

Kelowna Days, Kelowna Nights

There comes a time in every couple's life when dollars and sense need to fly out the window, preferably that of a restored pink Cadillac (but mom's SUV will do). If you're in pursuit of great food, fine wine, water views and Elvis's heir apparent, this is the getaway for you.

When is it essential to embark upon a his-and-hers road trip, leaving kids, jobs and yard work behind? I can't presume to penetrate the hidden grievances of your relationship, but for me, it was when I started to believe that my husband was letting the dandelions take over our lawn to torture me after I banned him from using Roundup. (The fact that I am morally right does not make it any easier to dig out the roots). Things were getting prickly, and not just because of the creeping thistle that has joined our backyard weedapalooza.

I'm sure there are couples who bond best over strenuous activity (not necessarily confined to the bedroom). Us, we like to eat. And drink great wine. And people-watch. We'll go for long walks and swing a golf club, but the main appeal of the links lies in the real-estate porn along the course. In short, we'll make the perfect retired couple.

While I know we must sound about as much fun as your in-laws, we're not dead yet. And the upside of knowing your spouse's limitations is that you also know when enough is enough. Our much-needed spark came in the form of Chris Isaak's Canadian tour. My husband had missed out on his only chance to see him years ago at the House of Blues in Los Angeles. He was on the road for business and didn't

want to go alone, so he stayed in his hotel room and has regretted it ever since. He's always said that the song "Except the New Girl" from 1994's *San Francisco Days* describes how he feels about me, and when I call it up on the iPod, I remember how lucky I am.

Last time I saw him

He was laughing

She was standing by his side

I've got a feeling

That they're still together

From the look that was in his eyes. There's no one

Except the new girl.

Dandelions be damned! I want my man to look that way at me again, and if I have to use Chris Isaak to make it happen, so be it.

Now we could have seen the 55-year-old musician with the killer sense of humour on a mid-August Friday at the Century Casino. Price tag: \$79.95 apiece for VIP reserved seating, plus the possibility of offsetting the charges by getting lucky at the tables after the show. Or, we could have driven to Edmonton the next night to catch Isaak at the River Cree Resort



PHOTO BY SHELLEY YOUNGBLUT

& Casino five minutes from West Edmonton Mall. For \$424 a night, we could have checked into the Fantasyland Hotel's Hollywood Deluxe suite where the king bed is surrounded by "Vegas-style" lights and rests on a purple zebra-print carpet. Elvis would likely have given it a stamp of approval, as would CARP.

But Elvis has been headlining in a far better showroom for the past 34 years and, quite frankly, no matter how much you tart up an Alberta casino, it ain't Vegas—nor is it us. However, the next date on Isaak's Canadian tour—an outdoor concert at Mission Hill Family Estate in Kelowna—hit the jackpot. It would be a long drive, but a road trip would give us a chance to talk and laugh or look out the window and say nothing at all. Did I mention what a great driver he is? See, it's already working.


Driving seven hours to see a casino-playing rocker seems indulgent, but it could also be seen as an investment in the future. We decided to think of the trip as an MRSP (Marriage Rescue Spending Plan) and maxed out this year's contribution with a decadent itinerary. I booked a heritage suite at the lakefront Hotel Eldorado. Saturday was a day of feasts, including lunch on

Isaak, started by crooning “Beautiful Homes” in a baby-blue suit the colour of the 8 p.m. sky.

the Terrace and a guided tour at Mission Hill and dinner at RauDZ, where celebrated chef Ron Butters works his local magic. Sunday afternoon was a round on the new Ridge Course at Predator Ridge, where we fantasized about the houses for sale (which are now tantalizingly close to our budget).

I was able to score special concert tickets online that, for \$155 each, included a pre-show reception featuring Mission Hill wines and a lovely assortment of appetizers, as well as reserved seating. We may not be ready for the early-bird special, but we're too old for rush seating. Juggling two healthily poured glasses of 2009 Five Vineyards rosé and bags of truffle-infused popcorn, pretzels and chocolate-chunk cookies lovingly prepared by Calgary's Rebekah Pearse, Mission Hill's pastry chef, we took our seats in the sixth row. Isaak, whose trademark western wardrobe is custom-made by North Hollywood's Jaime Casteneda, started by crooning “Beautiful Homes” in a baby-blue suit the colour of the 8 p.m. sky. “I'm sorry for the things I said, sorry for the things I did,” he sings. “Sorry that I ever made you cry.”

It feels more like a great wedding than a concert, and Mission Hill has scored the nuptial trifecta: great location, great food, great band. (In fact, winery owner Anthony von Mandl was married on this very spot exactly one year earlier.)

“Girls filled with love, emotion and liquor, and that's how I like my crowd,” says Isaak, surveying the audience. My husband just laughs. There's no one for him except his new girl, swaying happily by his side. 

Check with missionhillwinery.com for the announcement of the 2012 concert series, as well as more special events, tastings and tours.

Four Ingredients for a Happy Life



1) The View from the Eldorado

Room 305 looked out over the Eldorado Marina, the social hub of lower Mission. We watched husbands and wives totally in sync, who could back a boat off a trailer into the water, park and be out on Okanagan Lake in minutes. Equally compelling? Sniping couples insistent on taking a piece out of each other—and their \$100K pleasure crafts at the boat launch. **1-866-608-7500, eldoradokelowna.com.**



2) Lunch on the Terrace at Mission Hill

Chef Matthew Batey's cuisine du terroir alone is worth the drive from Calgary. Recent lunch highlights included marinated Ocean Wise shrimp with feta, mint and a cucumber sorbet and wine-fed Sezmu beef with a butter potato salad. Leave room for Rebekah Pearse's French lemon tart with a lavender shortbread crust and raspberry sorbet. **250-768-7611, missionhillwinery.com.**



3) A Round on the Ridge Course at Predator Ridge

Now with two 18-hole courses, Vernon's premier golf resort is only getting better with time. It's all about attention to detail (note the sand traps in the shape of bear claws and maple leaves on Hole No. 5 on the Ridge, recently named Canada's best new course) and building a year-round recreational nirvana. Check out the special Golftoberfest packages, Oct. 11-17. **1-888-578-6688, predatorridge.com.**



4) Dinner at RauDZ Regional Table

RauDZ is a play on master chef Rod Butter's first name, but he's serious about bringing out the best in regional ingredients, which you can taste in every bite of his oat-crust Arctic char and summer veggies. I left with a bag full of RauDZ's homemade preserves and pickles, hoping to recreate a bit of the magic at home. **250-868-8805, raudz.com.**

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