

PLACES TO SEE

Ingenuity in the Interior

Museum offers cornucopia of auto, fashion, Alaska history

By TRACY KALYTIK

WHAT DO ORNATE SILK gowns, a Heine-Velox Victoria and photos from Alaska's past have in common?

The answer? They are all housed inside one 30,000-square-foot building in the city of Fairbanks, along with a trove of automotive, vintage couture and photographic curiosities.

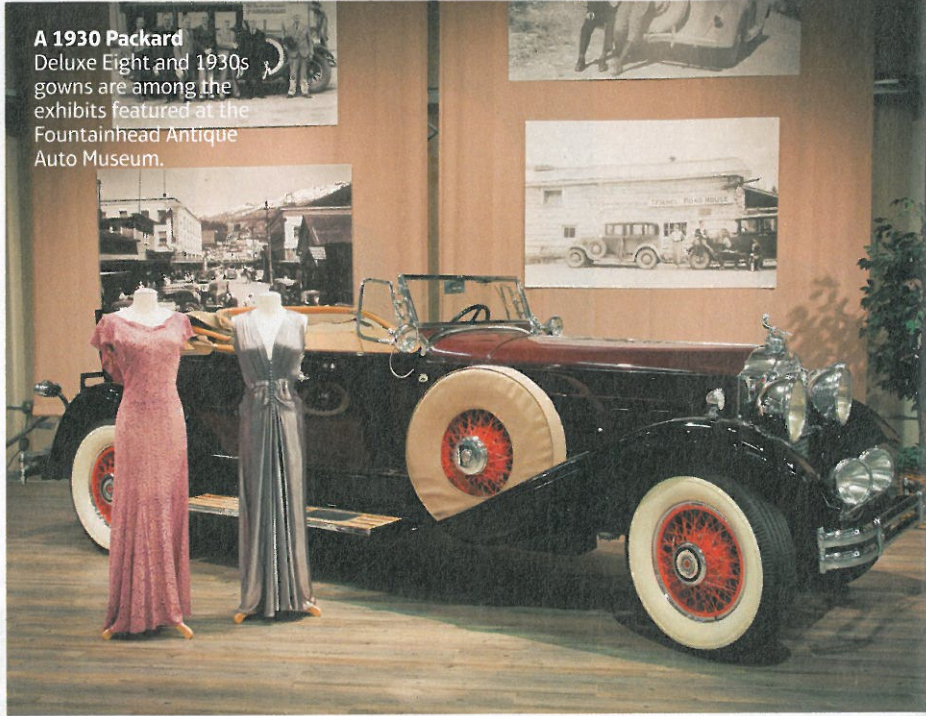
Tim Cerny owns the Wedgewood Resort in Fairbanks. He began displaying the carefully chosen collections at his Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum in 2009 because they show related facets of the progression of American automotive history.

"The newest (automobile) is from 1936, the oldest is 1898," museum director Willy Vinton said. "We stay pre-World War II. It's just the focus that we have; you can't cover everything and do a decent job. The technological changes and styling changes are what we really focus on."

The prestigious Pebble Beach (Calif.) Concours d'Elegance invited the museum last year to enter into competition its 1918 Biddle Town Car and a 1919 McFarlan Type 125 Sport Touring once owned by silent film star Wallace Reid.

The McFarlan won Best in Class in the A-2 Antique category and received the Ansel Adams Award for Most Desirable Touring Car of Its Era.

"There was an audible gasp among the crowd when they learned that the car belonged to a museum in Alaska," Cerny said, last year, in a museum press release. To contend at the Concours, an automobile must be rare, hold historical



A 1930 Packard Deluxe Eight and 1930s gowns are among the exhibits featured at the Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum.

value and be a well-preserved or accurately restored vehicle still capable of being driven.

Only in Fairbanks is it possible to find a Compound, Argonne, Hay Motor Carriage, Sheldon or Heine-Velox Victoria. The latter three were the only ones ever built.

One of the first cars in Fairbanks—a 1906 Pope-Toledo—is no longer in town, but a twin of it found in Kentucky soon will be, this fall.

A vehicle that seems to draw almost every visitor's eye, Vinton said, is the museum's 1933 Auburn V12 dual-ratio custom speedster, with a boat tail. "It's absolutely stunning," he said. Eighty-five of these vehicles adorn the collection; all but three can still be taken out for a spin.

"We're a living museum—almost everything gets serviced and operated," Vinton said.

Transportation history aficionados may also pore over the museum's 90 antique photographs—most of which are 7 feet wide—depicting the first automobiles to reach Alaska and its mining camps.

Exhibits and antique movie footage illustrate how resourceful Alaskans tinkered with vehicles, making it possible for them to travel on snow, cut firewood, ride rails—even propel a paddlewheel boat down the Yukon River.

Complementing Fountainhead's

meticulously restored vehicles and historical Alaska images is its collection of vintage clothing, highlighting fashion's progression from the 1700s through the 1930s. Dozens of displays explain how the popularity of the automobile influenced fashion.

"We are planning to add some special new clothing displays in time for summer, including several pieces from well-known European haute-couture designers from the early 1900s, as well as more historic Alaska garments," museum historian Nancy DeWitt said. Scott Grundy, a member of the Vernon L. Nash Antique Automobile Club of Fairbanks, sometimes serves as a Fountainhead museum docent.

"What sets this museum apart is the quality of the cars, all restored to superb condition," Grundy said. "I would say the basic reaction of tourists is that they're astounded a collection of this quality would be located in Fairbanks."

The Fountainhead Antique Automobile Museum is located off College Road in the Wedgewood Resort.

For information about hours of operation and exhibits, visit its website, <http://www.fountainheadmuseum.com/>, where a link to the museum's blog is located, and check out its Facebook, Twitter and YouTube sites. 📍

Tracy Kalytiak serves as senior editor for *Alaska* magazine.