

COASTAL LIFE

Books, gardening, hiking, hobbies,
recreation, personalities, travel & more

CLOSE TO HOME

TRAVELING IN THE GREEN LAND

PART 1

By DAVID CAMPICHE
FOR COAST WEEKEND

I recently reread “Travels with Charley,” the 1962 autobiography written by the great American author John Steinbeck that was given to me by a friend.

The plot reminds me of the Simon and Garfunkel song about folks who “walked off to look for America,” people with inquisitive eyes and an appetite for truckin’. In this case, the seekers are Steinbeck and his Standard Poodle, Charley.

Earlier this year—more than 50 years after Steinbeck’s volume was first published—my wife, Laurie, and I are crossing borders as well, sidling along rain-slogged back roads en route to Seattle and Victoria, Washington, and Vancouver, British Columbia. We settled anonymously and happily into these eminently indulgent cityscapes.

Steinbeck, a man with eyes and ears wide open, spoke of how the American landscape of the 1950s had changed since his childhood, how he couldn’t find what he once knew and loved. (Of course, in his travels with Charley, there were many locations he had not previously explored.)

Now, in my late 60s, I can relate. Today, humanity seems indefatigable: It just keeps coming and growing and unfolding and colliding; its size and speed are exhausting.

And this is a new century. Most likely, Steinbeck



PHOTOS BY DAVID CAMPICHE
The Seattle Great Wheel

would not recognize its diversity and technology. Seattle

The normally three-hour journey from our Columbia-Pacific nest to Seattle, took five hours on that soggy March day. Traffic was a snarl.

Arriving without expectation in downtown Seattle, we parked the car, and accepted the mantle of tourists. Late, we settled into our hotel room after a glass of Northwest wine.

Like many tourists, we ate at Ivar’s on the waterfront. The repast was surprisingly good: lovely



The Seattle Waterfront



Crabs for sale at Pike Place Market

plates featuring fresh halibut fillets, black Indonesian rice, asparagus and a beurre blanc sauce.

The feast was preceded by the underground tour of the Rain City. Turns out, the undercarriage of Seattle is not so different than that of our own budding River City, Astoria, with the first story

with quicksilver reflections. On that unusually clear day, you could count the peaks of the Olympics, over water and under the tapestry of lavender mountains and cotton-white clouds.

We walked and walked, and walked some more, refreshed ourselves with a good Irish Guinness in an Irish pub attached to the Smith Tower, once the tallest edifice west of the Rockies, but now, living in outstretched shadows of skyscrapers. Later, we dined in a splendid Italian diner, Assaggio, an establishment rich in tradition and a perfect repose for these two city trekkers.

The restaurant was completely unpretentious, and the style of service performed with precision and amicability. Laurie had a sublime lamb shank, slow-cooked in a rich stock of wine and herbs. I devoured Pappardelle Al Cinghiale (wide pasta with boar ragu). My brother, Jeff, joined us, and polished off a portion of Osso Buco attached to a marvelous risotto. After a bottle of good Chianti, we were as happy as owls in ancient cedar.

One must mention the Seattle Art Museum, a mind-expanding experience featuring, world-class paintings, constant exhibits and permanent collections like the Art and Life Along the Northwest Coast.

We’ve seen Picasso here, and marveled at works from Mark Tobey and Kenneth Callahan, a Peninsula resident in his later years. Yayoi Kusama is here next

month (paintings and drawings that seem to “float in a magical place”).

Perhaps, the best beer in the city can be had at The Pike Brewing Company. The Finkles (two of the oldest owners and brewers of Northwest microbrew) have become dedicated friends of our Columbia-Pacific homeland.

And one wanders. Everyone loves the Pike Place Market and its carnival-like atmosphere. Fine shops and food dot the landscape like hordes of wild mushrooms that crowd our homeland in the fall. This is a wide open invitation to some of the best food in America. All this under the ebbing flood of Puget Sound and its sparkling waters, and the silhouette of Mt. Rainier.

Football and baseball: Seattle has some of the best. Music: Seattle makes us proud. We prefer the jazz; Jazz Alley is a city favorite.

We sipped splendid white wine and people-watched; you can choose from hundreds of locations from which to do this. Service is generally professional, urban and friendly, and the choices of cuisine nearly endless. We nibbled our way through the market. I always choose the humbrows and barbecued pork.

And all of this, particularly on a day when the traffic runs like clear racing water, and our destinations remain Close to Home.

Next up: Victoria, Washington, and Vancouver, British Columbia