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WHAT'S DOING

In Seattle

By TIMOTHY EGAN

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Whenever a city opens a big new public space, it says something about the people who live there. Seattle has always been very bookish. And so, six years after voters agreed to a tax increase to build a \$165 million library, this city will open its shrine to books and information: a new mesh- and glass-encased Central Library.

It looks like nothing the city has ever built. Designed by Rem Koolhaas, the Dutch architect who won the 2000 Pritzker Prize - the profession's highest honor - the new library is see-through, with a honeycomb of diamond-shaped glass on 11 levels that appears to float. From some angles, it can also look like an accordion left open on its side.

Even with its unusual shape, the standout feature of the library, at 1000 Fourth Avenue, (206) 386-4100, www.spl.org, may well be the Books Spiral, a gentle ramp that winds through four floors spanning the entire Dewey Decimal System and allowing a visitor to walk continuously from one subject area to another. The grand opening, scheduled



Pragnesh Parikh/The Seattle Public Library Central Library, by Rem Koolhaas, scheduled to open on May 23.

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for May 23, comes near the end of a civic makeover that has transformed Seattle in the last decade, with two stadiums, a new City Hall and downtown retail centers.

But while spring will bring a new home for 1.4 million books, Seattle still looks outdoors for its seasonal rituals. To the north in Skagit County, fields of tulips are the center of the Skagit Valley Tulip Festival, which runs through April; (360) 428-5959 or online at www.tulipfestival.org. To the south, king salmon are returning from ocean travels to the Columbia River and its major tributaries, providing chefs with what may be the best fish of the year: spring chinook.

The blossoms of spring bring forth a light of their own. Rhododendrons, native to the Pacific Northwest, give even the most common landscape a dimension lacking for much of the year. They are at their showiest from now through early May.

Another rite of spring, this year, will be a chance for Seattle fans to boo a formerly beloved baseball player: Alex Rodriguez, now with the Yankees. For years, A-Rod was a hero in town, playing shortstop for the Seattle Mariners before moving on to the Texas Rangers. When he shows up in Safeco Field May 7, 8 and 9, in traitorous Yankee colors, the Seattle version of Bronx cheers will belie this city's reputation for politeness - for the moment, at least; tickets from Ticketmaster, (206) 622-4487, or www.seattle.mariners.mlb.com.

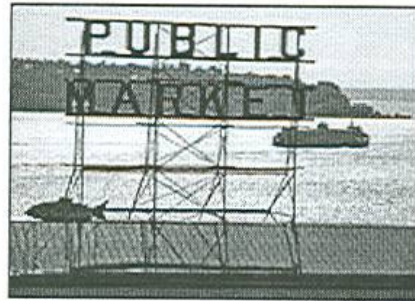
Events

Washington state, the nation's second-largest wine producer, shows off its range of tastes at the largest show devoted exclusively to this region's food and wine: Taste Washington. More than 150 vintners and 90 chefs offer samples and pairings, with a seafood and oyster bar, and a dessert cafe serving after-dinner wines as well. This year the program has expanded to three days, next Friday, Saturday and Sunday. On Saturday at the W Hotel, 1112 Fourth Avenue, a full day of seminars and classes is \$225 a person. The showcase event on Sunday, at the Seahawks Stadium and Exhibition Center, 800



Rhododendron Garden Photo Library

Flowers in full bloom in the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, just south of Seattle.



Tim Thompson

A ferry plies Seattle Harbor, near the public market at Pike Place.

Occidental Street, is \$85. A full weekend package is \$400 tickets online at www.tastewashington.org, or through Ticketmaster, (206) 628-0888. Information: (206) 667-946

David Horsey, a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner for his cartooning in *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, is the subject of "The Expanding Universe of David Horsey," at the Frye Art Museum, 704 Terry Avenue, (206) 622-9250, www.fryeart.org through May 23. The show takes in 25 years of Horsey cartoons. Free admission.

