



FEATURES

Greener Pastures

Wednesday, December 28, 2016 | by JONATHAN ZWICKEL



Ishmael Butler of Shabazz Palaces performing with Tacocat at the Tokeland Hotel. Photo by Ben Lindbloom

Seattle is changing legal marijuana, and legal marijuana is changing America.

It's a social experiment within a social experiment within a social experiment. Two dozen of us have traveled to Tokeland, Wash., a no-traffic-light fishing village on Willapa Bay 140 miles southwest of Seattle, to spend Halloween weekend at the oldest hotel in the state. We've been convened by a marijuana edibles company called the Goodship, which asks only that we give ourselves 100 percent to this untested psychedelic adventure.

Ishmael Butler of Shabazz Palaces and the four members of Tacocat are our artistic engines, stars of this motley solar system. Orbiting them is a team of sound engineers, filmmakers and photographers all documenting their improvised musical output, plus one writer taking notes (me). Ringleading the circus is the Goodship staff, led by founder Jody Hall, queen of Cupcake Royale and legal-weed entrepreneur. For 48 hours, the Tokeland Hotel—built in 1885, reputedly haunted—is entirely ours.

Instruments, amps and microphones crowd the lobby, a cozy, doily-laden tea lounge frozen in anachronism, its log cabin/fishing lodge décor part Wes Anderson, part David Lynch, all guileless Northwest. In an adjacent room, Erik Blood mans a complicated-looking mobile recording studio. And over here is the “weed buffet,” its assortment too miscellaneous to detail.

This inaugural Goodship Session, as Hall's team has dubbed the weekend, could yield gold, folding peak-form musicians into a creatively charged environment with no parameters and a tableful of high-octane ganja products. Or it could yield a goopy mishmash of underbaked ideas. Most likely something in between—raw sound that Blood will later mold into cool-sounding music, raw footage the filmmakers will weave into a coherent storyline. With luck, sometime soon they'll share a beautifully crafted document attesting to the sort of joyful mind-meld that cannabis can incite.

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Generally speaking, humans consume cannabis to alter the boundaries of perception.

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We alter our perception to remind ourselves that reality is malleable, ours to shape into the vision of our choosing. In America, this distinctly West Coast sensibility brought us Hollywood and the Summer of Love and Burning Man and Silicon Valley and virtual reality—each a collective reimagining of consensus reality.

This is not just the pot cookie talking.

In 2012, along with legal weed, Washington State approved a \$15/hour minimum wage and marriage equality; a year later \$15/hour became an ongoing national movement and marriage equality was protected by the Supreme Court. This past November, eight more states approved legal weed for recreational or medical use, and so today one in six Americans lives in a state with access to legal weed. Our corner of the country has reacquainted the rest of the nation with its most progressive inclinations.

Now changing laws and social norms have us venturing into uncharted territory. Four years after the passage of I-502, people like Hall and a cadre of imaginative professionals are updating our understanding of marijuana in the legal era, pioneering a brand-new industry with massive social and economic implications. This year, *Forbes* valued America's fledgling legal-weed industry at \$7 billion, and more states will go legal in the coming years, all of them reaping enormous tax revenues as a result. As growing, possessing and selling is legalized, tens of thousands of non-violent drug offenders should be exonerated and released from incarceration.

According to a 2016 Gallup poll, 43 percent of Americans have tried marijuana. Legalization is normalizing an intoxicant that's never caused a death by overdose and that tends to inspire creative thinking, to slow the pace of modern life, to invoke feelings of warmth and kindness. It's a social experiment within a social experiment, the results of which could change the nation.

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"The industry is filled with a lot of wealthy people who want to be super-wealthy," says Jody Hall a few weeks after the Tokeland outing. "Then you find gems who get the bigger picture—the opportunity to not only make a great business but to leave a positive mark on society, especially given the pain the War on Drugs has caused."

