

The scoop on Stratford

YOU'VE SEEN one swan, you've seen 'em all. And as for paddle boats, no local would be caught dead in one, unless it was a covert operation performed after last call.

During the high season in Stratford, which began last week with gala openings of several plays at the renowned Shakespearean festival, the locals studiously avoid the picturesque river, lush gardens, busy shopping area and many of the chi-chi restaurants where the tourists alight.

It's not that those places aren't pleasant — it's just that they're full of tourists. And they're a bit rich for the blood of the artsy bohemians, B&B owners and pickup-driving farmers who live in Perth County.

Fortunately, there's more to Stratford than historical herb gardens and prix-fixe dinners. It's become a fun place to hang out, even for those who can barely afford the price of a theatre ticket, let alone dinner.

As every smart traveler knows, following the locals is a sure way to uncover a city's secret treasures.

FOOD

■ **Chez Jimbo (Allen's Alley):** This little hole-in-the-wall is hidden in a back alley, with almost no noticeable signage (a spray-painted logo next to the door looks like it was put there by a skateboarder on a tagging spree), and chef Jim doesn't advertise. Rumour has it he doesn't like crowds, so don't tell him I sent you. Jimbo's is where the town's wait staff go to hide from tourists, and wherever they go, the party inevitably follows.

The décor seems slapped together, with mismatched chairs and a comfortably cluttered atmosphere. The menu changes regularly, with entrées ranging in price from \$9 to \$15. Leave your camera at home, and if anyone asks where you're from, say Tavistock, not Toronto.

■ **Pazzo (70 Ontario St.):** Though tourists happily fill Pazzo's airy restaurant and cozy pizzeria during the peak hours before shows, locals (including author Timothy Findley) like to hang there while the plays are in progress. By far the best pizza in town, at an average of \$11 per pie.

■ **The Elizabethan Restaurant, 95 Ontario St.:** This is the no-nonsense lunch spot for office types and retail workers downtown. It's packed with regulars every weekday, particularly Fridays, when the special is always chicken cutlet with fries, salad and a hot roll for \$5.75.

The décor has been the same forever — white stucco walls, red plaid tablecloths, and stained-glass windows picturing Elizabethan royalty. Why fix what isn't broke?

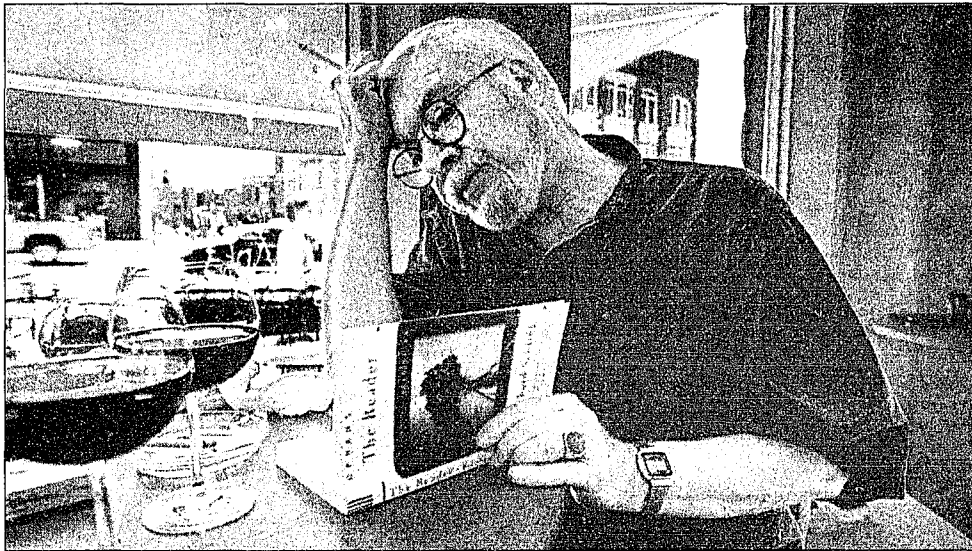
■ **York St. Kitchen (41 York St.):** This funky little restaurant and sandwich stand near the river is a favourite among both tourists and locals because there's never a problem getting a seat — the river is lined with benches and picnic tables for an outdoor lunch.

