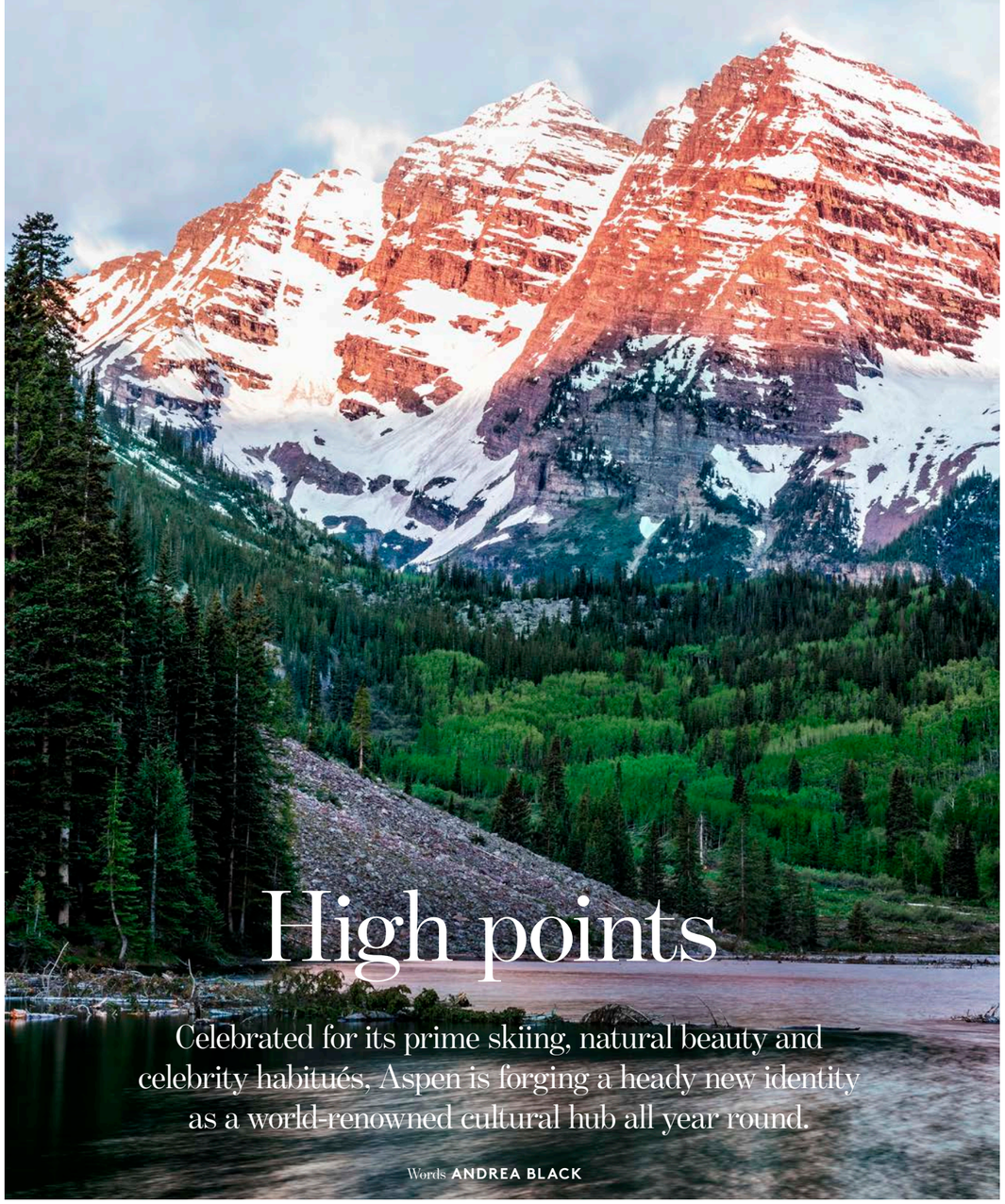


High points

Celebrated for its prime skiing, natural beauty and celebrity habitués, Aspen is forging a heady new identity as a world-renowned cultural hub all year round.

