

Belle of the Isle

Belle of the Isle Credits:
Looks from The Getup Vintage
& Star Vintage

Until it closed seven years ago, the Belle Isle Aquarium was the longest continually running aquarium in the country. Nonetheless, tides are changing and major efforts to reopen the long-lost gem are underway. Finding inspiration in the aquatic life the building once housed starting in 1904, "Belle of the Isle" uncovers the aquarium's history with polished looks and words in an effort to spring forward.







With warmer weather well on its way, the impulse to appoint time outdoors grows rampant. There's an immediate burn to feel the warmth of the sun on our skin and the freshly thawed ground beneath our feet. There's no doubt with a little creativity and careful eyes, we'll find the perfect outdoor adventure spots and secret hideouts just in time for spring.

During a spring awakening such as this, one can expect to uncover various hidden treasures at Detroit's budding Belle Isle. Perhaps the most precious treasure buried at the metropolitan park is the Belle Isle Aquarium, a forgotten jewel tarnished by rough times eagerly awaiting the right person to pick it up, dust it off, and hold it toward the sky so it can sparkle.

Though formerly considered to be another ghost building downtown "frozen in time," along with neighboring iconic vacancies such as Michigan Central Station and the Detroit Boat Club, the Belle Isle Aquarium is in the midst of disproving itself as shuttered. Urban myth states the aquarium is in shambles, but never has it been more beautiful in its effort to detach from a cold past to spring forward. Until it closed seven years ago, the Belle Isle Aquarium was the longest continually running aquarium in the country. Amidst the wild governing rein of Detroit's former mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, the aquarium fell by the wayside. Detroit Zoological Society Director Ron Kagan convinced government officials to cut the aquarium's upkeep from the city budget, claiming the burning hole in the cities' pockets wouldn't cool off with the aquarium afloat. More recently, Detroit was saved from yet another irreparable loss. In lieu of increasing financial trouble, the city proposed to close the Detroit Zoo. It was a close call and though we'd like to think of the historically and culturally rich institutions such as the aquarium and zoo as untouchable, reality is there is the potential risk of their evaporation when the economy takes an even harder hit.

Metro-Detroiters would be shocked to know there are no public aquariums open in Michigan, an undeniable embarrassment for a state surrounded by water. With the rising pattern of a decreasingly satisfactory educational system within the state, it's equally disheartening that historical and educational facilities like the one-of-a-kind aquarium are stunted in their efforts to educate Michigan's residents and youth about aquatic life and their connection to local history.





After the aquarium closed in 2005, word of a super aquarium on Detroit's riverfront sprung up. Nonetheless, funds never pooled together and plans stood stagnant. Though the original aquarium is closed, visitors of the Isle can peer through the locked doors and see Albert Kahn's - frequently called the architect of Detroit- green tile masterpiece coating the curved walls and vaulted roof of the aquarium. Kahn's signature style of heavy carvings and industrial detail are mimicked throughout the city but many of his designs are permanently lost, buried deep within the shambles.

Looking through the clouded glass creates an underwater effect filled with beauty but also a ghostly presence that points out the time capsule within the cold interior. Nevertheless, tides are changing. Supporters of the aquarium's revival, such as The Friends of Belle Isle Aquarium, raise private funds and seek government aid in an effort to polish the sunken treasure. This year, on the fourth of January, the aquarium temporarily re-opened as a part of a day-long series of events on the Isle. Indeed, the excitement brought lots of wondering eyes and proved the hundred-year-old building, despite what others may think, is capable of staying afloat. A variety of fish made their way back into the exhibit, helping visitors of the event see things as half full rather than half empty, and essentially helping the Belle Isle Conservancy move forward, taking it one tank at a time. With the help of state-funded grants, the aquarium is patching itself up, working from top to bottom. Recently, the aquarium was awarded \$45,000 to restore the copper roof. This is one step towards re-instituting the 1,500 aquatic creatures that formerly called Belle Isle home. In 1904, the Isle's infancy, Michigan legislator David E. Heineman traveled to Naples, Italy and when he returned to Detroit he sought to build an aquarium modeled after the one that stole his heart abroad. Belle Isle is special in that it is the only island park designed by one of the nation's most beloved landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted, regarded as the father of American landscape architecture co-designed Central Park in New York City, once said, "healthy parks are one of the most important assets of healthy cities." Olmsted modeled Belle Isle after the tree-lined boulevards of Paris. After all Detroit was once called the Paris of the Midwest. Whoever said out with the old and in with the new doesn't see the potential in putting forth energy into restoring weathered gems back to their original luster.

