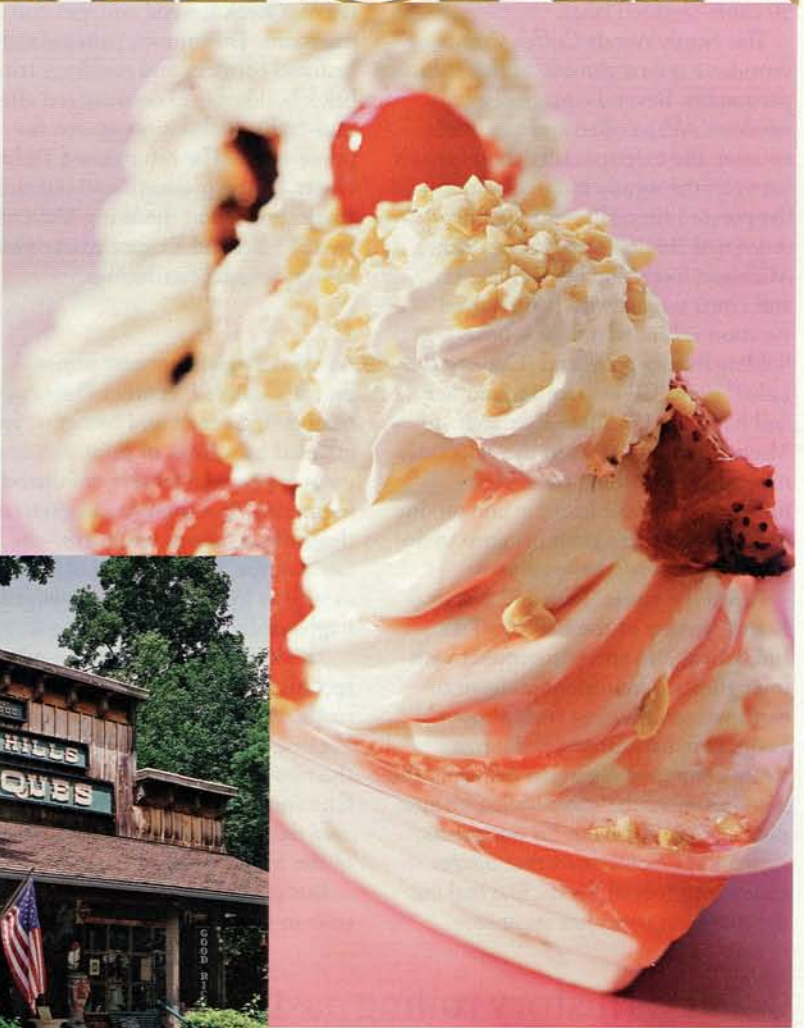


Old and new contrast and mingle appealingly in the Great Lakes State's southeast corner. Within 100 miles of Detroit, an easy-to-navigate wedge includes towns that are simultaneously **preserving their pasts** and reinventing themselves with stunning results. Follow roads that started as Native American trails to some of the state's most historic places, its **freshest wine scene**, art, cool jazz, a treasure trove of out-of-the-way antiques shops and more.

O R I G I N A L M I C H I G A N



(Clockwise, from above) Fresh and local are nothing new at roadside stands that dot the Irish Hills. Old-fashioned ice cream sundaes are a specialty at Molly's Mystic Freeze in Dundee. Antiques shops cluster along historic routes in southeast Michigan.



