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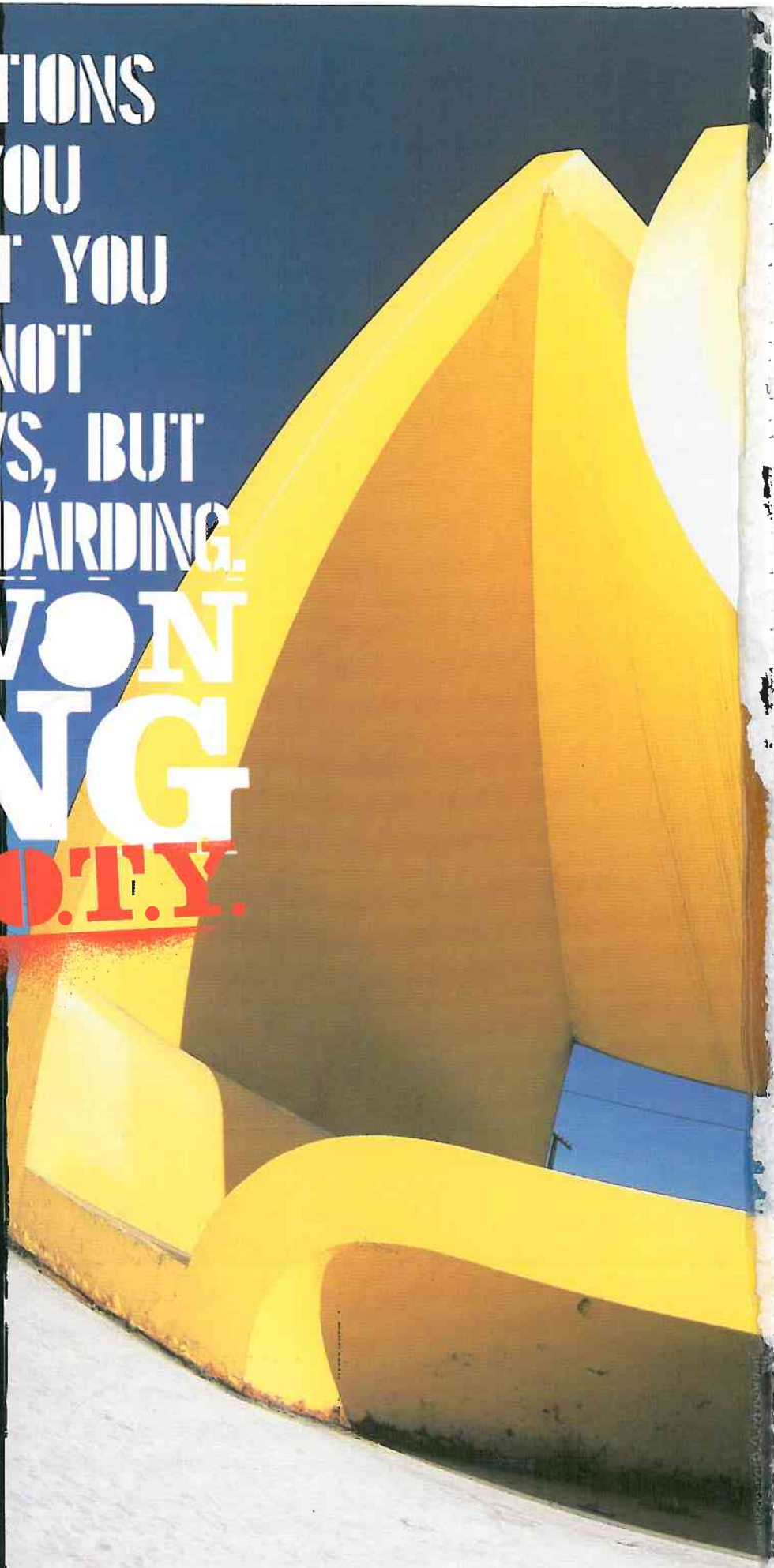
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Winnipeg

The Plaza at the Forks

WORDS BY FRANK DANIELLO

“I went to Winnipeg on the Tony Hawk secret skatepark tour...and that park’s amazing – probably the best park in North America right now.”