Hall herself is one of the gems. Today, accompanied by Goodship marketing manager Eileen Namanny, she's explaining the ethos behind Goodship's business model. It boils down to "take care of your people"—a lesson she learned directly from Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz, for whom she worked between 1989 and 2001, overseeing the company's marketing efforts in 80 new locations across the U.S. This is a woman who knows about building market share out of nothing.

Thanks to Hall's strong ties to Seattle's entrepreneurial community—as well as the company's clever branding—Goodship is an early leader in the edibles industry, making delicious chocolates, cookies and pastilles. The company is setting precedents on pricing and labor practices with equity in mind. State vice and sales taxes on their products total a whopping 43.5 percent, but Goodship sets prices at a rate that allows them to start their 15 workers at \$14 per hour plus a company stock plan and generous paid time off. The company is also collaborating with Alison Holcomb, criminal justice director of the ACLU and author of I-502, to launch a foundation in late 2017 that will address the social justice issues associated with the legal weed industry.

"[The industry is] built on the backs of a lot of people that are still sitting in jail for crimes that are now legal," Namanny says. "The true pioneers of the industry can't participate in it. A disproportionate amount of people of color are being punished and a disproportionate amount of white people are benefitting. We don't talk about that enough."

Adds Hall, "Cannabis legalization is a template for criminal justice reform. We shouldn't expect it to start at the national level, but at the community level."

For the time being, Goodship is generating mainstream acceptance by producing programs of an artistic or intellectual bent that speak to the values the company believes marijuana engenders. The Goodship Sessions are one avenue, focused on music; another is Goodship's Higher Education series, in which compelling thinkers like author Lesley Hazleton, architect Katrina Spade and engineer Blaise Agüera y Arcas deliver lectures on heady subjects like infinity, human composting and artificial intelligence. Both are forms of lifestyle marketing aimed not specifically at pot smokers but anyone with an inquisitive mind. What Red Bull is to action sports, Goodship aspires



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to be to empathy.

“The social return isn’t just having a foundation and giving back,” Hall says. “It’s also inspiring people to have profound connection together. The Goodship Sessions, Higher Education, all of that is how you might make your life feel more open and connected.”

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In case you need reminding, 2016 is not 1976. And yet I must include a paragraph here about the outdated, unflattering stereotypes still associated with cannabis: Cheech & Chong, wannabe Rastafarians, daffy stoners limited in sense and motivation. By now we know better—there is no typical pot smoker—but cultural stigma is hard to shake. The cannabis industry has struggled to catch up with cannabis culture.

“Cannabis has to evolve with the consumer,” says John Le, one of the co-owners of Trichome, a new-school “lifestyle boutique” in the International District. “We’re trying to showcase what a modern cannabis user can be.” His store is a proving ground.

At three years old, Trichome arrived early in the legal era and quickly applied a slick, sophisticated look and feel. While it’s not a complete reinvention of the head shop, it is a radical revision—the kind of carefully curated, design-centric shop non-smokers would appreciate. Le, who previously had a career as a cardiac surgery assistant in University of Washington’s pre-med program, and his partner Richard Saguin developed a split-level storefront that’s equal parts urban-minimalist design studio and neon-hued artist hideout. A pair of arcade games flank the doorway, a tabletop inside is made of working TV monitors, monitors above the door run Bruce Lee’s *Enter the Dragon* on loop and an alien-looking floral display adorns the back wall.

Alongside glass smoking implements, wooden storage boxes and stainless steel grinders—Le describes Trichome’s inventory as “functional, design-driven, almost like a kitchen utensil”—the store carries locally designed clothing, zines and high-end scented candles. For a few months in 2014 Trichome hosted a Sunday morning pop-up where customers could buy artisanal pour-over coffees dosed with cannabis extract, an “experimental nootropic elixir” Le didn’t invent but perhaps perfected. Around that time, he commissioned a series of porcelain pipes in the shape of Bruce Lee’s head by ceramicist Charles Krafft. Only one remains for sale.

Le opened the store in the ID because of his family’s longstanding weekend-brunch tradition in the neighborhood; plus rent is cheap. He hopes Trichome establishes a sort of anti-gentrification beachhead against what he sees as an incoming tide of tech-obsessed newcomers.