Now that spring is upon us, it's time to see things in a different light. Despite the grey hue of the past, we ought to find warmth in supporting local causes that promise a budding future. Let's make a resolution to fill our time with countless bike rides, picnics alongside hidden lagoons, kite flying, and hopefully one day visiting the re-opened aquarium. It's in opening up to simple pleasures that we're able to appreciate the richness of our surroundings and able to value what we already have. Fingers crossed, but with time, the "Green Oasis" will reopen and refill our wildest imaginations. Because, if not the city will have lost a shrine of its original charm.





Blue Valentine

Blue Valentine Credits
Looks from The Getup Vintage





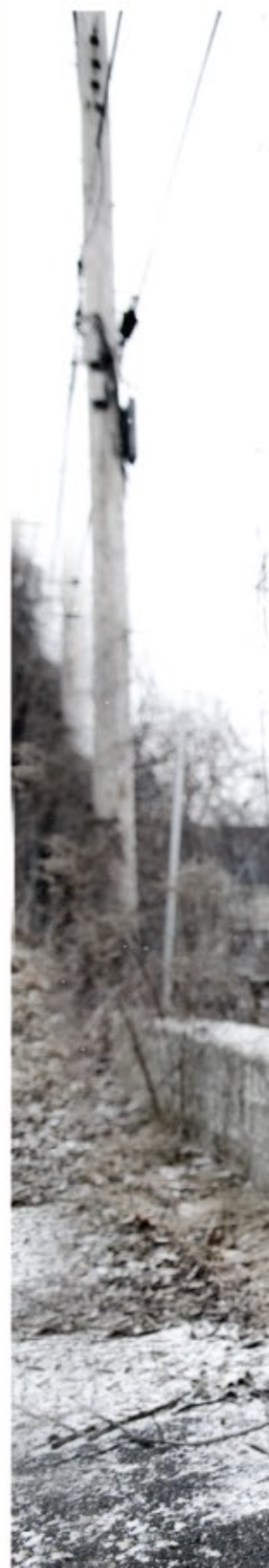








Blue Valentine offers a glimpse of restless spirit, stopping time in a nineties visionary romance. In hopes of finding inspiration within an otherwise bleak reality, the two discover warmth in the simplicities of each other's company and that true love blooms in the presence of a budding friendship.





Breakfast at Lab

lab 
www.labcafe.tumblr.com

lab 
www.labcafe.tumblr.com



We are undeniably creatures of habit but for patrons of Lab on East Liberty there's more to coffee breaks than throwing back a quick cup of caffeine. Unlike large-scale coffee houses that shuffle customers out the door within a matter of minutes, Lab asks patrons to think of coffee as a cultural experience. Whether it's morning, afternoon or night, serious coffee and tea drinkers covet the time and funds they invest in sustaining their daily routine. Though Lab is surrounded by a half dozen coffee shops and a dozen more within driving distance, it stands out by providing unparalleled service, quality products, and modern design.

The idea behind Lab started two years ago when co-owners Tobias Wacker and Joanna Hung decided to tend to Ann Arbor's drought of privately owned coffee shops. The University of Michigan graduate students drafted an idea to start a business rooted in customary coffee traditions constructed within a modern setting. Tobias and Joanna share a background in urban planning and conceptualized Lab using an aesthetic approach, hoping to bridge an already unique Ann Arbor community together.



Today, Lab has coffee down to a science. When the store opened in 2009 it started as a yogurt shop that served coffee, but soon after the doors opened, espresso orders began to pick up steam. Lab's success relies on its menu which offers an array of roasts, teas, confectioneries, and frozen yogurt flavors. The coffee menu is traditional, but complementary treats can be quite adventurous. Flavors are ever changing and imaginative; salted caramel ice cream, black currant macaroons, and blue velvet cake for starters. The mouthwatering baked goods come directly from Ann Arbor's own Pastry Peddler, Tasty Footprints and Cecilia's macarons.

