

DRIVING PATTERNS

On 90 miles of northern Indiana backroads, murals and meticulously planted gardens blend Amish quilt-making tradition with the landscape itself.

WRITER *Kit Bernardi* PHOTOGRAPHER *Bob Stefko*

LOCAL TRAFFIC

1 Area families count on the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail as a key transportation corridor. **2 AND 3** Display gardens at Wellfield Botanic Gardens in Elkhart, Indiana, and the Nappanee Center.



AFTERNOON SUN WARMS THE FIELDS, lifting the scent of damp furrowed earth and wild lilacs into passing cars, along with the clip-clop announcement of approaching Amish buggies.

Here in Indiana's Elkhart and La Grange counties (110 miles east of Chicago) land and local custom are nearly inseparable. Even the spirit of quilts that warm beds all winter emerges from the ground in spring when blooms appear in 20 quilt gardens graced with names like Dutchman's Puzzle and Wagon Wheel.

During the Elkhart County Quilt Garden Tour (May 30–October 1, 2014), teams in Shipshewana, Middlebury, Elkhart, Nappanee, Goshen and other towns tend more than 115,000 annuals that replicate quilts, some the size of a suburban home. (Admission to all is free.) Twenty-one quilt-pattern murals also decorate the route.

In front of Shipshewana's red barn Menno-Hof, the Mennonite-Amish museum and information center, Dan Grieser kneels and kneads soil. For three years, the volunteer has worked in the museum's garden. His five-man team stretches and knots cords across the plot, outlining a pinwheel quilt pattern. Then, using wooden planks with holes spaced 6 inches apart, they plant a whirling palette of yellow marigolds, scarlet begonias and white dusty miller. "We plant them straight and neat," Dan says, "then help the women keep them clean, fed and watered."

In Elkhart, another quilt garden flourishes on the manicured grounds of the 1910 Ruthmere Mansion, at the confluence of the St. Joseph and Elkhart rivers.

While some avid gardener-tourists vow to see all of the region's planted patchwork, most travelers take a more meandering path, stretching a day trip into a weekend of visiting family-owned shops, art galleries, Amish heritage sites and restaurants.

Many visitors make time for a walk or bike ride on the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail, dubbed the Amish Highway by locals. The paved trail flanks tidy farms and threads through towns with quilt gardens. Families pick wild raspberries along the path's shady fringes. Men in suspenders lift their bearded chins in greeting as they pedal past visitors in Middlebury's Krider Gardens.

In Goshen, a striped awning shades the 102-year-old Olympia Candy Kitchen. As he has for 45 years, Kirby Whitehead stirs a copper kettle of candy filling. He rolls the concoction out on a marble table and forms it into balls. Dabbing his brow with an apron corner, he plops into a rocker by the window. "Too hot to dip those in chocolate today. Time to take a ride along a country road."



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TOURING THE BLOOMS

- 1 Wellfield Botanic Gardens—pictured here during the 2012 Elkhart County Quilt Garden Tour—covers 36 acres, with a variety of water features and beds.
- 2 Candymakers have worked for more than a century under the awning at Goshen's Olympia Candy Kitchen.
- 3 Laundry day, northern-Indiana style.
- 4 The quilt garden outside the 175-year-old cabin (housing a quilt gallery) at Goshen's Old Bag Factory.