“One thing that can counteract that boom in Seattle is a boom in cannabis culture, which will help maintain art and music and the other things people use cannabis around. Hopefully it’ll help retain some of the soul of the city.”

Legalization has drawn smokers out of the closet, so to speak, refuting taboo and aligning marijuana culture with empowerment, tolerance, creativity and activism. Given more latitude, advocates are proclaiming cannabis as a conduit for human connection more meaningful and more direct than unaltered consciousness provides. Weed transcends age, class, race and privilege—walk into any of Seattle’s 30-plus pot shops and you’re part of a clientele that’s integrated in a way rarely seen elsewhere in the city. An entire cultural and economic ecosystem has flowered around the substance itself.

Women.Weed.Wifi, a cooperative of 20-something women of color, produces art shows and pop-up markets, runs an active, eclectic blog and online store and compiles a quarterly print zine. “WWW is basically our vision for the future,” the group told *City Arts* in July of last year. “The future will be run by women, weed keeps us level and holds so many keys to a greater human enlightenment, and Wi-Fi is how we meet each other, learn and make shit happen.”

April Pride created Van der Pop, a collection of luxury accessories like a \$240 lockable humidior and \$275 Italian leather stash bag, many of which the entrepreneur and erstwhile clothing designer developed herself, targeting women ages 30–50. For the last year, she’s hosted a series of Van der Pop Sessions in Seattle, Portland and, most recently, LA—female-friendly confabs Pride describes as “a Tupperware party meets 420.”

Chelsea Cebara, a certified medical cannabis consultant (via Seattle Central College’s

20-hour online course) and sex educator, works at the intersection of sexuality and marijuana. During the day, she's a budtender at Dockside, one of Seattle's first medical marijuana dispensaries and now one of its best-educated recreational stores. In the evenings, she hosts workshops with titles like "Bud in the Bedroom" at Babeland and the Center for Sex-Positive Culture. With its female-focused, sex-positive approach, Babeland helped bring the adult toyshop into the modern era; Dockside and other expert retailers are doing the same with weed.

"Seattle is a thought leader for the country in a lot of these progressive issues," Cebara says. "We're a sex-positive city, and there are a ton of people that know a ton about sex, and there are a ton of people that know about weed. But there's nobody but me in the middle of that Venn diagram." Cannabis, she says, has a profound ability to help people, especially women, "crack open and discover facets of their sexuality."

Maintaining a bird's-eye view of the entire landscape in all its cultural, economic and political ramifications is Leafly, a "cannabis tech company" that launched in 2010 as something like Yelp for medical pot dispensaries that has since morphed into something far more robust. With Bruce Barcott, Guggenheim fellow and author of *Weed the People*, published last year by Time Books, as deputy editor, Leafly has emerged as a high-minded journalistic endeavor. "Something between WebMD and *High Times*," Barcott says.

Barcott—who points to Seattleite Rick Steves as the original mainstream marijuana writer—pens regular features about local and national marijuana issues and oversees a stable of freelancers on the front lines of state legalization efforts across the U.S. He and his writers debate terminology—they've settled strictly on "adult use" rather than "recreational" and hew mostly to "cannabis" rather than any myriad slang—as they document the impact of legalization on society as a whole.

"We had an amazing election where eight of nine states adopted their legalization efforts, but at the same time we elected a president who's about to appoint an attorney general who's anti-cannabis," Barcott says. "But there's an overriding belief that no matter what he might try to do, the change we're seeing is deep, it's historical, it's cultural, it's social. And there may be a few forays, DEA raids here and there, but I don't see them rolling everything back.

"It's a leading-edge culture that pushed it forward, especially here in Washington," Barcott continues. "It was the combination of the cultural leading edge coming together with mainstream institutional thinkers and leaders who had the vision to say 'we should do this, and we can do this.'"

And so we did. The experiment continues.

This piece has been changed to reflect the fact that Bruce Barcott is Leafly's deputy editor, not editor in chief.

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