

ROUGHNECK GRACE

Tourist act sometimes works out

I compose this note on a return flight from Los Angeles where I didn't pick up a lot of actionable advice other than if you hope to catch a ride out the back door of SoFi Stadium at 1:30 a.m. you would be better off not to.

Rather, go ahead and hike right out past Touchdown Drive to Pincay Drive, then hustle up to the little turn-around just off Carlton which is where the last of the orange cones and world-weary security guards make their final stand. You'll

know you're headed in the right direction if you see other wee-hour stragglers wandering heads-down, tapping at their ride-hailing apps like perplexed zombies.

I learned this all on the fly and the flop. After inviting driver number one, I watched our blue dots zig-zag back and forth, nearing but never quite reaching each other.

Our correspondence — now immortalized in my iPhone — took on the desperate tone of two people trying to work out a long-distance relationship until finally the driver said it just wasn't worth it anymore and ghosted me. It gave me flashbacks to my young dating career, only with postcards and long-distance phone calls.

The second driver was more understanding, especially after I made that jog out to Carlton. He drove like a charioteer, and delivered me shortly to my room.

This was my second trip to Los Angeles in four months. Both visits were for work that may or may not manifest. This time I was accompanied by my main business partner to whom I am also married.

Between official meetings we ate seafood in a restaurant overlooking the Pacific near Topanga Canyon, which sounds exotic to a cheesehead except on this day the sea was whipped by wind and rain and we could have been in Duluth when Lake Superior was feeling grumpy.

Earlier we sheltered from the rain in the Getty Villa Museum where a quick review of Greco-Roman funeraria reaffirmed that whatever ostentatious silliness we're up to now we've been up to forever, and we would do well to take ourselves and our most insistent declarations less seriously, because one way or the other it's all gonna wind up as dirt, dust or trinkets in a gift shop.

On our one sunny day we walked and gawked the Santa Monica and Venice Beach promenade. The glory and madness of the human cavalcade is elixir for a retiring loner such as I, shaking my little snow globe and forcing me to view the world through unfamiliar fractals.

I include the grimmer things we saw. But to stroll through it rather than scroll through it makes all the difference in the world.

I enjoy needling city folk, but I stopped making fun of them a long time ago, mostly because in the midst of the multifarious scene you are reminded how stiff and worriedly I can hunch myself against things I've never met. Or grappled with.

I hope I have also learned that sometimes when you are a tourist you should act like a tourist, so on the final sunny evening we borrowed camp chairs and hiked the asphalt until we reached the beach, settled in with a book apiece, and resolved to take in the

Please see PERRY, Page D2

PLAYGROUND REVIEW | MADISON CHILDREN'S MUSEUM



AMBER ARNOLD PHOTOS, STATE JOURNAL

What should visitors expect at the new Wonderground playground at the Madison Children's Museum? We asked the experts: kids.

Our intrepid explorers try out Wonderground

A panel of experts shares descriptions of newest playscape

GAYLE WORLAND
gworland@madison.com

In early October, the Madison Children's Museum opened its latest attraction — an outdoor playground known as the Wonderground.

Designed to be played on and climbed over in sunshine or in snow, the 10,000-square-foot Wonderground was constructed using local and upcycled materials on a former parking lot behind the museum at 100 N. Hamilton St.

But just how does the Wonderground compare with other playgrounds? Which features work well? Which features don't? Is it "cool"?

We wanted to know more. So the Wisconsin State Journal decided to ask the experts: kids.

State Journal state politics editor Matt De-Four recruited his sons Will, 12, and Daniel, 8, plus a group of their school friends to be our testers. The junior reporters gathered at the Wonderground on a recent Friday afternoon to scale its ropes and timbers, race inside its Paul Bunyan-size barrel, navigate its secret passages and tall bridges — and then share their impressions of it all.

Here's what they said:



Lincoln Miller, 12, explores the giant barrel — with hidden surprises inside — at the new outdoor Wonderground playground at the Madison Children's Museum.

The Giant Bucket

When I first walked out, probably the first thing I saw was the Giant Bucket. It was literally a giant bucket. So, I went over, and when I walked in, it was like nothing I had ever experienced. In fact, I had never really experienced anything like the Wonderground. It's fun, it's whimsical, and there's an amazing nature component too. It has a lot of wood, which not a lot of playgrounds have, a few plants and a million different structures. There's the Bucket, the bag swings, the beehive, the climbing wall and so much more!

— Brynn Hinterthuer, 12, O'Keeffe Middle School



Find more Wonderground reviews on **PAGE D6**

RESTAURANT REVIEW | KETTLE BLACK KITCHEN

New Monroe Street eatery is simply nailing it



SAMARA KALK DERBY, STATE JOURNAL

Kettle Black Kitchen is in a spot that formerly housed Joon, Burgrito and Double S BBQ.

Challenges slow, but can't stop, this native New Yorker

SAMARA KALK DERBY
skalk@madison.com

Last February, when I spoke to Brian Hamilton about his planned Kettle Black Kitchen, we talked about the restaurants that had most recently been in that spot: Joon, Burgrito and Double S BBQ.

The Monroe Street location across from Trader Joe's has had "a little bit of a run of bad luck, but I think I'm going to nail it," Hamilton said.

After a recent meal on a Saturday night, when the intimate, 30-seat room was full, it looked

like he had.

"I like this menu," I told my friend.

"What's on it, or how it's printed?" he asked, to which I said: "Both."

Hamilton's French onion soup (\$10) was about as perfect as it comes with a deep broth, caramelized onions, soaked bread and plenty of melted Gruyere.

Also outstanding was the Charleston shrimp and grit cakes with bacon (\$13), with four wonderfully grilled shrimp, a seared square of grits, and crisp, thick-cut bacon. My friend liked the shrimp and bacon, but wasn't into the grits. I was more than happy to eat his share.

The grilled flat-iron steak

Please see KITCHEN, Page D2

INSIDE

TRAVEL

'Granny moon'

Gear up for a grandparent getaway before the new baby arrives **PAGE D8**



HEALTH

Proactive gut health

Dr. Zorba Paster: Try a probiotic while taking antibiotics **PAGE D5**



TAKE FIVE

Puzzles and more

Take a break with the Sunday New York Times crossword, sudoku **PAGE D4**