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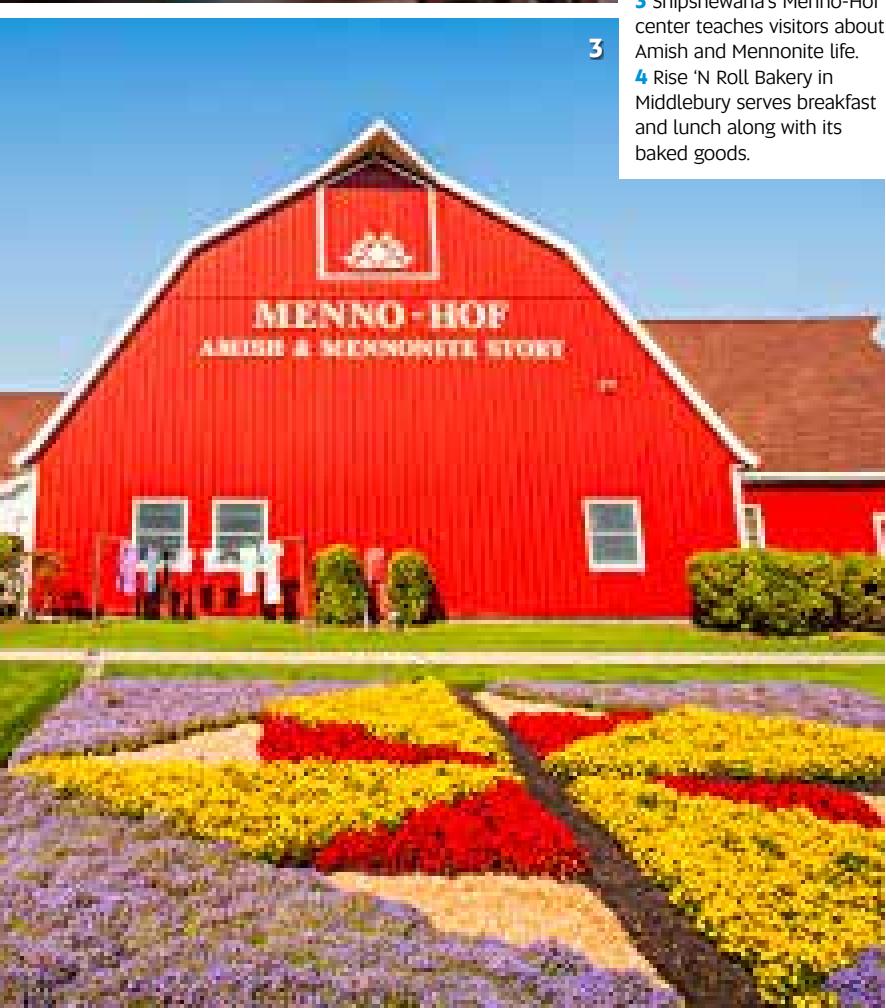


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GOOD ART, GOOD EATS

- 1 523 Tap and Grill in Elkhart.
- 2 The Old Bag Factory houses sculptors, quilters and several specialty shops.
- 3 Shipshewana's Menno-Hof center teaches visitors about Amish and Mennonite life.
- 4 Rise 'N Roll Bakery in Middlebury serves breakfast and lunch along with its baked goods.

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Three-day itinerary

For more information, contact the Elkhart County Convention and Visitors Bureau (800/262-8161; amishcountry.org). Pick up a free **Heritage Trail** audio CD at sites along the trail or at the Elkhart County Visitor Center. The quilt gardens are open May 30 through October 1, 2014.

Day 1

Start at Elkhart's **The Daily Grind** for coffee, pastries and quiche (574/293-4864; elkhartdailygrind.webs.com). **The Midwest Museum of American Art** showcases 19th- and 20th-century American works, including 45 Norman Rockwell-signed lithographs and Overbeck sisters' pottery (574/293-6660; midwestmuseum.us). Take guided tours of the well-preserved 1848 **Havilah Beardsley House** and ornate 1910 **Ruthmere Mansion** (888/287-7696; ruthmere.org). The turkey-cheddar panini or a salad with pecans and blue cheese are appealing options at the combo cafe-gift shop **B on the River** (574/293-9333; b-ontheriver.com). Paths

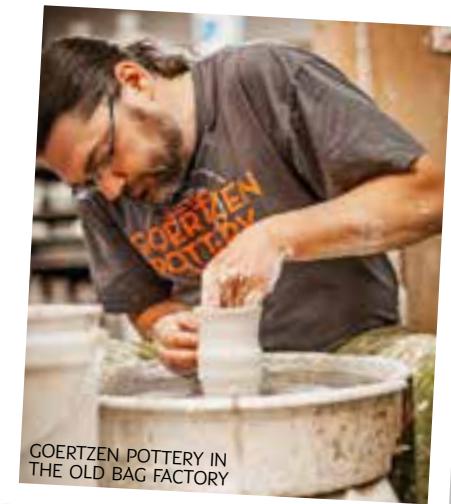
wind through woodlands, bonsai displays and sculpture-studded formal gardens at **Wellfield Botanic Gardens** (574/266-2006; wellfieldgardens.org). **Mod Closet** sells 1950-70s clothing and bangles (574/303-4680; modcloset.com). In nearby tiny Bristol, wind down over a glass of regional grape or orchard-fruit wines at **Fruit Hills Winery** (574/848-9463; fruithillswinery.com). Or stay in Elkhart to sip cocktails amid contemporary art and dine on a veal chop seasoned with a 10-pepper blend and smothered in wine, mushrooms and sweet cherry peppers at **523 Tap and Grill** (574/523-1523; 523tapandgrill.com). In all its former Vaudeville glory, the 1924 **Lerner Theatre** anchors downtown Elkhart's recently restored arts and entertainment district and hosts headliner acts and theatrical performances (800/294-8223; thelerner.com). Spacious rooms and a hot breakfast buffet make for comfy stays at **Staybridge Suites**; from \$109 (574/970-8488; staybridge.com/elkhartnorth).