— Alex Chalmers



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Some call skateparks the future of skateboarding in regards to how these structural contributions are directly correlated to the rapidly heightening skill levels of young skateboarders. Direct results of this can be seen in those little rug rats with new knees that have a bigger bag of tricks than you. Some call skateparks a more productive and positive way for youth to utilize a public space that would otherwise be underused, or used in a negative manner; the Vancouver Plaza is a perfect example of this, where the city police advocate the use of the space by skaters. On the other hand, some park frowners claim these concrete creations are taking skateboarding out of its own creative element, the streets, and segregating it.

One thing is certain, concrete skateparks are not only here to stay, they're evolving in design, size, and frequency. Yes, they're getting better, and more plentiful, which means there are a lot of successful examples in Canada to build your case on when trying to get one built in your community. British Columbia has held the heavyweight title belt for completed concrete park projects for a very long time with at least 85, and counting. BC-born parks have been used as models in other communities, and their designers have seen a surge in business due to the park proliferation that is happening in many areas across Canada. This is good news for skaters of all skill levels, everywhere.

However, there has been one particular prairie municipality that, for some reason, has been left behind during the modern skatepark boom over the years despite having a very rich skateboard history that stretches back to the mid 1960's. Winnipeg has been left with a legacy of outdated and extremely mellow outdoor creations built in 1979 such as Sturgeon Creek Park in the St. James area (which has been buried for years) Chornick Park in East Kildonan, and Happy Lands Park in the city's French district and St. Boniface. Now Winnipeg has finally been put on the skatepark radar, and the signal from *The Plaza at the Forks* is a strong one, prompting construction of two additional parks in the Southern Manitoba capital, and one in Brandon, a neighbouring town.

Plaza at the Forks Facts

Design:

- New Line Skateparks (Vancouver)
- Van der Zalm and Associates (Landscape Architects, Vancouver)
- Scatliff+Miller+Murray (Landscape Architects, Winnipeg)

Construction:

- PCL Construction

Size:

- The park covers a total area of 44,000 square feet.

Cost:

- Approximately 2.5 million dollars (Canada's most expensive park).

More Details and Info:

- winnipegskateparks.com
- sk8skates.com
- theforks.com

The Forks

The Forks has been a popular meeting place in Winnipeg for over 6,000 years. It's located in the heart of Winnipeg, at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. Historically, it was used for the purposes of trade due to its functional location and river access. It was later utilized as a rail yard and eventually re-developed to fulfill its original purpose within the framework of modern society. It's now a large urban green space complete with a market boasting boutique shops, restaurants, a hotel, and a large outdoor stage. The Forks is a tourist destination, sees about 4 million visitors annually, and is easily accessible via transit.

Project Development

Winnipeg, which is not normally known as being a high-budget city on a number of fronts, came through with the funding and superior location of this skatepark project mostly through big business.

"The project has been pretty independent of their (the City's) involvement. I think it kind of sucks in some ways because it lets the city off the hook," explains Genico Aiello, owner of Sk8 Skates, Skatepark Supervisor, and Project Supervisor at the Forks Plaza. "It's a project that the city should have done a long time ago, and they kept waiting until this park happened, and it took the pressure right off of them."

It took the initiative of big business philanthropy to make this park a reality and Mr. James Burns of the Power Corporation, who was originally noted by the media as an 'anonymous donor', footed the majority of the price tag and used his connections with one of Canada's largest construction firms to build it.

"My understanding is that Mr. Burns was asking around and trying to find out why more skateparks hadn't been set up in the city. I think he discovered that paperwork hadn't been done, and the work hadn't been done to push the city," says Aiello.

"The budget kept growing and when we finally did a proposal to design and build this thing, the only criteria Mr. Burns had was that it said 'World Class Facility,'" explains Bob Somers, a Landscape Architect for Scatliff+Miller+Murray in Winnipeg. "The beauty of this project being on the Forks site and not City property, is that I think there's going to be a lot more care and long-term maintenance being put into this place because the Forks had to get corporate insurance for the site, so they're building it as the number one skate plaza, and they want to keep it there. I hope the impact of this park will make communities want to have something like it, so we can plan for them a lot better," Somers adds.