Build your own sandwich with such eccentric toppings as liverwurst, sauerkraut, peanut butter and jam, and the chef's legendary homemade corn relish, among many others, for about \$6. Then head for a private spot — the sandwiches can be thick and embarrassingly messy.

■ **Boomers Gourmet Fries (26 Erie St.):** Three words say it all: Goat's cheese poutine.

■ **Madelyn's Diner (377 Huron St.):** Lots of parking, greasy breakfast and friendly service.

Entertainment reporter and former local Daphne Gordon reveals the theatre town's best-kept secrets



SIMON WILSON FOR THE TORONTO STAR

INSIDE STRATFORD: Above, Timothy Findley sips vino rossi and reads at Pazzo, where, besides star-gazing, you can eat the best pizza in town. Chez Jimbo, right, is where Stratford's hardy restaurant staffers party. Given its location — in an alley — it's not likely to attract the blue-hair crowd.

DRINKS

Once again, it's the service-industry folk who set the agenda when it comes to the hottest night spots in town. They tend to start late, go hard and end early — in the morning, that is.

Things can get particularly rowdy on Sunday nights, known as Silly Sundays, since many local restaurants close on Mondays. The tradition began a few years ago with a pink pig named Mr. Silly, who hosted weekly bar crawls around town. Mr. Silly has been something of a recluse since being cruelly pig-napped last year. Still, the tradition continues.

■ **Bentley's (99 Ontario St.):** Bentley's has long been the key gathering place for people who like their pints — there's lots of bar space, cozy booths, a couple of dart boards and, most importantly, 15 kinds of draught beer. It's where Silly Sundays typically begin.

■ **Down The Street (30 Ontario St.):** Right down the street, fittingly, from Bentley's, this restaurant and bar has become the place for arty types to talk theatrically, dahling. It's a great spot for wine by the glass and a bit of star spotting — Paul Gross, Stratford's latest Danish prince, has been spotted there this season, as have most of the Festival's company after (and occasionally before) curtain.

■ **Fosters Inn (111 Downie St.):** This narrow bar a few doors down from the Avon Theatre has been known to serve oysters and invite local jazz musicians to entertain. Be prepared to rub elbows — it's a tight space.

■ **The Dominion House (3 Guelph St.):** Known as "The Domino" among those in the know, this saloon is located right across the tracks from the train station.



There's hit-and-miss country music Friday and Saturday nights, and the roadhouse menu is surprisingly good — it's where the town's tradesmen go for a big feed. Wear jeans and drink Labatt's 50 to fit in.

■ **Backstage, 46 Wellington St.:** This down-at-the-heel bar isn't much to look at but it's one of the few places in Stratford for regular live music, mainly of the blues and rock varieties. Bring your instrument for jam nights Thursdays and Sundays.

BESIDES THEATRE

■ **What's Up Chuck,** available at local restaurants and stores, www.whatsupchuck.on.ca

Stratfordites turn to the juicy gossip rag *What's Up Chuck* for news on municipal politics and local scandal. A sort of *Frank* magazine for Perth County put together by local cab driver and city councillor wannabe Chris Rickett, the most recent issue (a three-year anniversary edition) includes comments on the closing of the local jail and first-person accounts of taxi trips with Stratford celebs. Good for a laugh and a few entertainment listings.

■ **Stock Auction, Perth Line 36, off Mornington St.:** The weekly sale at Stock Auction takes place Tuesdays at 3:30 p.m. (viewings on Monday afternoon) and is a popular haunt for antique hunting among locals.