Words **ANDREA BLACK**

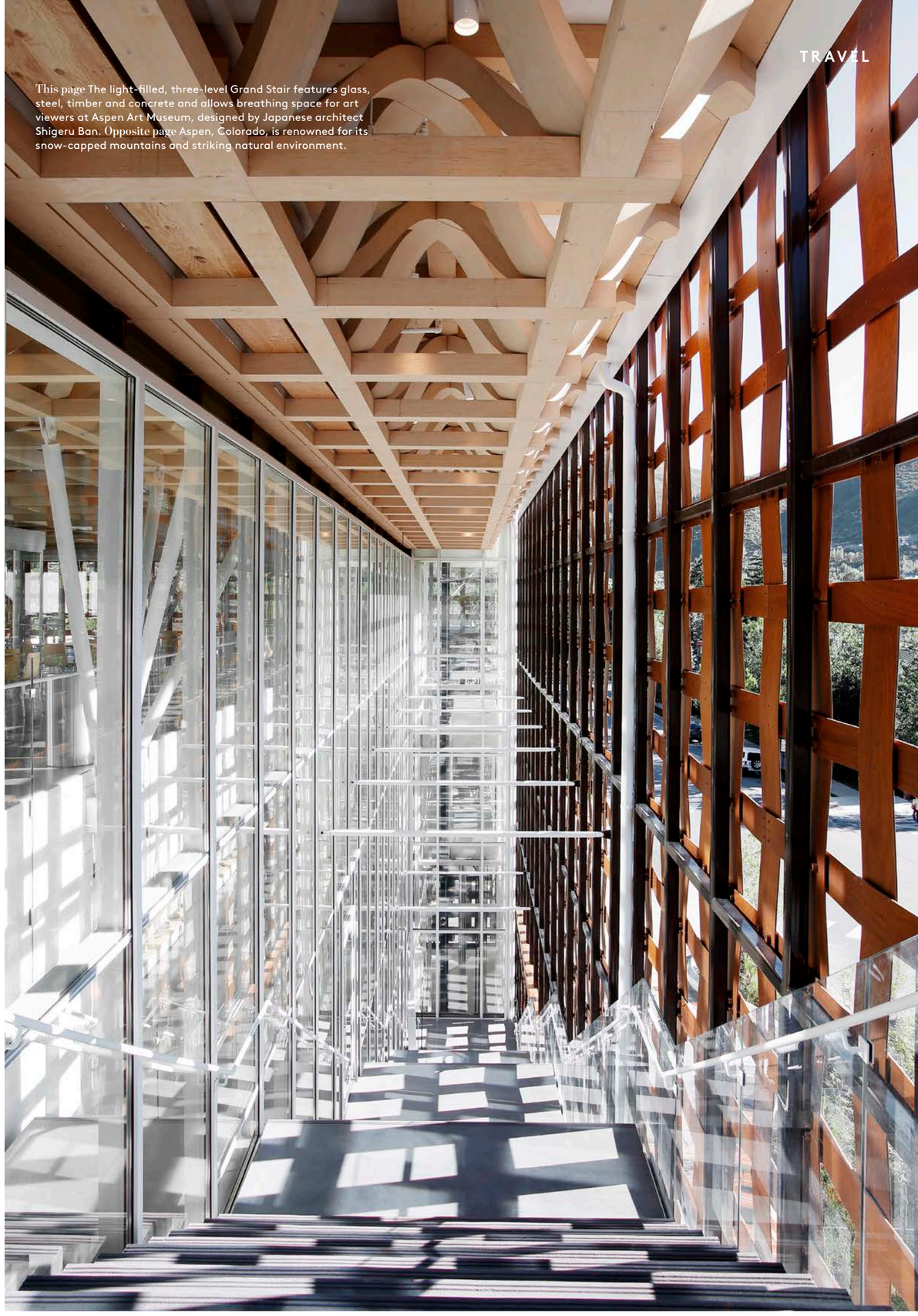
Aspen is well-known as a luxe ski destination but once the snow has melted, and the skis and snowboards are stored away, this Colorado mountain town positively blooms. And it's not just the fields of wildflowers that blanket the mountains in a kaleidoscope of colours, the towns of Aspen and nearby Snowmass offer a more cultural bent in the warmer months; one that is quite unique.