Street Plaza Details

The street plaza section is 30,000 square feet and is themed after urban skate spots in Japan, Barcelona, San Francisco, and contains popular elements that originated in BC parks such as numerous granite ledges of various sizes, and grindable angled walls lining both sides of select stair sets. Skateable art structures are also prevalent in the Plaza, with the popular 'magic carpet', a large acid treated steel ribbon track that ends in a 7-foot quarter. Granite hubbas of various sizes, as well as multiple stair-cases, rails, and gaps stem from the centerpiece of the plaza. On the lower level, a long banked wall with three levels of ledge protrusions can be found, inspired by a famed Barcelona spot. There is a corner hip, numerous planters, manual options, tight 'street' transitions, and a fun flat-bank-to-barrier. The deck above the ledge-shelf bank features a stomping ground for games of SKATE, and a tight SF China Bank inspired 4-foot transition with intermittent granite ledges to carve and grind over. There's no deck on the China Bank, so watch out for the high drop on the other side.

The Plaza is detailed with acid stained concrete elements, and some of the lower level skateable planters have lights, and mini-billboards that showcase alternating pieces of local art and photography. No expense was spared in the landscaping of the Plaza to give it a natural feel. There is a picturesque view of Downtown Winnipeg in the backdrop, and locals claim the skate plaza is actually nicer than plazas that currently exist in Winnipeg's urban architecture. There is an on-site kisok/satellite shop courtesy of long-term local Sk8 Skates, that also enlists team members to staff the park during seasonal months. They supply helmets and pads which are recommended, but not required.



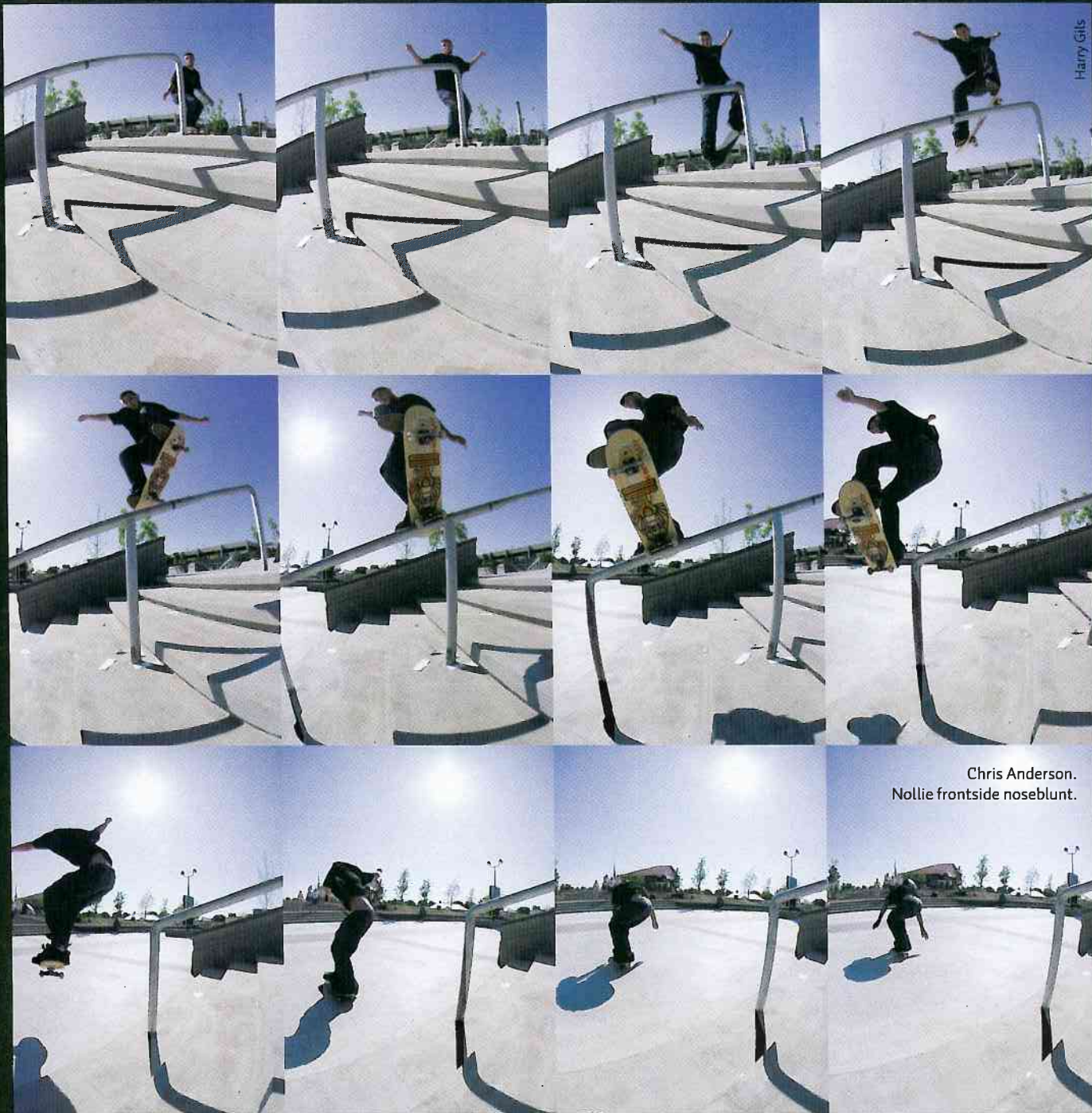
Shaun Stobodian.
Oltre.