PHOTOGRAPHS: (FROM TOP) ROBERT J. JANSON/LINCOLN; BRANDI ZIEGLER/ICJ

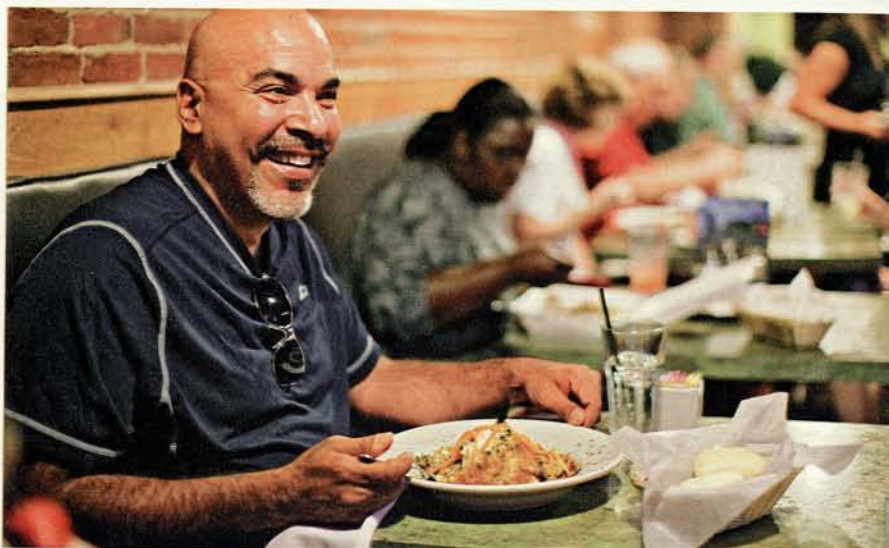
To experience this region's character, turn off the interstates that speed toward Detroit onto older roads that wander through green hills. Along US-12, US-223, M-50 and other routes, the going is slow, and the temptations to stop are plentiful. The rewards are just as ample. Give in: It's that kind of trip!

Coldwater

At the western edge of this triangle, this city of 12,700 prospered in the mid-1800s as a lucrative middle point along US-12, once the main route between Detroit and Chicago and one of Michigan's oldest roads. Later, the community thrived as a center of some 50 cabin-studded lakes.

The North Woods Coffee Company provides a telling glimpse of this split personality. Beyond vintage display windows and a coffee and sandwich counter, the cafe/specialty shop sprawls between the weathered wood floors and the pressed-tin ceilings of the once-renowned Branch Department Store. Michigan foods and genteel linens and china mingle with lighthearted vacation-cabin trimmings—bears holding fishing poles and “Gone to the Lake!” signs. Co-owners and mother and daughter LouAnne Barr and Michelle Milnes revel in the eclectic mix, and in providing small-town hospitality. “People love the one-on-one contact, and that's great because so do we!” daughter Michelle says.

Down the street, John and Nancy Krajny, owners of the Chicago Pike Inn & Spa, also strive to connect with their guests. Their friendly, down-to-earth welcome almost feels abnormal against the backdrop of the inn, a white-columned Georgian mansion, the grand dame of the surrounding historic district. “We go all out for our guests,” Nancy says. Sometimes that means catering to special needs, like making the pumpkin pancakes sugar-free.



A walking tour map leads through neighborhoods dotted with painted ladies, Greek Revival cottages and brick mansions. Downtown, painstakingly restored cornices and moldings trim brick buildings, all constructed after a mid-1800s prohibition against fire-prone wood. The refurbished Tibbits Opera House presents sold-out summer stock shows, and the Wing Museum, an 1875 Second Empire masterpiece, houses original furnishings.

Irish Hills

As US-12 meanders east across emerald-colored, gently rolling country, mini-golf, go-carts and barbecue joints guarded by statues of giant pigs and cows appear like lovable childhood memories. And then you begin to notice the antiques shops and malls—in farmhouses, sheds and an old school, as well as in new buildings wedged haphazardly in between.

This is history rolling past—a living record of one of the nation's oldest roads. What started as a Sauk trail became a stagecoach route between the newborn cities of Detroit and Chicago and then a link to a vacation area that was within Model T range of the Motor City.