On a walking tour of Aspen's leafy West End, Nina Gabianelli from Aspen Historical Society points out a house conceived by Bauhaus artist and designer Herbert Bayer – his work is peppered throughout this historic district. He left a lasting mark on this mountain resort town, one that is being celebrated in this, the 100-year anniversary of Bauhaus, and beyond, no doubt.

How did an esteemed alumnus of the Bauhaus school, which was quashed by the Nazis in 1933, come to settle in Aspen? By then it was practically a ghost town with the silver mining boom long gone. In the 1940s industrialist Walter Paepcke and his wife Elizabeth, founders of the Aspen Institute, envisioned a mountain resort with its own resident cultural attractions. They lured Herbert, a polymath (he designed houses, created sculptures, decorated tea sets!) to town from his new home in New York. Raised in the Austrian Alps, Herbert loved Aspen's natural surroundings, and ended up living in the town and creating works from 1946 to 1975.

His designs bring the outside in, and the inside out, utilising steel, glass and concrete. The pared-down facades don't compete

PHOTOGRAPHY KRISTINA BLOKHIN/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



This page The light-filled, three-level Grand Stair features glass, steel, timber and concrete and allows breathing space for art viewers at Aspen Art Museum, designed by Japanese architect Shigeru Ban. Opposite page Aspen, Colorado, is renowned for its snow-capped mountains and striking natural environment.

PHOTOGRAPHY EFRAIN PADRO/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

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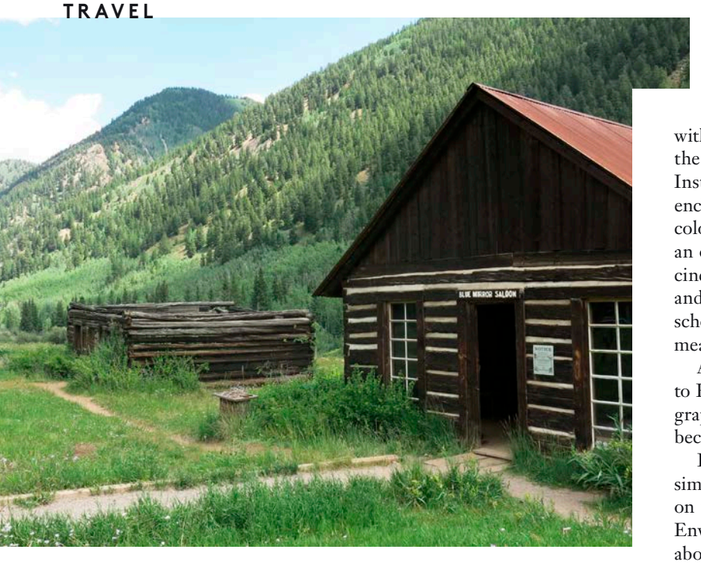
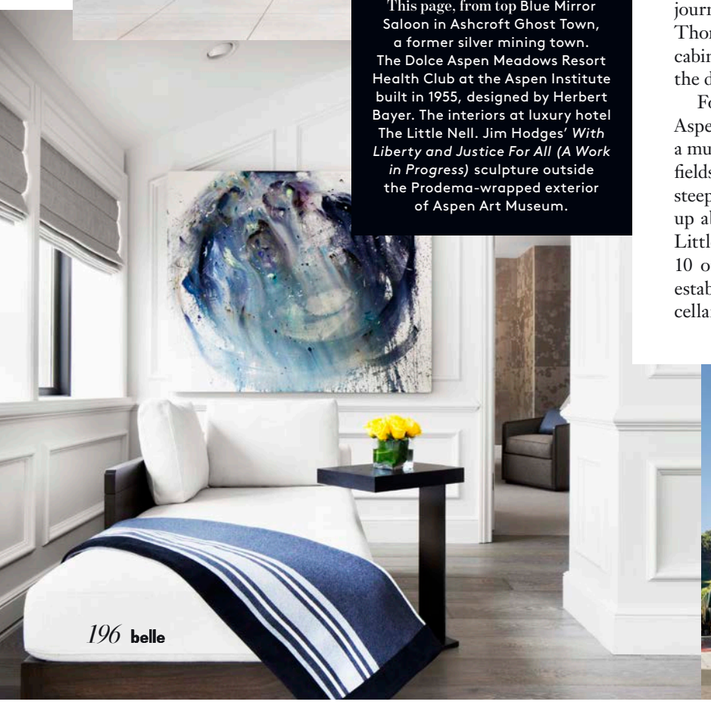