Dan Neusfeld





Harry Gills

Chris Anderson.
Nollie frontside noseblunt.

The Bowl

Did you think that was it? The Plaza at the Forks boasts Winnipeg's first real bowl, and a world-class one at that. It's 8,500 square feet, next to the Plaza, and separated by a pedestrian path. The bowl has a 6-ended layout with 5-foot transitions at the smallest bowl end. The large end has 7-foot transitions; there are 8.5 and 9-foot extension ends, as well as an over-vert pocketed end sitting at 10 feet—and an honourable mention goes out to the manly 8.5 foot ditch leading into an impressive acid stained 17-foot cradle. If you can't skate it, at least play with the echo-effect of this monster cradle. The bowl is complete with operating light-boxes, painted tile detailing, smooth metal coping lines, as well as pool-block sections. There is a flat bottom pump-bump and numerous speed-lines that encompass the whole spread, from various drop-in/roll-in points.

Design Strategies

Coming up with a unique design at a high-profile public space with special attention to detail in a city that is very particular about street skating was no easy task. And the scouted land had similar issues to the land used in Shanghai, China; where the World's largest skatepark is located.

"Winnipeg has climate and soil problems for any construction. The Forks site used to be a dumping ground basically, where most of the ground there was 20 feet lower, and now there's just a bunch of construction fill on top," explains Somers. "Below that 20 feet there's just clay that's shifting all the time, and we determined this from doing soil tests early on. With our structural engineer, we decided we had to do this thing on piles. There's over 200 piles holding the park up. There's probably about \$700,000 worth of work that you don't even see, it's all underground."



Harry Gills

Jamie Mospanchuk.
Nollie kickflip noseslide.

Who would think finding trees to help create the natural ambience of the plaza would be hard to find? Well, it seems Donald Trump's people purchased them all with a swift swoop not unlike Trump's famed comb over.

"Our problem all over the prairies in the soft landscape world is that all our trees go to the States. We were calling suppliers to try and buy Elm trees for the Forks Plaza landscaping, and probably the best grower in town said he didn't have any because they all went to the Trump Towers," says Somers. "So we had to make a lot of changes to the types of plants we were using.

Personally, after skating the park in the opening week (June 30th/2006), my only complaint wasn't in spite of Winnipeg's humid summer heat or infamous infestation of mosquitoes (they've enlisted a new-and-improved fogging program), but of the numerous iPod wielding BMXers; the use of wood chips

in the planters and mini-gravel on the path between the Plaza and the bowl. It caused all sorts of unnecessary slam infused flatspot opportunities that come with the disappointment of hitting tiny rocks on smooth concrete. However, Bob Somers emailed me recently with the update that the gravel path was kyboshed. Now, if only the budget permitted the transportation of all BMXers up north to Flin Flon, Manitoba.

Epic Events

The Grand opening of the park was quite the spectacle with a pyrotechnics show that literally blew down walls that were surrounding the park during construction. There was an impressive media event that had the Hotel Fort Garry's white-gloved and posture perfect serving staff handing merlot to individuals who were going for a test roll of the park. Live bands hammered the outdoor Scotiabank Stage, and special guests that otherwise would



Jamie Mospanchuk.
Kickflip frontside noseblunt pop out.



Dan Neufeld

probably never have visited Winnipeg, came to skate.

