



Where
ART
Meets
NATURE

Story by Ashley Petry

Three Days in Spring Green, Wis.

Tucked into the rolling hills of the Wisconsin River Valley, the tiny town of Spring Green is home to just 1,600 people. Yet this farming community—where bright red barns and herds of black-and-white cattle still dot the landscape—also boasts several of the Midwest’s most significant cultural attractions. Among them are Taliesin, the longtime home of architect Frank Lloyd Wright; the American Players Theatre, a classical theater with an unparalleled outdoor setting; and House on the Rock, a quirky museum reminiscent of the roadside attractions of days gone by.

Combined with memorable golfing, dining and shopping, these cultural icons make Spring Green an ideal—and refreshingly compact—place to spend a long weekend. If you have just three days in Spring Green, here’s how to make them perfect.

FRIDAY

4:30 P.M.

After a six-hour drive from Hamilton County, stretch your legs at Tower Hill State Park, where you'll get panoramic views of the wooded hills of the Wisconsin River Valley.

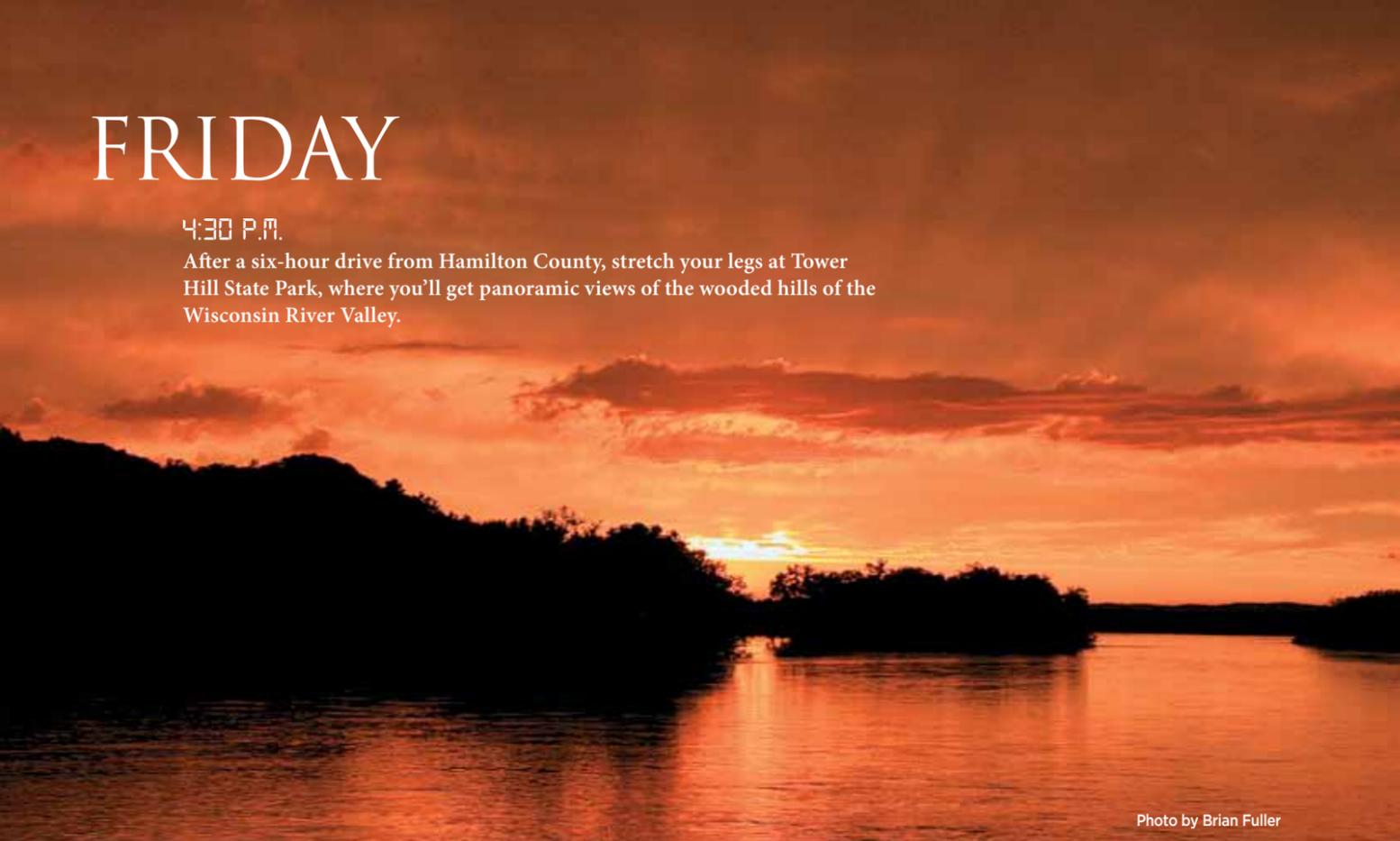


Photo by Brian Fuller

6 P.M.

Claim a picnic table on the grounds of American Players Theatre. You can bring your own picnic fixings and fire up one of the grills, or you can pre-order a picnic from the theater, such as a salmon salad croissant with spinach orzo salad, diced fruit and a brownie (\$14). For a group, try the Most Bountiful Picnic Basket, which serves four (\$52). It includes Italian marinated salmon filets, chicken salad, spinach orzo salad, fruit salad, seasonal greens, local cheese, fresh-baked baguettes, and brownies or strawberry-rhubarb pie.



American Players Theatre.
Photo by Carissa Dixon

8 P.M.

Take your seat in APT's Up the Hill Theater, an outdoor performance space on a wooded hilltop. The theater was founded in 1980 by theater professionals looking for "the perfect place to do Shakespeare in nature," says Sara Young, director of communications. Now in its 32nd season, APT is one of the top classical-theater companies in the Midwest. "Seeing those great classic plays under the stars in the beautiful woods is what makes it so special," Young says. This season, APT is presenting eight plays, including works by William Shakespeare, Noel Coward and Tennessee Williams. Productions at the

Up the Hill Theater include "The Tempest," "The Taming of the Shrew," "The Critic," "Of Mice and Men" and "Blithe Spirit." Even in August, the weather can turn chilly at night, so be sure to bring a sweater—or head to the concession stand for a mug of hot chocolate spiked with peppermint schnapps.