This page, from top Blue Mirror Saloon in Ashcroft Ghost Town, a former silver mining town. The Dolce Aspen Meadows Resort Health Club at the Aspen Institute built in 1955, designed by Herbert Bayer. The interiors at luxury hotel The Little Nell. Jim Hodges' *With Liberty and Justice For All (A Work in Progress)* sculpture outside the Prodema-wrapped exterior of Aspen Art Museum.



PHOTOGRAPHY ANDREA BLACK (ASHCROFT GHOST TOWN), VRX (HEALTH CLUB), NIC LEHOUX/VIEW PICTURES/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES (ASPEN ART MUSEUM)

with the landscape – he didn't want the buildings to overwhelm the natural environment. But it's Herbert's works at the Aspen Institute that are the most impressive – it's the only Bauhaus enclave in the US. There are Italian marble sculptures, a colourful metal work called *Kaleidoscreen*, a health club with an outdoor spiral staircase leading to a sun deck, and low-lying cinder-block buildings among the vistas of Buttermilk Mountain and Aspen Mountain and the highlands. The goal of the Bauhaus school was to unite fine art and functional design, a reality in the meadows here.

At the Aspen Institute, there's an ongoing exhibition dedicated to Herbert Bayer displaying some of his ceramics, tapestries and graphic design including the array of posters that helped Aspen become the celebrity choice of ski destinations.

It's easy to see why Herbert chose Aspen as his home. You simply have to step outside. On a hike of the Hunter Creek Loop on the outskirts of town with a guide from Aspen Center for Environmental Studies, pine squirrels, deer and butterflies abound. Firs, spruce and cottonwood trees stand tall by creeks and the air is filled with the sound of the fluttering Aspen leaves. Weaving up the mountain are patches of wild roses, purple Aspen daisies, thimbleberry and serviceberry, called as such as it is used in floral arrangements for late-spring funerals. The aroma of sagebrush permeates the air, which thins on ascent; the high point here is 2682 metres. On another morning, it's worth conquering the hike on the Rim Trail to Inspiration Point half an hour away near the village of Snowmass. The view from the top provides a panorama that not only includes the snow-tipped mountains but also the dog sledding school, and Kurt Russell and Goldie Hawn's ranch.

Then there's the cycling. The 16-kilometre trail through the Roaring Fork Valley to Woody Creek is an easy pedal and riders can enjoy with tacos and margaritas at the end in the Woody Creek Tavern. Here, the spirit of Hunter S. Thompson looms large because this was the local watering hole for the late gonzo journalist – his property, Owl Farm, is a short stroll away. Thompson's wife Anita recently began renting out the writer's cabin on the farm. His IBM Selectric III typewriter still sits on the desk, and Thompson's flock of peacocks roams outside.

For a more adrenalin-filled adventure, a sunset Jeep tour up Aspen Mountain, organised by luxury hotel The Little Nell, is a must. The jaunt brings incredible photo opportunities of flower fields as the sun sets over the Elk Mountain range. The descent is steep, but the reward is seeing the twinkling lights of Aspen from up above, and the promise of an incredible drop of wine. The Little Nell's wine program is world-renowned, having schooled 10 of North America's Master Sommeliers, the most of any establishment on the continent. There are 20,000 bottles in the cellar, and highlights include mature classed growth claret, Chave

PHOTOGRAPHY TAMARA SUSA (HORSEBACK TOUR), ELLE LOGAN (ASPEN HIKE), ANDREA BLACK (ANACONDA)