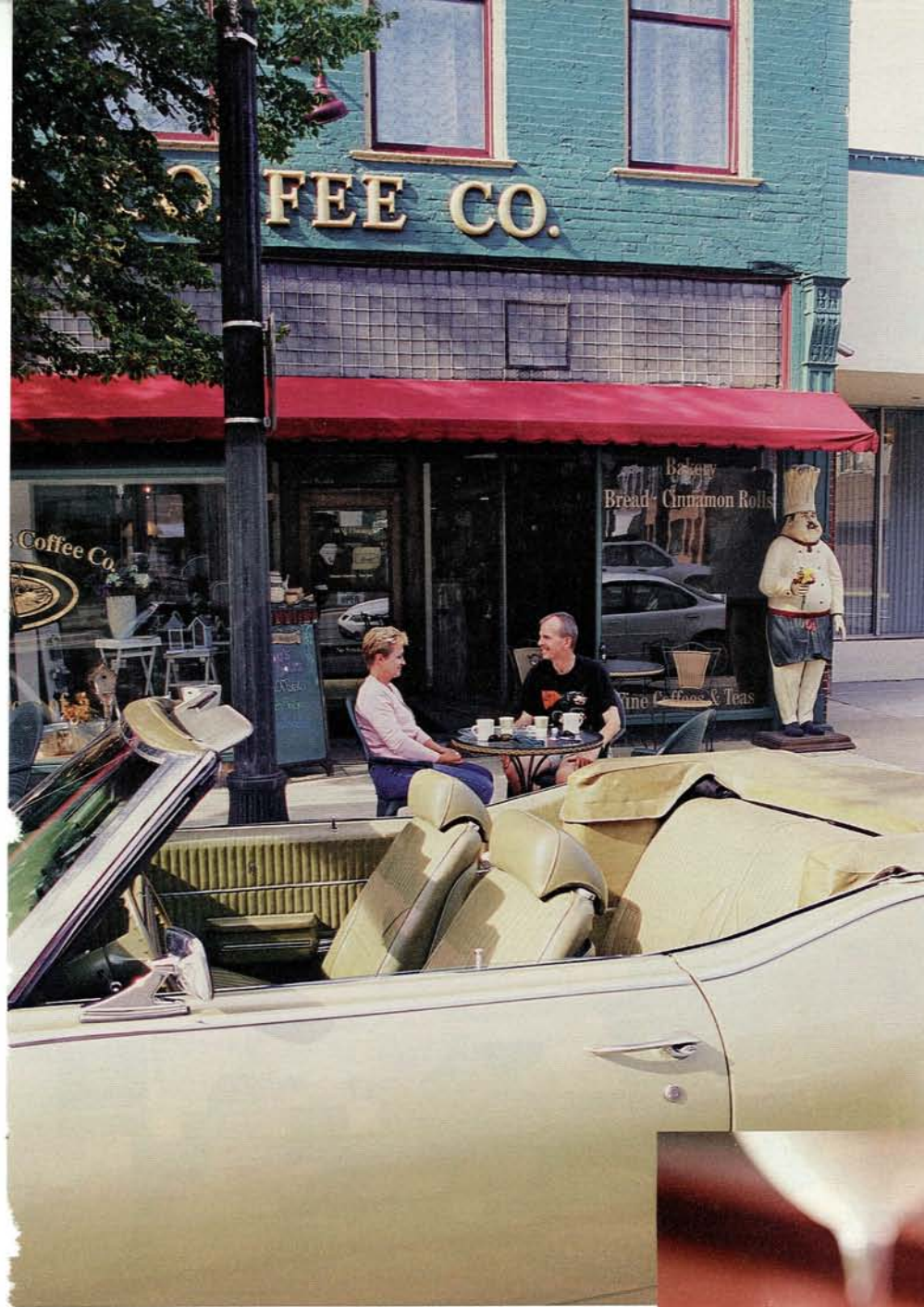
Bits of each stage of the road's life endure side by side. Cafes that simply



advertise “EAT” in glowing neon share the shoulders with hip newcomers crafting steaks and pasta.

