

# From Way Up High

TRAVEL WRITING BY HELEN ANNE TRAVIS

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## 24 Hours in Grand Rapids

By Greg Gall On September 24, 2014 · Add Comment · In What We Find When We Land

With a growing farm-to-table restaurant scene, more breweries than you can count, and outdoor neighborhoods to explore, squeezing the best of **Grand Rapids** into a 24-hour city guide is a tall task.

Fortunately, downtown Grand Rapids is easily navigable by foot. And with Uber recently setting up shop in the city, getting to sites outside downtown is a breeze.

We were graciously hosted at the [Amway Grand Plaza](#) during our stay in Grand Rapids. From its downtown location we were able to walk to most of the places listed below. No need to rent a car to experience this city guide.

And besides, we'll be throwing back a beer or five, so put on your walking shoes and let someone else do the driving.

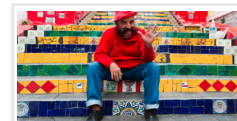
### Morning

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# Spanish Breakfasts and Italian Horses

## San Chez

38 Fulton St W, Grand Rapids, MI 49503  
(616) 774-8272

Our favorite breakfast spot in Grand Rapids was the Spanish-influenced **San Chez**. About a 10-minute walk from the [Amway Grand Plaza](#), San Chez has been crafting tapas and Spanish dishes since 1992. San Chez bills itself as a “responsible restaurant”. Local and organic ingredients are used whenever possible, and the restaurant minimizes its environmental impact by handing out compostable drink straws, and recycling its fryer oil.

The breakfast menu includes omelets, hashes, and continental breakfast fair such as muffins and bagels. I personally recommend the Spanish Peppered Pork Hash, a smorgasbord of mojo roasted pork, onions, potatoes, scrambled eggs and cheese. It could easily feed two people.

Helen Anne ordered a breakfast sandwich with manchego cheese, cilantro and soy sausage, served on toasted ciabatta bread.

sushi and Russian  
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## Meet Helen Anne

I like  
to



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Spanish Peppered Pork Hash

We both took our pick from the Bloody Mary menu. I ordered mine with a jalapeno vodka, and Helen Anne's was served with a lime and citrus-infused tequila. The custom liquor was a pleasant change of pace from the traditional recipe.

## Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park

1000 East Beltline Ave NE  
Grand Rapids Charter Township, MI 49525

After breakfast, jump in a taxi or call an Uber and ride 15 minutes west to **Meijer Gardens**. You could spend hours in this 132-acre park, wandering the many paths and paved roads, and stumbling upon hidden sculptures behind perfectly manicured shrubbery. The park was opened in 1995, 13 years after the original concept was designed. The Meijer family lent their support to the project in 1990.

The star of the show here is a bronze horse. After we got our ticket, a helpful attendant pleasantly reminded us that we have to see the horse. You do not want to miss the horse. Make sure you see the horse. Here are the directions to the horse. The horse is not to be missed.

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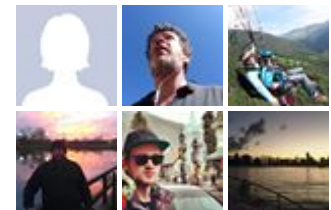
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So we went and saw the horse. And all joking aside, it is quite impressive.



It's actually kind of hard to miss this gigantic horse.

The American Horse was created by famed animal sculpture (there are so many jobs out there) Nina Akamu. The work was inspired by a similar horse created for the Duke of Milan by Leonardo da Vinci in the 15th century. The horse stands approximately 24 feet high, with a second casting on display in Milan.

The real pleasure of Meijer Gardens is to approach it with no real plan. Let yourself relax and stroll around the park, being pleasantly surprised at the art you find. You can get through most of the park in about two hours if you keep moving, but it's just as nice to find a bench and soak in the nature around you.



There are many random sculptures throughout the gardens.



## Fulton Street Farmers Market

1147 E. Fulton Street  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Hop in a taxi and head back into the city to the **Fulton Street Market**. This is one of the city's gems. Established in 1922, it is the oldest market in Grand Rapids.