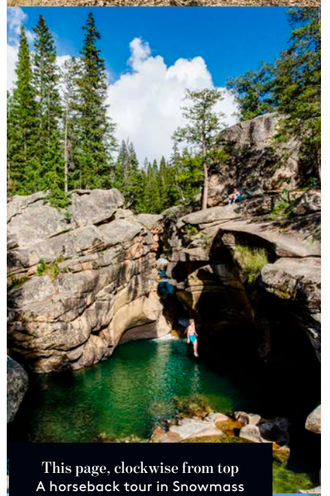
Hermitage and Selosse Champagne. The sommelier can pair wine with dinner featuring locally sourced produce (there's even a herb garden on site) at the Element 47 restaurant, or you can select your own from the extensive wine menu. The Little Nell has recently been renovated and each of the 92 suites features a gas log fireplace, necessary for cooler nights even in summer. The hotel also offers a complimentary Audi for guests to drive around the town in two-hour slots to explore the Rockies.

Over in Snowmass there's a new base village, and at its centre is the Limelight Hotel with 99 rooms, outdoor hot tubs and a giant climbing wall. Rooms feature quirky touches including bright artworks, a Smeg fridge and a classic hardcover book for bedside reading. Here in Snowmass in the summertime, there's also a focus on culture. At Anderson Ranch Arts Center, visiting artists such as Ai Weiwei and Nick Cave give talks, while other esteemed creatives teach classes in ceramics, painting, woodturning, photography and sculpture – workshops that span one to three weeks. A summer highlight is Lunchtime Auctionettes, where you can bid on artworks produced at the ranch for a fraction of the gallery prices, and a barbecue lunch is thrown in as well.

Back in Aspen, one of the cultural highlights is a visit to Aspen Art Museum, designed by Japanese architect Shigeru Ban and completed in 2014, the same year he won The Pritzker Architecture Prize. The exterior lattice allows those on the outside to look in and those on the inside to look out. The museum hosts as many as 18 shows per year, including first-time US solo shows and new contexts for masters. Last summer, Aspen Art Museum held its Fashion Lecture Series, which saw names such as designer Cynthia Rowley take part. Up on the top level is the cafe where the views across the mountains are sublime.

All roads lead back to the Aspen Institute, where you should experience a concert at one of its theatres, preceded by a meal at Plato's restaurant. It's only a short drive between them, and even the dessert is a tribute to Bayer and Bauhaus: a cake featuring cubes of red, blue, black and white sponge.

In summer 2022, a new centre dedicated to Herbert Bayer will open, with exhibitions, educational programs and an overall aim to provide tools for the preservation and study of his work. It will be in Herbert's Bauhausian style – yet another cultural drawcard for this Colorado town. *aspenchamber.org; gosnowmass.com*



This page, clockwise from top A horseback tour in Snowmass over summer takes in some breathtaking terrain. Hiking through Aspen reveals pristine watering holes. *Anaconda* is a seven-piece sculpture crafted in Carrara marble that was hand-selected by Herbert Bayer of the Bauhaus school.

Aspen & Snowmass hotlist

PITKIN COUNTY DRY GOODS
Store with a mix of designers from Dries Van Noten to Rag & Bone. *pitkincountydrygoods.com*

AJAX TAVERN
Casual lunch spot at The Little Nell with vegan cauliflower gratin and truffle fries. *thelittlenell.com*

LOST FOREST
Visit for zip lines, biking trails and the alpine coaster. *gosnowmass.com*

THE CREPE SHACK BY MAWA'S KITCHEN
Roll up to try the best breakfast in Snowmass. *thecrepeshack.com*

THE HISTORIC PUB CRAWL
Discover Aspen's historic haunts on a 1.5-hour guided tour. *aspenhistory.org*

ASPEN ART TOURS
Agustina Mistretta hosts free tours to visit six contemporary galleries. *aspenarttours.com*

YOGA ON ASPEN MOUNTAIN
Stretch your body in a summer session with the view of Elk Mountains. *thelittlenell.com*

WHEELER OPERA HOUSE
Holds comedy and film festivals, such as the Shining Mountains Film Festival. *wheeleroperahouse.com*

GHOST TOWN
Visit Ashcroft, a former silver mining town, where only one of 20 saloons still stands. *aspenhistory.org*

IL POGGIO
This is a firm favourite in Snowmass for Italian fare and quality wines. *gosnowmass.com*