“Let’s face it, Winnipeg is in the middle of nowhere. To a pro from LA, the closest point of reference is Fargo, like the movie,” says Aiello. “It started with (Steve) Berra because he was out here filming a movie. He was unique because he really got to know the community. It made it way easier for me, rather than having to try and twist people’s arms to come out here. He knew what the city was about, and how huge this would be for Winnipeg.”

With Berra spreading the good word of Winnipeg to his counterparts in Tinseltown, he was joined at the opening event by the likes of Eric Koston, Mike Taylor, Jason Dill, Tyler Bledsoe, and Omar Salazar. ‘Peg native Mike McDermott, Sheldon Meleshinski, and Keegan Sauder made the pilgrimage from Vancouver. Many extended their flights to enjoy the ample and cost effective nightlife, culture, and skate spots that Winnipeg has to offer.

Since then, the financial backdrop provided by provincial and federal grant money that helps fund the supervisory and ongoing maintenance of the park, along with support from the business community that stems from The Burns Family Foundation’s initial involvement, *The Plaza at the Forks* hosted a unique skate-camp. The Investors Group, in conjunction with the United Way of Winnipeg and The Coalition of Youth Serving Agencies sponsored 40 inner city youth and treated them to a free 2-week pilot project.

“The opportunity to help Winnipeg youth get involved in recreation that provides physical benefits while also challenging their creativity and innovative abilities is a great fit with Investors Group’s focus on worthwhile community activities,” says Richard Irish, Assistant Vice-President of Community Affairs for Investors Group.

Dan Neufeld



Shaun Slobodian.
Cab to frontside boardslide fakie.

The first week had Chris Anderson (Alien Workshop roller from Kentucky), Sheldon Meleshinski, and Ryan Oughton skating with the kids. The second week featured Anderson, Mike Taylor, and Tyler Bledsoe.

“We had a variety of workshops from trick tips to videography, where Shawn Dolinski (of the former 5Foot12 video magazine) taught the kids how to film and edit their own parts,” explains Aiello.

The videos were later screened at the local IMAX theatre and the highly successful event has prompted the planning of additional camps, both charitable and cost-driven, slated for next summer—as well as a possible hotel-package component in association with the Inn At The Forks, for out-of-town participants.

In addition, *The Tony Hawk Secret Skatepark Tour* made a surprise visit to *The*

Plaza at the Forks, late Fall 2006. Hawk, Bam Margera, Ryan Sheckler, Alex Chalmers, Andrew Reynolds, Mike Valley and others rallied at the park, and put on a clinic. This merely solidified the fact that Winnipeg is quickly being established on the skateboard-map, as a destination city.

Human Rights

The Forks Plaza was designed in concert with the world’s first Human Rights Museum, which is scheduled to open adjacent to the Plaza, in 2010.

“Any of the moves we were making with the Plaza, had to work with that project as well,” says Somers. “There’s nothing quite like that building. The museum wants to take people through the different elements of human rights. It wants to look at everything from bullying to the Holocaust. Basically, it’s mostly to educate the public on Human Rights—it will be an overwhelming destination.”



Dan Neufeld

Chris Rossonig.
Kickflip backtail revert.

Baby Apples and Barley Sandwiches

Colin Lambert's Après-Skate Guide

So, you've skated the park all day. You're sweaty, and if you're like the rest of us, you need to get some eats, a cold beer, and somewhere to party. Here's the low-down on what's hot and what's not surrounding The Plaza.

VJ's is a rad place to grab a burger if that tickles your fancy. It's located on the corner of Main St. and Broadway.



Pancake House is hot—it's located right near The Plaza in The Forks Market. Affordable pizzas, or to waitresses and the Baby Apple. The Baby Apple is a big ass pancake covered in cinnamon, brown sugar, and apples—definitely a favourite. Make sure you don't get the Giant Apple, it might be tempting to get the big one, but for some reason they always burn the Giant Apple. Once you pick off the burnt pieces, you're left with a Baby Apple anyways.

Once you pick off the burnt pieces, you're left with a Baby Apple anyways.