The Seattle International Film Festival celebrates its 30th anniversary from May 20 through June 13, with heavy emphasis on international films. Tickets are \$9 for single events, \$425 for the entire festival. Films are shown at five different theaters. Call (206) 324-9996, or go to www.seattlefilm.com.

The Beatles and Bruce Springsteen are the rockers highlighted this season at Experience Music Project, Frank Gehry's theater devoted to popular music, at the base of the Space Needle on the Seattle Center Grounds, 325 Fifth Avenue North, (206) 367-5483 www.emplive.com. The Beatles show, which runs through December, includes artifacts from their first American tour 25 years ago this year. The Springsteen display emphasizes his love of the road, and cars, with a large collection of photographs and a good mix of songs and video displays. Ends May 9. General admission: \$19.95.

From May 10 to 15 at the Seattle Center, the International Children's Festival, (206) 684-7338, www.seattleinternational.org, presents music, dance and theater, with groups from all over the world showing how they can be entertained in any language. Single tickets: \$12.

Sightseeing

Gluttons for gardens will not have a hard time satisfying themselves.

The Washington Park Arboretum's Seattle Japanese Garden (206) 684-4725, south of the University of Washington, is a compact world of sculptured shrubs and flowering trees, a pond and bridges, and a few quiet places that practically invite meditation upon a visitor. Admission to the Japanese Garden \$3; open every day but Monday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., through May; to 8 p.m. in summer. The rest of the arboretum, more than 40,000 trees, shrubs and vines spread over 230 acres, is free. The park's Azalea Way is at its best in late April.

Just south of Seattle, the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden

Garden, (253) 838-4646, www.rhodygarden.org, is a 22-acre tract with several hundred species. It is designed as a woodland garden, with heathers and ferns, and an alpine area studded with more than 200 tons of granite shipped in from the Cascade Mountains. Best blooming through middle of May. Don't miss the tiny-leafed rhododendrons imported from the foothills of the Himalayas. The garden is just off Interstate 5, at 2525 South 336th Street. Admission is \$3.50; open every day but Thursday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., through May; in summer, the garden opens at 11 a.m. and is closed Friday.

A short ride on a Washington State Ferry takes visitors to Bainbridge Island, home to the Bloedel Reserve, a classical garden sloping to Puget Sound, 7571 Dolphin Drive NE, (206) 842-7631, www.bloedelreserve.org. Reservations (required) are best made far ahead. To get from the ferry to the garden, a car, cab or bicycle is suggested. Open Wednesday to Sunday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; \$10.

A good way to see the city, which is cradled by Puget Sound and surrounding mountains and islands, is on a floatplane. Many leave from Lake Union, just south of downtown. Kenmore Air Seaplanes, 950 Westlake Avenue North, (800) 543-9595, www.kenmoreair.com, offers flights from Lake Union to the San Juan Islands and back (two hours round trip) for \$173; \$98 one way. Book the day of flight. A 20-minute flight over Puget Sound is \$75.

Where to Stay

The Inn at Harbor Steps is a short walk from the Seattle Art Museum, the Benaroya Concert Hall and the renowned Pike Place Market. The European-style hotel has 28 rooms, tucked away in a fold on a busy street at 1221 First Avenue; (888) 728-8910, fax (206) 748-0533, www.foursisters.com. Most rooms have fireplaces and balconies, with fitness center and indoor pool as well. Double rates, with breakfast and afternoon wine and hors d'oeuvres, range from \$165 to \$230.

Near the University of Washington, the Watertown, 4242 Roosevelt Way NE, (866) 944-4242, fax (206) 315-4242, www.watertownseattle.com, has 100 rooms, many with views of the city. For the techie who wants to exercise, the hotel has high-speed Internet access and bicycles to loan. Rooms include microwaves. Rates, with breakfast: \$139 to \$179.

Budget: Close to the Space Needle and the Seattle Center's performing arts complex, the Inn at Queen Anne is in a 1930's era building at 505 First Avenue North, (206) 282-7357, fax (206) 217-9719, www.innatqueenanne.com, with antiques and Tiffany lamps throughout. The 68 rooms have kitchenettes.