

Get inspired on a crafty tour of the villages near the Credit River

Alton, Belfountain, Terra Cotta and Glen Williams provide the perfect picturesque views and artist galleries to get the creative juices flowing.

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Sat., Aug. 5, 2017 timer 6 min. read
update Article was updated Aug. 29, 2017



There's nothing like getting outside the city to get the creative juices flowing. As a crafter and stylist, I often take to the road to seek inspiration — my best ideas often making an appearance while driving a country road or exploring a market.

On a recent warm summer day, I found myself cruising down a winding tree-lined road just north of Brampton, in an area renowned for its beauty and hills, headed toward the picturesque villages of Alton, Belfountain, Terra Cotta and Glen Williams that run near the Credit River and are home to many artist studios, cafés, galleries and markets featuring one-of-a-kind treasures.

To get in the spirit, I listened to a few crafty podcasts along the way. My favourites include [Elise Gets Crafty](#), a weekly podcast featuring interviews with creatives that's geared toward small business; [The Merriweather Council](#), in which Danielle Spurge, a

craft business consultant and blogger shares tips on running an online handmade business; [The Jealous Curator: Art For Your Ear](#) from artist and blogger Danielle Krysa, who interviews contemporary artists about how they live, who they know and work with; and [While She Naps](#), in which Abby Glassenberg, a sewing pattern designer, craft book author and blogger talks to designers and makers about what it takes to build a creative business.

After an hour, I was inspired and ready to explore the area, see some art and meet the makers and artists who live and work here.



First stop: Coffee in Belfountain

I parked my car and took some time to walk around this pretty hamlet before ordering a latte and banana bread (\$7) from [Higher Ground Coffee](#) on Old Main St. Belfountain is tiny but charming with its pretty homes, a conservation area complete with swing bridge, trails and a waterfall.

Across the street from the coffee shop, I spotted the historic [Belfountain General Store](#), built in 1888. I was too early to go inside (they're open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily), but from the window I could see shelves filled with crafts and preserves as well as a display case with baked goods. The benches in front of the store suggest it'd be a cute spot to stop another time.

Meet and greet with artists — and teachers — at Alton village

I drove into Alton, about 15 minutes north of Belfountain, and went to an old mill, built in 1881, which has been reimagined as a thriving arts centre. There is a foot bridge that leads across Shaw's Creek to the Alton Mill Arts Centre on Queen St. featuring galleries, a café and working studios where more than 20 artists have the good fortune to work.

Inside, Margi Taylor, the mill's corporate events manager, told me the building's history is as diverse as the makers who now work in it. "It was originally created to be a knitting mill ... they knitted wool-lined long johns for the Canadian soldiers," she said. Taylor is an artist and the longest standing tenant at the mill. "It was refurbished into a rubber mill and they made latex products and had a big contract with Disney and made Mickey Mouse balloons and condoms."

As a crafty destination, it offers a great opportunity to visit studios to not only see art, but interact with artists at work, buy arts and crafts from glass and pottery to painting, jewelry and woodwork. Visitors can also take a class or workshop, such as Anne-Marie Warburton of Gallery Gemma's chain-mail bracelet-making class, one she says is popular with bridal parties. Go to altonmill.ca to sign up for workshops and classes in advance.



Cider making tour at Spirit Tree Estate Cidery

Driving south, through a landscape dotted with old farms, grazing cows and lots of horses, along the ridge of the Niagara Escarpment, I stopped to snap the skyline of Toronto in the distance. My next destination was lunch and a tour of Spirit Tree Estate Cidery, just above the villages of Cheltenham and Terra Cotta. Spirit Tree Estate Cidery,

at 1137 Boston Mills Rd., looks like it has been part of the landscape for decades. The building was made using a straw bale construction method — a post-and-beam frame with walls filled with straw bales and covered with lime/concrete stucco.

At the Ciderhouse Bistro, I ordered the “short flight sampling” of three ciders (\$8). Beet hummus (\$10) is served with homemade dukka and wood-fired bread. And a Charcuterie Board (\$28) that was like a painter’s palette of charcuterie created by executive chef Nelson Singh. Neighbouring diners were amused by the photographic diary I am keeping of lunch.

Guided tours are available every Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m. and group tours run Wednesday to Saturday (minimum six people) for \$10 per person. My tour guide, Tiegan Armstrong, took me on a walk through the orchard, where I realized cream-coloured flat shoes don’t fare well in clay soil.

“The first tree of each row is a crab apple tree. They are the first to come into bloom before the apple trees, so they attract all the wild pollinators into the area. When their blossoms are finished, within a few days, the apple blossoms are out,” Armstrong told me.

The name Spirit Tree evolved out of the historical tradition of wassailing, which is the practice of singing to apple trees to scare away evil spirits and then bless the orchards in the cider producing regions of England. It’s meant to promote a good harvest for the coming year and is a practice Spirit Tree does every Family Day.



Antique market in Glen Williams

I had just enough time to fit in a late afternoon visit to Williams Mill Visual Arts Centre in the hamlet of Glen Williams. As I approach, I spotted the Beaumont Mill Antique Market, at 586 Main St., so I detoured to explore. Inside it was a hodgepodge of rooms full of vendors, and an antique mall with friendly owners and an impressive mix of vintage and antique finds. I considered a pair of opera glasses with mother-of-pearl accents, but since they only take cash, I decided leave them for someone else to discover.

The Williams Mill, a three-minute drive from the market, was built in the 1800s and was most recently used as an apple-processing factory until the 1980s. In 1985, local entrepreneurs Doug and Mary Lou Brock began converting it into studios for professional artists.

The Mill's impressive gallery features a changing collection of work from GTA artists. For artist studios, Glen Williams Glass is a must-see, where you can observe the glass-blowing process. At the mill, you can also chat with artists, pick up a handmade souvenir from the gallery and gift shop, and have dinner at the Glen Tavern run by Ben Frogget, whose father is a co-owner of Scaramouche in Toronto.

“The thing about this village is it's very much in a renaissance. We've had some new development here, modern homes up on the hill, the Copper Kettle restaurant ... it's beautiful, there's also the Beaumont Mill Antiques, the Antiquarian Bookshop, the Glen Oven Café ... lots of change and renewal, so it's an exciting time for the Glen for sure,” McGowan said.

The best days to find artists in their studios are Friday and Saturday from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m.



Last stop for ice cream on the way home

On my way back to the city, I made one last stop for an ice cream at Sweetie Pies on Main St. in Georgetown, where own Gwen Patterson makes homemade ice cream in a rotating list of flavours such as black cherry, cheesecake, coffee crisp and tiger tail (\$3.70 for a single scoop).

It was the perfect treat to cap this creative crawl.

Daytrippin': A crafters crawl near Credit River

Distance from CN Tower to Alton via Belfountain: 82 kilometres

For scenic route: take Highway 10 north from Brampton, turn left at Forks of the Credit Road and wind your way up Caledon Mountain to village of Belfountain.

Alternate transportation: There is no direct public transportation to Alton. The closest you might get is Orangeville, about 9 kilometres north, via Go Transit Bus and then travel via taxi.

Budget: About \$125, which includes gas, coffee and baked goods, tour and tasting at Spirit Tree Cidery, and lunch for two at the Ciderhouse Bistro. The mill tours are free, though costs will rise as you find treasures.

Souvenir: A six pack of Spirit Tree Cider, \$20