Lab's standards for high quality products are upheld within every fold of the business. Lab is the proud owner of a La Marzocco espresso machine. La Marzocco espresso machines are handmade in Florence, Italy and offer the finest coffee equipment in the market. Though seating is limited, Lab is an intimate environment and foundation of closely-knit regulars. Pops of lime green color liven the space and accent the custom plywood tables and chairs, each hand-worked by professors from the Taubmann College of Architecture and Urban Planning. "Lab acts as a community hub for good coffee, design, and people who appreciate these things," says Alex Trajkovski. Alex has worked at Lab for two years and contributes to the staff's breadth of creativity. "Some of us are artists, photographers, filmmakers, DJs, and graphic designers." Hiring an imaginative staff supports Lab's dedication to arts and culture. Something strictly unique to Lab is the stream of found, art house footage projected behind the acounter top.

Aside from well known roasters, Lab's coffee selection asks customers to experiment. Madcap Coffee roasts its beans in Grand Rapids and Anthology, one of Lab's most popular roasts, comes from Detroit. Handsome Coffee Roasters is an equally popular roast. Mike Phillips, founder of Handsome Beans and the largest name in the coffee business, traveled from Los Angeles to Ann Arbor to personally deliver his handsome beans. "Coffee reconnects people," says Alex. For him, "Lab is where individuals crossover," and having Phillips take a personal interest in Lab speaks for itself.





Unlike coffee houses that seldomly brew fresh batches, Lab uses a pour over system that guarantees a personalized cup. Unlike major coffee houses who've distorted what coffee should look and taste like at the expense of capital, Lab reteaches the basics of coffee. Though big companies like Starbucks ushered coffee culture into cities big and small, they've distorted people's understanding and expectations. "Starbucks contrasts how good coffee should be," says Alex. "Nowadays, people want bigger portions and hotter temperatures." Lab Baristas are more than happy to teach customers about the process and to engage in conversation; lab to its customer's as Tiffany's is to Truman Capote's Holly Golightly. Whenever Holly came down with a case of "the reds" the only thing that did any good was to jump in a cab and go to Tiffany's. "Calms me down right away," said the eloquent Audrey Hepburn. Lab provides the same sense of service, comfort, style.



During the 1950s the first coffee vending machine made an appearance in the corporate marketplace. To avoid drinking day old coffee, men and women spent five to ten cents for a mechanically brewed cup of coffee in the workplace. These days, people still crave convenience over high quality, individualized service. It takes spirit to make an exceptional cup of coffee and there's more to say about the heart attached to the hands working the machine. What it really boils down to is whether or not you appreciate the craft. Lab invokes nostalgia for the past while building better grounds for the future. Lab fosters a mutual relationship in which its creatures of habit are willing to support a local business and the business puts in what is needed to sustain its customers, rather than simply refueling those who need their next fix.



Breakfast at Lab Credits:
Looks from The Getup Vintage



THE ORIGINAL PRETTY IN PINK

PRETTY IN PINK CREDITS:
LOOKS FROM STAR VINTAGE



A month ago I received Anthropologie's October issue in the mail. I fixed my eyes on the cover and an overwhelming blush of desire swept over me. I'd fallen in love with the bubblegum pink coat featured on the front page, but with much dismay, my love affair ended as soon as it began. The cost of owning such a lovely item? Two hundred dollars. Though the stunning sixties inspired jacket with alabaster arrows that lined the hemline had pierced my tender heart, I simply couldn't fathom spending the pretty penny. After snuffing my hopes of ever wearing the pretty pink coat, I found love again, and this time, at a more affordable cost.

While walking down South State Street, I ventured below ground into Star Vintage. To my surprise, there on the upholstered wall hung the pink jacket. Not the one from Anthropologie but its vintage twin. I quickly learned the sapphire treasure once belonged to someone dear to the store. Tillie Whitt, owner of Star Vintage, and teasingly self-proclaimed "gypsy treasure hunter," purchased the coat years ago and retired it to her personal, permanent collection. With wide eyes, I gazed at "the look for less in front of me" and couldn't imagine my luck. Unable to guess why anyone would part with a coat of such rosy character, I knew I had to meet Tillie and unravel the crimson threads that held the story together.