The produce! One vendor told us that outside of California, the regions surrounding Grand Rapids are the best-producing farms in the country. We strolled what must have been a football field-length corridor, talking to vendors (they were so nice!)

The variety of produce is astounding. The rainbow of colors from the eggplants, squash, lettuces and tomatoes lures you in, and the smells prevent you from leaving. Though I think I've figured out their secret to success: wicker baskets! Each table is artfully arranged to create the picture-perfect vignette. Powerless against the wicker basket forces, we bought a couple of tomatoes and ate them like apples; ignoring the juices streaming down our chins.

When we visited, it was near the end of the day. Some shops had already closed, but it was still worth our time.

If you want to visit, plan accordingly as it's only open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 8am – 3pm.



Heirloom tomatoes.



Wicker baskets everywhere!

## Afternoon

### Beers and Exploring

#### Brewery Vivant

925 Cherry St

## Grand Rapids, MI 49506

A short walk away from the Fulton Street Market is a lovely neighborhood called **Heritage Hill**. We'll explore the neighborhood later, but first the important stuff: beer and food.

On the main strip, Cherry Street, find **Brewery Vivant**. This was our favorite brewery in Grand Rapids (yes, we know Founders is there). Set in an old crematorium, the building itself is worth a trip, but stay for the excellent pub food and Belgian style beers.

Their beers balance malt sweetness and hop bitterness with fruity, spicy, floral and herbal aromas. I've always been partial to IPAs and my favorite there was a Belgian IPA crossover called Them's the Hops. An almost clear yellow beer that you could mistake for something much lighter-tasting, the beer is dry and malty but finishes with that classic floral profile. Top-notch drinking.

After visiting the brewery, stroll around the neighborhood. Considered to be the first suburb of Grand Rapids, some of the grand homes here date back to the mid-1800s. Wrap around porches, tall second story turrets and bright paint jobs add to this neighborhood's eclectic appeal. It's a fun walk after sipping a few high-octane Belgian beers.



One of the grand homes in the Heritage Hills neighborhood.



## Founders Brewery

235 Grandville Ave SW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Now that we've kicked off the beer tour, there is no going back. After all, Grand Rapids is known as **Beer City USA**. Make your way back into downtown and head to **Founders**, the most popular brewery in Michigan.

This was the place to be in Grand Rapids. We arrived at 4pm on a Thursday and the place was packed, with standing room only by 7pm. The massive brick warehouse is a one-stop shop for all things Founders. Show your Michigan pride with a t-shirt from the gift shop. If you want pub food, there is a dedicated bar line for just that. And of course there's the beer. I like their All Day IPA.

An indoor/outdoor concept creates a vast hang out space. It feels as if you were drinking in your friend's backyard.



Looking from the deck area into covered space at Founders Brewing.