■ **The Old Grove, entrance on**

John St. Anybody can walk around the river, but most tourists conk out at the Huron St. bridge. Continue walking south along T.J. Dolan drive past John St. to the Old Grove, where the terrain gets more interesting. Bring your dog and beware muddy conditions after a rain.

■ **Stratford Country Club (53 Romeo St., 519-271-4212):** It seems everybody plays golf these days, particularly restaurant workers, some of whom have their days free.

Book a couple of days in advance for prime tee-off times at this 18-hole course. Green fees are \$36 on weekdays, \$42 on weekends. Or try St. Mary's Golf & Country Club (519-284-3704). Green fees range from \$26 to \$32 for 18 holes.

■ **Stratford Tennis Club (371 Water St., 519-272-0062):** Sure, you can play tennis in Toronto, but can you play on clay? Four of the six courts at Stratford's club are gray clay, making for a slower, cooler, less painful game.

The club is across from the Festival's main theatre, and showers are available. Day passes cost \$30 for a group of four, \$20 for a pair. Call ahead to book.

■ **St. Mary's Quarry (St. Mary's):** Bathing in the Avon River is a definite no-no (those swans can be territorial, you know) but the St. Mary's limestone quarries have long been a favourite swimming hole for Stratford locals.

There are no lifeguards, though, so don't swim alone.

On & Off

VINAY MENON



Julia a pretty P.O.'d woman

What's On

I Wear My Fly Specs At Night: With summer here it is time to think about your retinas. You could dust-off those black RayBans. Or dig-up those wrap-around fly-specs. But if you want true UV-cool this season, get some aviator sunglasses. Spotted on celebrities like Britney Spears, Lenny Kravitz, Brad Pitt, and Naomi Campbell, and featured in Prada ad campaigns and Louis Vuitton fashion shows, the large sunglasses are perched on trendy noses in New York, Los Angeles and Barcelona. Look for thin wire frames and multi-coloured, gently-tinted lenses, which cover from cheekbone-to-eyebrow. Perfect for outdoors and pretentious Yorkville nightspots.

Just a flesh wound. What's your sign? Part tattoo, part fashion statement, part Band-Aid, some trendsters are now wearing ornate "Flesh Wound Strips." The strips, which look like Band-Aids, come in a myriad of patterns, including faux fur prints, gold lame and plaid flannel. They're usually worn on ankles and arms. A great conversation starter. Not so good for real cuts and wounds.

Hot accessory: Detachable velcro pockets.



BRAD PITT

What's Off



JULIA ROBERTS

WIPO-ed out: Finally, an Internet decision that makes sense. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) ruled that actress Julia Roberts has legal right to the Internet domain name juliaboberts.com. Roberts had launched a challenge after American cybersquatter Russell Boyd registered the name. The WIPO decision should help other celebrities, including Tina Turner and musicians Jethro Tull, fight to retain their domain identities.

Napster dozes off: Napster, the Internet company and site where global visitors flock to exchange musical files for free, nearly committed PR-suicide last week. The company, which has attracted the ire of the recording industry recently sent Offspring a cease-and-desist order after the band started hawking T-shirts, hats and bumper stickers all emblazoned with the Napster logo. It seems Napster didn't enjoy having its intellectual property exploited. After much deliberation, the company says it will work with Offspring with profits going to charity. Sources say it may change its name to hypocrisy.com.

Off phrase: Urban anthropology

12 steps for recovering cooler drinkers

I saw a bunch of young guys drinking in the park the other day and do you know what they were sucking back? Not good old "I Am Joe And I Am Canadian" Molson's Export Ale.

Nope. These weenies were drinking bright, fluorescent pink and blue and radioactive green coolers (talk about your Technicolor Yawn after three too many of these babies!)

This young thugs were actually drinking stuff with names like Breezer, and Loaded Soda and Mike's Hard Raspberry Lemonade and even — I checked the empties later — a new kind of drink called Wild Herb, a.k.a. "The Thinking Cooler." This is a Canadian product that is — I swear I'm not making this up — a mix of vodka, natural peach, raspberry, lemon and other sissy-berry flavours AND the "thinking ingredients" — a dose of both Ginseng and Ginko Bilboa, which is what they put in so-called Smart Drinks.