Days later, Tillie and I met for the first time. She warmly invited me to sit with her in the heart of her second home. I pulled over a retro chair from the funky dining room set in the living room and felt immediately at ease, an effect Tillie has over all her customers. That's exactly what Star Vintage is a personal living space, full of belongings that each carry a unique history. Much like family heirlooms, every piece of jewelry, cloth, or furniture is one of Tillie's invaluable possessions. Tillie calls herself a "world traveler" and treks the globe in search of hidden treasures to add to her sophisticated collection. Star Vintage represents every era and all walks of life. Unlike many vintage hunters, Tillie has never entered a vintage warehouse. She values the search. "I'm like the original rag picker," she said. "Scouting and digging."

Tillie has owned Star Vintage for six and a half years. Her collecting days began when she was a little girl living in New York. Both of her grandmothers worked in the fashion industry during the nineteen twenties. She recalls the ladies as "living in the lower east side and no matter how poor they were they were always dressed beautifully." Tillie discovered her love of antiques and all things vintage in her grandmother's basement. "It takes a certain type of person, a certain eye, and a certain spirit," Tillie said with twinkling eyes. It also takes time and appreciation for salvaging bits of history and when pieces are unearthed, it's like paying homage to the previous owners. I too like to think pieces such as the coat survived for a reason. Every month Tillie flips through the pages of Vogue and other major fashion publications only to find the same thing time and time again. "You'll see a designer selling something for an arm and a leg and I have the original for a fraction of the cost!" she said with a smile.

Buyers from Anthropologie, Urban, and American Apparel come into Star Vintage in search of new inspiration and old pieces, which are then sent to the company to be redesigned and sold to the masses. It's no surprise that fashion trends come back into style but why spend double, even triple, for a copy when you can own the original? Great pieces, like the electric pink coat, carry a cultural anthropology and history. It takes a certain spirit to wear a piece such as this but Tillie is a matchmaker. She can look at someone and pull items she knows they will connect with. "I get this feeling when the right person finds their mate," said Tillie. It's a mutual relationship; vintage brings something special out in the shopper and the shopper breathes new life into the garment.

Today's consumer is out of touch with what they buy. However, vintage reconnects buyers with items that speak to their identity. Every item in Star Vintage has a story to tell. A library could be filled with narratives, retracing and retelling the stories contained within in object, and in doing so, the real value unfolds. Items like the perfectly pink fall coat make you feel as though it was made for you. They are the pieces you love to wear. The idea of something being tailored for you before your time gives it soul. The past is kept alive until threads disintegrate and cloth thins and everything eventually must retire, but we'll always have the worn patches to testify our love for what we own.

Star Vintage "lives to make people feel loved," pieces such as the pink coat connect with something within. "That's our bottom line," Tillie explained. "These pieces have a life of their own and it's my job to find the right person to bring out the life in them." Towards the end of our conversation I realized I hadn't asked about the coat. "What about the pink coat? I asked "how did you stumble upon it?" Tillie lived in London at the time and one day while sifting through the flea market on Portabella Street, she came across it. "I wore that coat everywhere, New York, San Francisco, nights out on the town and music hall." I call pieces like this a signature piece because they become a part of you. They produce memories and identify with their owner. "I preceded to ask Tillie how she knew she was ready to part with the coat. "Sometimes I go through my closet and release. I know when an item needs to be in circulation. I just knew it was time for someone else to have it."





The pink, mod coat is from the nineteen sixties is living in it's original history. The coat channels a certain energy and elicits a fearless spirit. The coat truly is a one-of-a-kind and so is Tillie. In fact, all of Star Vintage's employees are real characters. There are no recycled greetings, only clothes. Within the short amount of time I met Tillie, her infectious personality filled my heart. I then realized the true weight that her work carries. It wasn't the coat I was drawn to but the story stitched within. Shopping vintage helps local business owners like Tillie continue what she loves to do. Even though vintage costs considerably less, it contains something much more. Although I have no ill will against large retailers such as Anthropologies, my experience at Star is something strictly unique. Anthropologie can recreate the piece, but it can't replicate the history and people attached to the original. If you take the time, you too will find an irreplaceable piece of history, and whoever has the pleasure of owning the mod-cloth coat should treasure it forever. I'm unsure whether finding the pink highlighter colored coat was a coincidence or something greater but one thing is for sure, it's vibrancy and value are something that will never fade.