Not far from antiques malls packed with hundreds of dealers, the Walker Tavern State Historic Site preserves an early stagecoach stop. Peaceful fields surround the white-clapboard way station, furnished as it would have been in 1836. Guides offer insights into the rigors of travel when the Chicago Road was little more than a well-worn path, the muddiest sections covered with

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(Clockwise, from left) Coldwater's North Woods Coffee Company tempts cruisers on US-12 to stop. Signs mark the onetime stagecoach route. An entree doubles as art at Evan's Street Station in Tecumseh. Fields spread between towns along US-12. (Opposite) Dinner comes with cool music on Jazz Nights at the Monroe Street Grill in Monroe. The Chicago Pike Inn & Spa welcomes travelers in Coldwater.





(Clockwise, from above) Vineyards produce grapes from the area's wines. Finds fill Cobblestone Rose, part of an intriguing mix of shops and restaurants in rejuvenated Saline. Tecumseh's Boulevard Market stocks gourmet cheeses. *(Opposite)* A historic cannon anchors a downtown park in Coldwater.

planks. Towns—that grew up to serve those stagecoaches, a requisite 12 to 15 miles apart—have come full circle, catering to travelers. Freshly painted storefronts line up in Clinton, Brooklyn and Tecumseh. In a carefully renovated century-old storefront along Tecumseh's stretch of US-12, Pentamere Winery embodies the region's renewed spirit in award-winning vintages such as Walk-in-the-Water dry red.

Monroe

At the 129 Lounge in Monroe, the mellow sounds of the Brent Stanley Trio, a quartet tonight because a friend has joined in, spill out the rear door onto a deck overlooking the River Raisin and a new 1½-mile paved pathway along its banks. Patrons sipping martinis that are the club's

trademark easily could chat over the music, but the intricate strains subtly insist on attention.

Variations on this scene repeat at other cafes and restaurants that take part in this every-other-week summer River Raisin nights series of free concerts. Jazz Night regulars Jim and Debbie Nordstrom are getting ready to walk to the next venue. Or they might hop aboard the white horse-drawn carriage giving free rides. "What I love is that it's professional music in a small-town setting," Jim says.

Thanks to the music and new restaurants, coffeehouse and clubs, the vibe tonight is more hip than historic in this city of 23,000, Michigan's third oldest. Once this community 35 miles south of Detroit was best known for its War of 1812 battlefield (recently

designated as a national park) and as the hometown of General George Armstrong Custer. Then, giant paper mills fueled the economy. In recent years, musicians and music lovers have helped a revival that includes the paved walkway along the River Raisin and a nice selection of restaurants, clubs and a gallery or two. The year-old Hotel Sterling, a serene refuge of polished wood floors, flat screens and leather armchairs, has to be the coolest newcomer of all.

The scene reaches a crescendo (August 14–15, 2010) when 50,000 people gather for the River Raisin Jazz Festival. The event unfolds in a pretty downtown park along the waterway that carried some of Michigan's first settlers and commerce—another appealing meeting of old and new. ■



Southeast Stops

JONESVILLE About 20 miles east of Coldwater on US-12, this village claims the Grosvenor House, a mansion designed by the same architect who created the Michigan State Capitol. Stay at the elegant Munro House Bed & Breakfast and Spa, one of the oldest homes along US-12.

In nearby Cambridge, the circa-1850 stone St. Joseph Catholic Church and 1928 shrine inspired by the grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes in France are designated historic landmarks.

ALLEN This tiny Irish Hills town has transformed itself into an ultimate antiquing destination. Malls and vintage buildings turned into shops hold literally acres of dealers. All this competition means an amazing selection and seductive prices. You could spend at least a day without seeing all the possibilities.

BROOKLYN Stay at any one of a number of restored old homes serving travelers as inns, including Dewey Lake Manor on a knoll overlooking a pretty lake. The Michigan International Speedway is in the area, and on race dates, it can be challenging to find lodging, so plan ahead.

SALINE Just off US-12 near Detroit, the downtown mixes history with contemporary shops and innovative restaurants. The old train depot and local museum has an original Fairbanks scale, and there's a livery barn next door. Brecon Grille serves irresistible burgers in an English-pub setting. At Rentschler Farm Museum, roosters crow and a spinning windmill pumps water to livestock. Visitors get a look at farm life from the 1920s as they tour the three-story Queen Anne farmhouse.

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