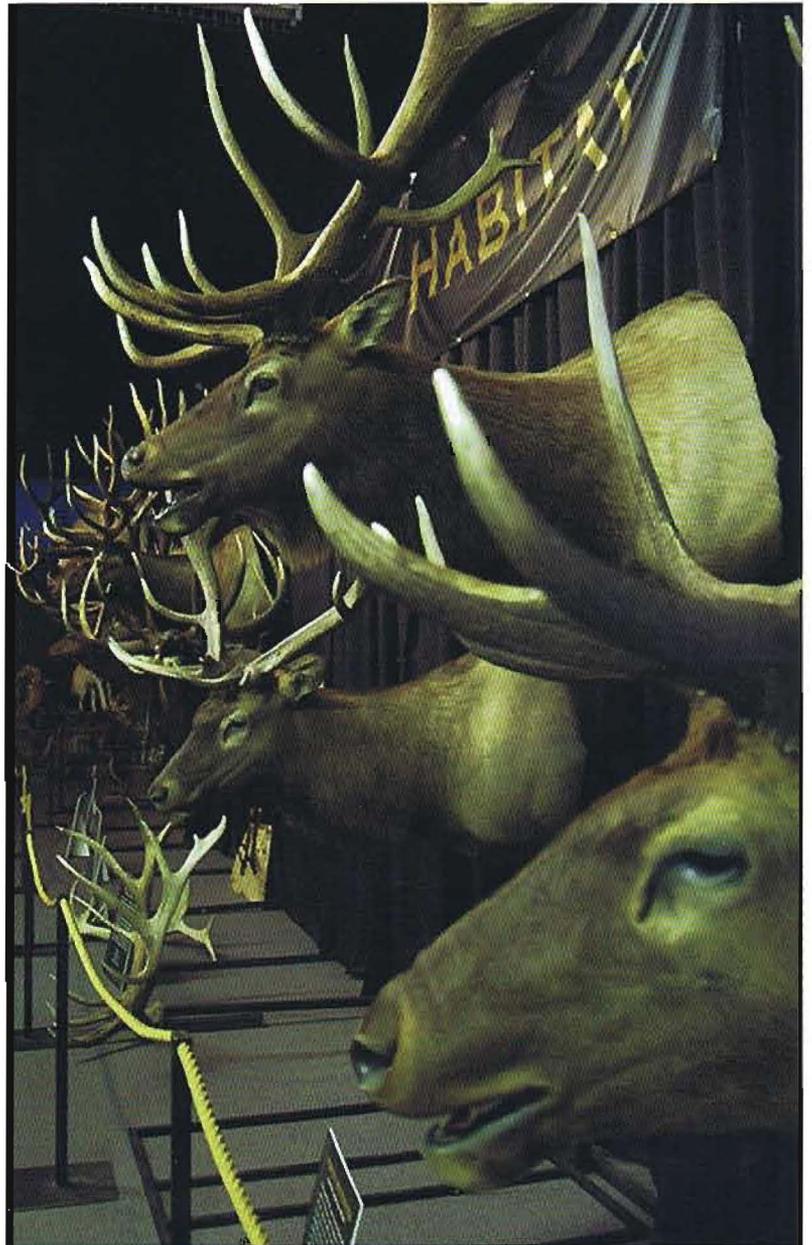
Besides the bustling downtown area, Missoula offers shoppers the Southgate Mall and an extensive shopping complex along Reserve Street near the airport with popular box stores like Costco, Pier One, and Old Navy.

Like many towns in the West, Missoula is growing at a rapid rate and witnessing the arrival of chain stores, which some consider the death of small town life. In spite of this growth, Missoula has managed to maintain a robust downtown, unique style, easy mannered atmosphere, and small town character.

Missoula continues to attract creative people with a noteworthy population of artists, writers, musicians, actors and filmmakers.

If you are looking for a cowboy, you can find him too – no, not just at the ranch, but at the International Wildlife Film Festival or even at the Hemp Fest. The wonderful blend of people and ideas is just one of the fringe benefits of a town that has such international appeal.

Part of Missoula's charm is that it is impossible to categorize or stereotype. The community is a work in process, a melding of people, ideas and economic ventures. Forget the Old West – this town represents the New West. **L**



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