## Evening

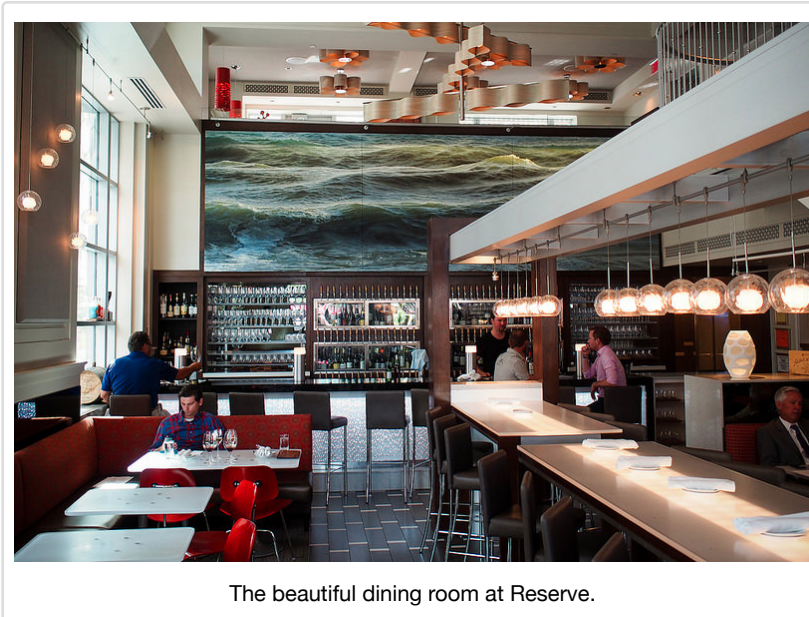


# More Good Food. More Good Beer.

## Reserve Food & Wine

201 Monroe Ave. NW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

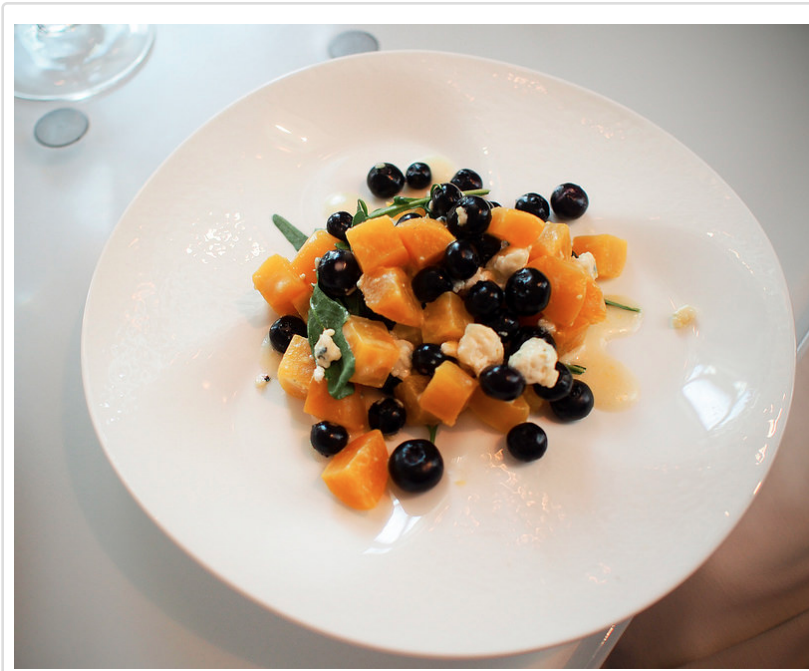
**ReserveGR** is an awesome dinner spot where the food focus is on local and sustainable ingredients. In the summers, much of the produce served at ReserveGR is purchased at the nearby Fulton Street Market. The restaurant also participates in the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch program, which helps restaurants and businesses choose seafood fished or farmed in ways that protect underwater life and habitats.



The beautiful dining room at Reserve.

This restaurant cares about the food it serves. Relationships forged with local growers play a significant role in what is on the menu. If it is not in season, the Reserve isn't serving it.

One of my favorite dishes was the creative roasted beet salad. Roasted golden beets, blueberries, stinky-good blue cheese and arugula were piled high and topped with a citrus vinaigrette. It was recommended by the waiter because blueberries would be in season for just another week. I'm telling you these folks know their stuff!



Roasted Golden Beet Salad

## HopCat

25 Ionia Ave SW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

I'm not sure what the criteria is, or who votes on these very serious matters, but since it opened in 2008, **HopCat** has been consistently rated as one of the best bars in the country. Who were we to argue? The bar serves craft beer from all over the world and also brews small batch seasonals on site. We both enjoyed the hoppy beer Right Meow homebrew.

Whatever you order, be sure to pair it with HopCat's Loaded Crack Fries, a devilish concoction of french fries, cheese sauce, onion, jalapenos and bacon.



Crack. Fries.

The fries are sprinkled with something similar to Lawry's seasoned salt (if you're from the South you know what I'm talking about).

Time to find a bed because you're going to crash after ingesting these.

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