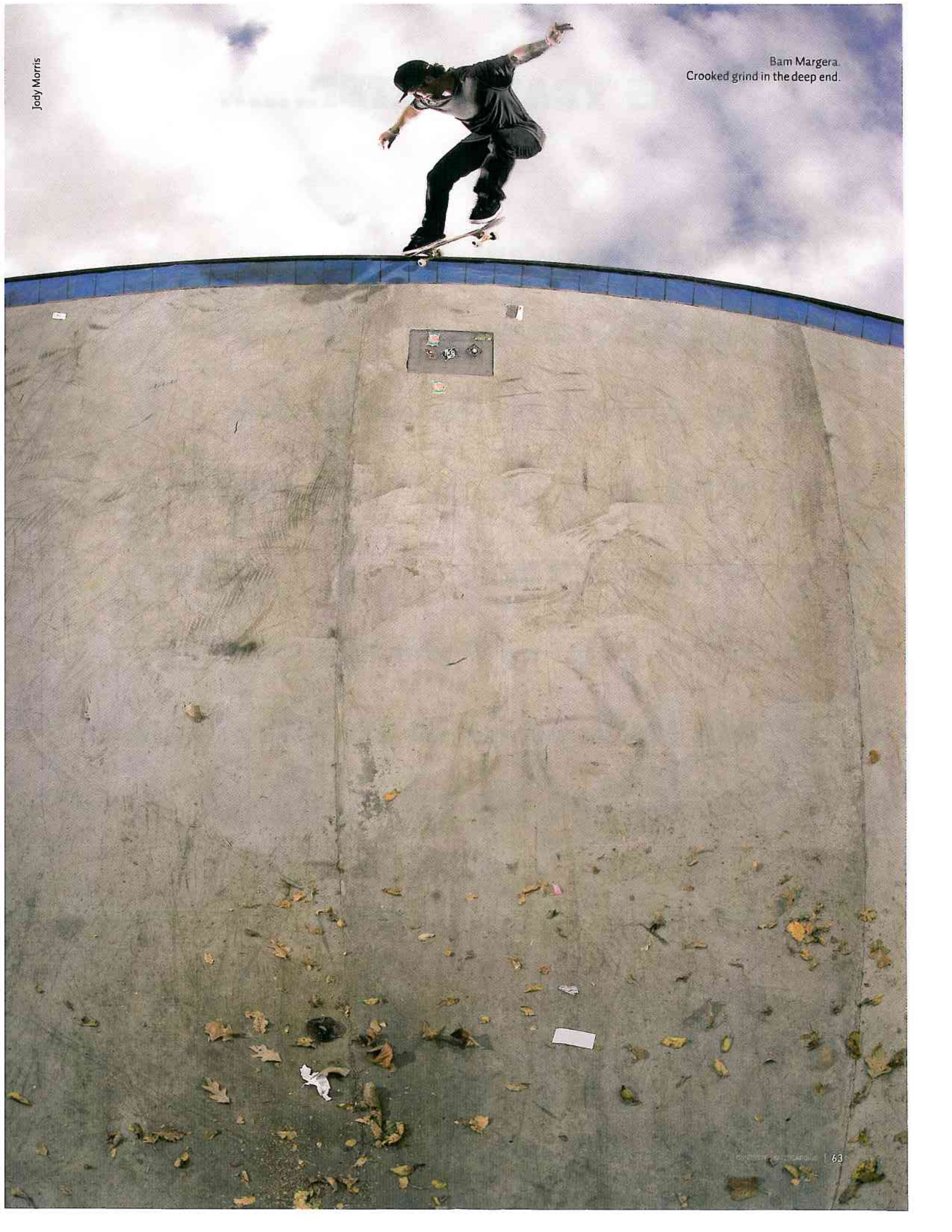
So you've filled up on some grub but you still haven't quenched that thirst. My best advice is to head straight to the beer store behind The Zoo on Osbourne St. The best bang for your buck would be a six of Lucky Lager Extra. Make sure to get Extra because it has a little extra alcohol for the same price. You're looking at \$7.25 for the six.



Now, you have your steady beer buzz and need a place to party. You can find a number of good spots on Osbourne St. (The Village) and Corydon Ave. (The Strip) like The Toad, The Cavern, Bar Italia, and The Collective. Just walk around and go wherever looks bumping. If you have a vehicle at your disposal (and a designated driver), I strongly suggest to

ditch the cover charges and \$6.00 drinks. Get your ass to Boomers Strip Club at the Red Lion Inn on Portage Ave. We're talking no cover, cheap drinks, and lovely ladies. It's a great place for us dirtball skaters.

Bam Margera.
Crooked grind in the deep end.



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