7 quintessential BEYOND

The city has remade its natural setting. Parks and a ski resort shape Boise’s own sense of place.
The English poet John Ruskin understood that the architecture of cities should complement the natural landscape, and that the most wondrous of human artistic creations could never hope to surpass the wonder of nature’s sublime. “An architect,” wrote Ruskin, four years before the founding of Boise, “should live as little in cities as a painter. Send him out to our hills, and let him study there what Nature understands by a buttress, and what by a dome.”

Ruskin proposed seven criteria—seven “lamps,” he called them—for illuminating the extent to which great buildings approached the sublime. *Quintessential Boise* takes a simpler approach. We see architectural form reflected in the ways a city’s buildings and streets have historically functioned. We feature authentic places that meet community needs.

Yet Ruskin’s concern for nature is also essential to the Boise in Boise. The city’s connection to the barren of Idaho’s outback has been a familiar theme since the era of the Oregon Trail. Discovered and rediscovered—as an outpost and oasis, as an Athens in the sagebrush, as a gateway to hunting and skiing—Boise has always been
boosted as an urban center on a wild edge. Boiseans value the edges. Where water laps on sandy beaches, where jet boats roar through rock-walled canyons, Boise builds civic identity. Hikers and bicyclists ply Boise’s bucolic greenbelt. Shakespearean follies play out against a wooded foothill backdrop. A mountain lures workers away from their desks to schuss through the snow. These natural edges—the river, the foothills, the mountains—are quintessential parts that help define the whole.

Some edges are like architecture. Purposely engineered, they look more natural than nature ever intended. Bogus Basin, for example, was thoroughly mined, clear-cut and grazed before the U.S. Forest Service began building a trail system, conserving the slopes as a park. The lake at Lucky Peak is an engineered flood impoundment. Its dams and dikes untangled the braids of a wandering channel, making the Boise River floatable. Today when Boiseans take the plunge into a seemingly natural river, they float a human-made floodway that looks nothing like the stream Bonneville saw.

**Lucky Peak State Park**

9725 E. Idaho 21

★ Identity ★ Scale ★ Utility ★ Consistency ★ Impact

Drive eight miles east of Boise on Idaho 21 in high summer and you’ll find sunbathers lolling on beaches. Water enthusiasts rev up their jet skis or go boating. Families spread checkerboard picnic tablecloths. Scuba divers practice in the murky waters and occasionally local preachers wade into low-crested waves with new congregation members for a baptismal dip.

Engineer Arthur Foote was one of the first to see the potential of a dam above the city. Foote and his wife, renowned author and illustrator Mary Hallock Foote, built a sandstone house near what is now Discovery Park. The U.S. Reclamation Service completed the dam after Foote’s project
went bankrupt. In 1912, Diversion Dam opened, feeding the New York Canal. Four years later, at Arrowrock, the reclamation service pioneered gravity-arch construction with the world’s tallest dam. Lucky Peak Dam was a belated response to a series of punishing floods. Built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from 1949 to 1955, the gravel dam created a popular beach called Sandy Point.

Like memorable architecture, they complement our history and carry emotional weight.

**Bogus Basin Mountain Resort**

2600 N. Bogus Basin Road

**Identity ★ Scale ★ Utility ★ Consistency ★ Impact**

Bogus Basin offers 2,600 snowy acres for downhill and Nordic skiers. With twinkle-lit slopes for night skiing, a tubing hill and two cozy lodges, the ski area rises above Boise’s smog inversion. Sundrenched on days when the filthiest air blankets the valley, Bogus is Boise’s Prozac, its buster of the winter blues.

In 1941 the non-profit Bogus Basin Recreational Association incorporated and sold $25 memberships. However, the start of WWII stalled the opening—and first rope-towed skiers—until December 20, 1942. Four years later, Morrison-Knudsen Co. helped install the first T-bar lift. J.R. Simplot added T-bar heavy “lifting” in 1953. The curling muddy road got a coat of pavement in the 1960s. In 1973, skiers could zigzag down the newly opened backside to a second Bogus lodge.
Ahead of the NASCAR craze, Meridian Speedway is a next-door Boise experience, just 10 miles west on Interstate 84 to Meridian exit 44. Meridian’s 117-foot onion-shaped water tower dominates the track. Saturday nights bring thousands for 50-lap sprint-car racing. Novelty events include go-carts, vintage jalopies, tractor-pulls, SUV jet boat pulls, and “smash-o-rama” demolition derbies. “Thunder dog” race-what-you-bring competitions pit minivans against beater sedans.

Opened in 1951 the quarter-mile oval speedway is one of the nation’s oldest in continuous operation. Blacktop arrived in 1962. Racing legend Davey Hamilton began his career at the speedway when his father managed the track. Crashes have sheared hundreds of fence posts. Collisions have launched cars into walls.
and fenders into the grandstands. One spectacular crash flipped a car through the speedway’s scoreboard.

Straightforward and functional, the speedway is hardly the Statehouse. It remains quintessential nevertheless.

**Idaho Shakespeare Festival Amphitheater**

* 5657 Warm Springs Avenue

**Identity★ Scale★ Utility★ Consistency★ Impact**

About five miles east of Boise, nestled in a wooded cove, thespians perform spring to fall in a grotto-like, open-air theater under the stars. Boiseans pack picnic baskets and carry in backpacks of wine and cheese so they can spread out to watch live performances on blankets and pillows, tables and chairs.

In 1976 a fund-raising festival for the Women’s and Children’s Alliance performed *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* down by the river. Today through an agreement with the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands and the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, the festival’s home is surrounded by a nature reserve where theatergoers get to see added attractions such as indigenous plants and flowers, deer, waterfowl and fox.
It is a unique experience and five-star quintessential. The park-like amphitheater is welcoming, functional, and well proportioned. Colorfully Elizabethan yet causally Idahoan, the festival celebrates Boise and its natural setting in unique and memorable ways.

The Boise River Greenbelt
Through Boise and Garden City

★ Identity ★ Scale ★ Utility ★ Consistency ★ Impact ★

Some say the greenbelt began in 1963 when a planner from California sold the city on the idea of a path between its riverside parks. Others say the greenbelt idea began when the Corps of Engineers sculpted the river with meandering dikes. Still others maintain that the credit rightly belongs to the 1972 Clean Water Act. Before that legislation, when effluent foamed in the pools and trash impounded the channel, the floodway was seldom a place Boiseans wanted to walk.

In 1963, in the city’s first 20-year comprehensive plan, Atkinson & Associates envisioned a riverside “east-west axis” with horse trails, walking paths and a scenic parkway. Four years later the city parks department began purchasing riverside lots. In 1971 the city council required a 70-foot minimum setback for all structures and parking. Another decade passed before city planners listed the greenbelt as “a major park system priority.”

Today the cherished greenbelt follows the Boise River from Discovery Park to Eagle, a distance of about 30 miles. Its parks and bridges are well proportioned. Memorable and functional, with benches for wildlife viewing and markers for historical sites, the greenbelt celebrates the human-made natural setting that gives Boise its own sense of place.