11 P.M.

With nary a hotel chain in sight, snuggle under the covers at one of Spring Green's quaint bed and breakfasts. "There's no hid-

ing it: We're a little more folksy," says Dawn Eno, executive director of the Spring Green Area Chamber of Commerce. "But we also know how to be hospitable." Try the Hill Street Bed and Breakfast, in a historic Victorian home in downtown Spring Green, or head to the Silverstar Inn Bed and Breakfast for a more rural alternative. Or try the Bettinger House in nearby Plain, where the loyal clientele come year after year for the lavish breakfasts—and the mental challenge each morning as the owners read brain teasers aloud.

TRAVELERS GUIDE

Tower Hill State Park - 5808 County Highway C, Spring Green; (608) 588-2116; www.dnr.state.wi.us

American Players Theatre - 5950 Golf Course Road, Spring Green; (608) 588-7401; www.americanplayers.org. (Note: Picnic dinners must be ordered by 4 p.m. the day before the show.)

Cedar Grove Cheese Factory - E5904 Mill Road, Plain; (800) 200-6020; www.cedargrovecheese.com

The Springs Course at House on the Rock - 400 Springs Drive, Spring Green; (800) 822-7774; www.thehouseontherock.com

Arcadia Books - 102 E. Jefferson St., Spring Green; (608) 588-7638; www.readinutopia.com

House on the Rock, the attraction - 5754 State Road 23, Spring Green; (608) 935-3639; www.thehouseontherock.com

Taliesin - 5607 County Road C, Spring Green; (877) 588-7900; www.taliesinpreservation.org. (Note: Reservations for all tours are strongly recommended.)

Spring Green General Store - 137 S. Albany St., Spring Green; (608) 588-7070; www.springgreengeneralstore.com

Wollersheim Winery - 7876 State Road 188, Sauk City; (800) 847-9463; www.wollersheim.com



Photo by Mike McDermott



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(Option A)

8:30 A.M.

After breakfast, head to the Cedar Grove Cheese Factory in nearby Plain. The facility—one of the first in the nation to refuse milk containing growth hormones—works with local dairies to craft more than 30 varieties of cheese, including havarti, butterkaese, Muenster, Swiss and a wide range of cheddars. Take the self-guided 30-minute tour (\$3), where you'll see the cheese-making process, taste lots of samples and explore the factory's unique wastewater-recycling technology.

Back in downtown Spring Green, browse the quirky Albany Street shops, where you'll find earthy gifts at 43/90 North Earth, international teas at Bird of Paradise Tea and Chocolate, and artisan necklaces at No Rules Jewelry. Nearby is the Jura Silverman Gallery, showcasing fine arts and crafts from Wisconsin artists.