Day 2

In Middlebury, stop for cinnamon rolls, doughnuts and free coffee at **Rise 'N Roll Bakery and Deli** (574/825-4032; risenrollbakery.com). **Das Dutchman Essenhaus** functions as an Amish resort, restaurant and shopping complex (574/825-9471; essenhaus.com). Free **Krider Gardens** replicates a design locals created for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair (middleburyin.org). Tomato basil soup and grilled cheese make a tasty lunch in **The Legendary Grind** at the **Middlebury Mercantile** (574/538-7242). **Pumpkinvine Cyclery** rents bikes to pedal the 16-mile Pumpkinvine Nature Trail (pumpkinvine.org), which links Goshen, Middlebury and Shipshewana (574/825-2252; pumpkinvinecyclery.com). **Rulli's Italian Restaurant** deserves its "like mamma's" reputation for baked ricotta-stuffed shells and pizza (574/825-7222; rullispizza.com). **McKenzie House Bed and Breakfast** guests enjoy a pool, gardens, a movie-rec room, multicourse gourmet breakfast and luxe, ultraprivate quarters. From \$99 (574/825-9787; mckenziehousebnb.com).

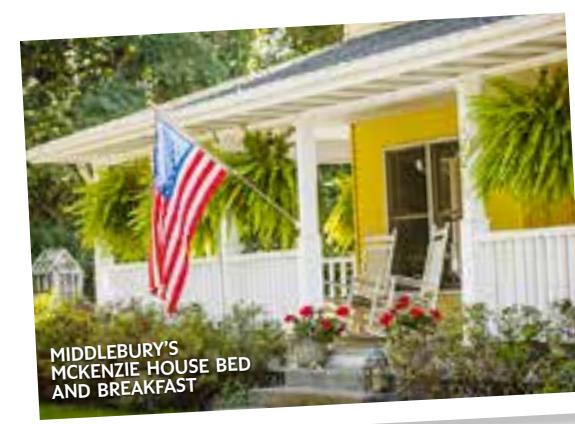
Day 3

The Shipshewana Auction and Flea Market fills 100 acres with 900 vendors (several sell breakfast and lunch) every Tuesday and Wednesday, May through October (260/768-4129; tradingplaceamerica.com) across from **Menno-Hof Information Center and Amish-Mennonite Museum** (260/768-4117;

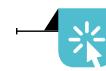


COERTZEN POTTERY IN THE OLD BAG FACTORY

mennohof.org). In downtown Goshen, **Olympia Candy Kitchen** serves burgers-and-fries lunches, chocolates and ice cream (574/533-5040; olympiacandykitchen.com). The 1896 **Old Bag Factory** houses antiques shops, cafes and studio-galleries of jewelers, ceramists, quilters and sculptors (574/534-2502; oldbagfactory.com). Housed in Nappanee's former Hoosier cabinet factory, **Coppes Commons** is a one-stop shop for everything Amish-made (574/773-0002; coppescommons.com). Family quilts and an 1897 home reveal town history at **Nappanee Center** (574/773-7812; nappaneechamber.com). **Amish Acres Historic Farm and Heritage Resort** introduces visitors to Amish life through family-style dinners, tours and documentaries (800/800-4942; amishacres.com). A Queen Anne-style home, **The Homespun Country Inn** offers five guest rooms and a gourmet breakfast; from \$93 (800/311-2996; homespuninn.com). **MAL**



MIDDLEBURY'S MCKENZIE HOUSE BED AND BREAKFAST



Want to visit more gardens? See our favorite tours at midwestliving.com/gardentrips.