The finished product looks and tastes like cream soda, but is 5.5 per cent alcohol. So they're stronger than your normal 5-per-cent beer (the other coolers are 6.9 per cent and 7 per cent alcohol, although you wouldn't know it by the sickly sweet taste).

So I'm wondering what is up with kids these days. What's the deal with these sugary pop-drinks? Since these "Thinking Coolers?" contain both

William Burrill



brain-sharpening herbs and brain-cell-killing alcohol, I suppose they would make you both smart and stupid at the same time. So — in the end — you'd wind up just as dumb as you were before you laid out almost \$10 for a four-pack of this crap.

It used to be that only preteen girls would drink these panty-waist coolers but now I fear the young manhood of The True North Strong And Freezing has forsaken its beer-soaked Hoser Heritage for kiddie-pop girlie-drinks.

Here on the anniversary of D-Day, can you imagine what would have happened if our brave Canadian soldiers stormed Juno and Gold beaches with a belly full of Peach Wine Cooler? The beer-loving Germans would have laughed them right off the beach!

Just when it seems Canadians have found some kind of national identity due to a Molson's beer ad, the youth of this country is trying to scuttle the whole proud moment by trading their Molson's for spiked, gaseous Kool-

Aid. You'd never find a dead mouse in a bottle of Pink Lemonade Cooler. And it goes lousy with back bacon. It's traitorous!

Shame. I blame Mel Lastman and Mike Harris for this, mainly because I blame them for everything else, so why stop now?

And I think that education is the only answer.

It is vital that governments and school boards bury the hatchet and unite to offer beer-drinking lessons to ensure our youngsters will knee-walk to national glory in the good-old Canadian traditional way.

What I propose is an all-important Twelve Step Program To Drinking A Twelve-Pack Of Molson's.

- 1). Buy a twelve-pack of beer. Drink one.
- 2). Drink another.
- 3). And another.
- 4). Repeat and rinse.
- 5). !Otra cerveza, por favor!
- 6). Just one more.
- 7). Just the one more.
- 8). Okay, just the one more.
- 9). Show enthralled companions how you can drink a whole beer through your nose with a straw.
- 10 a). "I'll just have a half this time."
- 10 b). "I'll just have a half this time."
- 10 c). "Where's the other half?"
- 11 a). "Gimme *hic* another @%&\$\$@ brewski an' I'll tell ya a

great story!"

11b). "Gimme *hic* another @%&\$\$@ brewski an' I'll tell ya a great story!"

11c). "Gimme *hic* another @%&\$\$@ brewski an' I'll tell ya a great story!"

12). "Whuzzittarglebarglesnarfle."

So you see, the process by which you get in touch with your historical hoser heritage is as simple as counting from one to 12.

Now it's very possible that — after a program such as this one — you may well wake up the next morning feeling like what is technically referred to as "a bag of smashed moose antlers."

But as Mayor Mel knows, there's NOTHING WRONG WITH MOOSES.

So throw away those coolers, young folks, and get with the program. Get on the case and INTO the case (whether it's Molson or Labatt's or whatever is your choice).

And this being the New Age and all that rot, our youth need not fear the stigma of being labelled what we used to be called "s-t-faced drunks."

Just remember: in the Year 2000, Nothing Is Your Fault. There are no more drunks. There are merely "Beer-Challenged Persons of Stupor."

And damn proud of it. I am Joe And I AM S-T-FACED!

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What's On listings compiled and written by Lesley Towers; theatre capsule reviews prepared by Star critics, based on opening night performances. Listings are printed free of charge; information should be received by Friday before publication at What's On, The Toronto Star, One Yonge St., Toronto M5E 1E6. (fax: 869-4418) Updated listings are posted each Thursday at The Star's Web site, www.thestar.com

See section A

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