(Option B)

8 A.M.

Grab your clubs and head to the Springs Course at House on the Rock resort. The 18-hole course, designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr., received four and a half stars from Golf Digest and was named by Madison Magazine as the best par-four course in the state. Winding along the valley floor, it features water hazards on nearly every hole.



House on the Rock. Photo by Brian Fuller



Frank Lloyd Wright's home, Taliesin. Copyright Pedro E. Guerrero, courtesy of Taliesin Preservation, Inc.



SATURDAY

Photo by Mike McDermott

11:30 A.M.

Have lunch at Spring Green's newest dining option, the Kitchen at Arcadia Books, a gourmet deli tucked into a corner of a bookstore. Try farm-to-fork basics such as Caesar salad, vegetable wraps and ham-and-cheese sandwiches, or opt for more exotic options—changed daily—such as pad Thai and chicken fried rice.

12:30 P.M.

Explore one of the Midwest's oddest attractions, House on the Rock. In 1945, would-be architect Alex Jordan began building a house on Deer Shelter Rock, a natural 60-foot sandstone tower just outside Spring Green. The 14-room house soon became a tourist attraction, especially after Jordan began displaying his collection of unusual artifacts. The museum—now a sprawling complex of 16 buildings—houses everything from the world's largest carousel to a giant sea creature. Along the way, you'll see an "infinity room" with more than 3,000 windows, a re-created 19th-century street, and extensive collections of music machines, circus memorabilia, dollhouses, hot-air balloons, antique cars and suits of armor. Whether you find the museum charming or creepy, it's an experience you won't soon forget.

3 P.M.

Take the two-hour highlights tour at Taliesin ("tally-ES-in"), Frank Lloyd Wright's home and workshop for 48 years. Built in 1911, the National Historic Landmark—named after a Welsh poet—is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. The highlights tour (\$52) starts at the Frank Lloyd Wright Visitor Center and includes Taliesin and the Hillside building, a Wright-designed facility that houses a theater and drafting studio. The 600-acre estate can be visited only during guided tours because it is a working community of architecture students. "Wright established a community of people to live and work on the estate and learn from him, and he converted many of the barn structures and other buildings ... into living space," says Becky Rex, special events and media coordinator. Among the residents are architects in their 90s who came to study with Wright and never left.

6 P.M.

Celebrate Wright's architectural legacy at the Riverview Terrace Café, part of the Taliesin estate. The Wright-designed dining room features walls of windows overlooking the Wisconsin River, and the menu highlights lo-



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Photo by Diekman Photography



Above: Spring Green General Store. Photo by Erin Fuller.
Other photos by Mike McDermott.



cal specialties like cheese, fish and pork. Start with a goat cheese or trout-and-bacon salad, and then order Rushing Waters trout or steak from nearby Otter Creek Organic Farm.

8 P.M.

Head back to American Players Theatre, this time for a performance in its indoor Touchstone Theatre. This season, the intimate venue features “The Glass Menagerie,” “Crime and Punishment” and “The Cure at Troy,” a version of Sophocles’ “Philoctetes.” For the perfect snack at intermission, pick up one of the heavenly brownies, baked fresh at Hubbard Avenue Diner.

and cinnamon toast topped with maple cream-cheese frosting. Afterward, browse the gift shop, where you’ll find an eclectic mix of clothing, toys and gifts—all with an artsy local flair.

NOON

On your way home, stop at Wollersheim Winery in nearby Sauk City. On a hillside overlooking the Wisconsin River, the winery was founded in the 1840s by Hungarian Count Agoston Haraszthy—who was soon lured west by the gold rush and became one of the founders of the California wine industry. Robert and JoAnn Wollersheim purchased the abandoned property in 1972, replanting the vineyards and refurbishing the underground wine cellars. The one-hour tour (\$5)—which runs hourly from 10:15 a.m. to 4:15 p.m.—includes a video of the winery’s history; a tour of the vineyards, fermentation facility and underground aging cellars; and a tasting of some of the winery’s most popular wines. Don’t miss the Domaine du Sac or the Prairie Fume, which recently earned best in show at the San Diego International Wine Competition. ☉

SUNDAY

10 A.M.

Mingle with locals and tourists alike at the Spring Green General Store, where the eco-conscious brunch menu includes a garlic-dill cheese-curd scramble, “Honey Gone Nuts” granola, buckwheat pancakes