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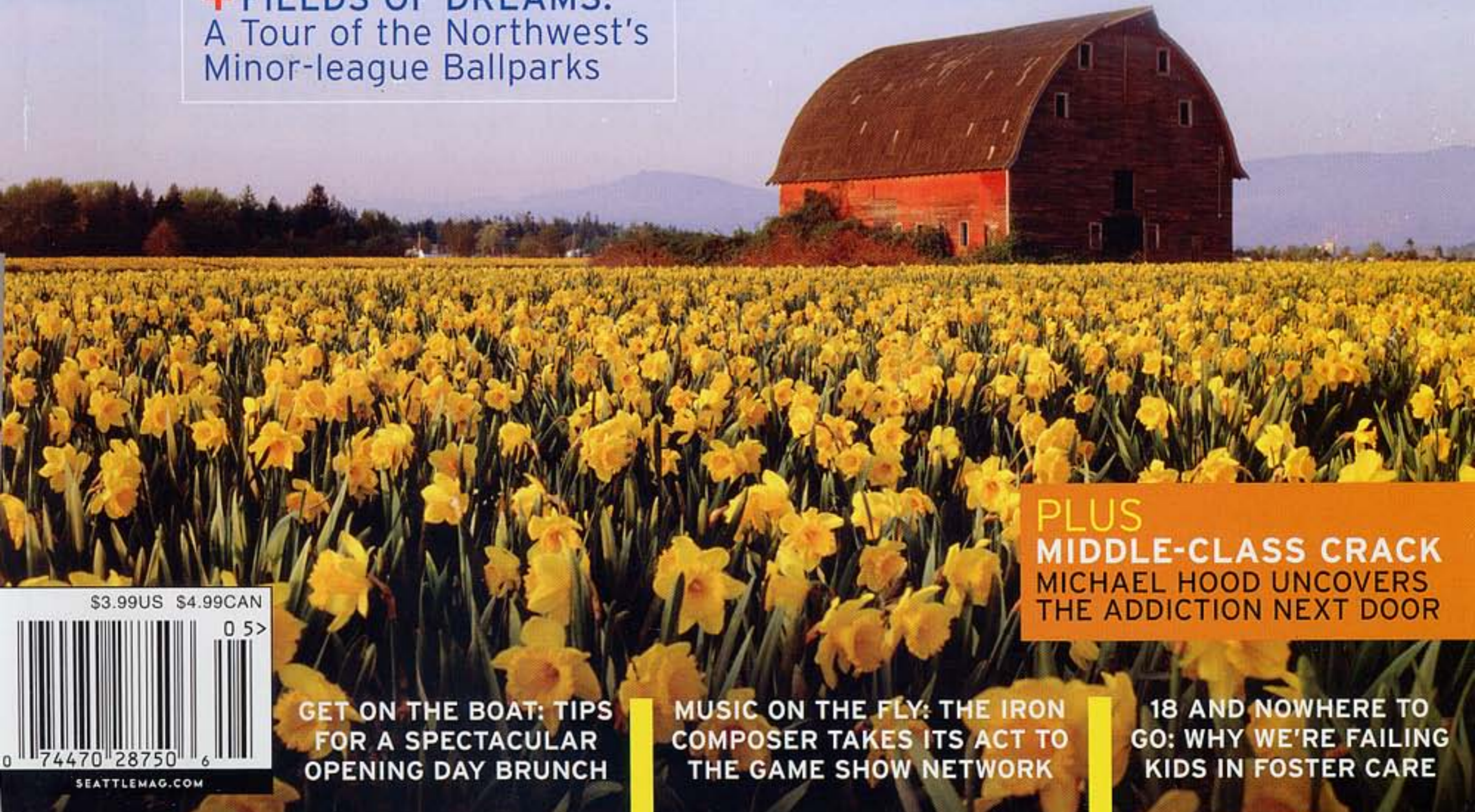
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Beauty Binge

At what price beauty? Kathy Schultz finds that it's all about balance

BLAME IT ON BOTOX or laser peels or those startling before-and-after photos. Blame it on the sudden influx of cosmetic surgery ads and giant ultrawhite teeth smiling at you from bus billboards. Somehow, laid-back Seattle is now competing with the perfect people of la-la land with the influx of extreme beauty treatments. Maybe it's because I'm on the other side of 40 now, but the promise of an instant face fix is becoming more attractive. After all, you don't know how well these treatments work until you try them.

It started innocently enough with individual eyelash extensions, one of the newest beauty trends—for \$100. The application was almost painless, and oh, the way those long, luscious lashes opened and framed my eyes. But after a few days, the lashes on my right (the side I sleep on) started falling out, while those on the left side still hung in there. Thirty days later, two lashes were hanging on unattractively. I'm still awaiting their departure.

Next came the medical-grade facial exfoliator (\$110 a bottle), which I used religiously every day. It was tingly—so I was sure it was working. After two weeks, I developed open, oozing sores on the sides of my nose. My face was peeling off. I followed the warning label instructions and discontinued use.

I then opted for a laser treatment to eliminate broken facial capillaries. The discomfort was relatively minor, “like the snap of a rubber band,” as the doctor put it. Until she found one offender embedded in the sensitive skin around my nostril—and caught a nose hair in the laser

cross fire (what was that smell?). But my capillaries miraculously disappeared. And for only \$150 for a quarter of an hour.

I moved on to a microcurrent toning facial. Not for wimps, this facial lifts tired, old muscles with low-level electricity. Ten treatments are recommended—at \$100 each. The aesthetician dotted my face with cream, then used electrified probes to systematically flex my muscles. It felt like I was being pinched. “You may experience a metallic taste,” she told me. (I wondered if I needed a wooden stick in my mouth so I wouldn't bite off my tongue.) Next came a thick layer of lotion and a special microcurrent canvas mask to increase my skin's absorption of moisturizers. With wires extending from it and holes for my eyes, nose and mouth, I felt (and am sure I looked) like Hannibal Lecter.

By then, I'd had my fill of being poked and prodded. I decided to bag the fix-it-quick external treatments (at least for a while) and switch to an “inner beauty” regimen: a detox program that promised to rid my body of toxins. The \$800 price tag for the monthlong program included consultations with a naturopath, dietary guidelines, education, supplements, toxin-releasing spa treatments, unlimited yoga and things like dry-brushing the skin to increase circulation. On the downside, the diet excluded caffeine, dairy, red meat, white flour—and my favorite three food groups: sugar, chocolate and wine.

I kept a journal and over the course of my detoxification, I noted, Day 1: No coffee, not a problem. Off to a good start. Day 5: Had a detox massage—the skin-rolling technique felt like getting pinched really hard by a little brother. Day 6: Went by Oh! Chocolate. Started crying. Day 7: Sleeping soundly. My eyes are clear and bright. I have energy! Day 9: Went out with friends. Did not drink. My friends are not as fun or funny as I thought. Day 21: Visiting my parents in St. Louis. Must...have...alcohol. Day 24: Back to oatmeal and stir-fry veggies. I feel better. Day 30: I complete the program with clear skin, feeling healthier, sleeping better and with a mental clarity and focus that I haven't experienced for some time. I feel, well, less toxic.

So, what did I learn? That achieving inner beauty through healthful means requires discipline and hard work, but yields results. That on some days, discipline is more than I can manage; I need that promise of an instant fix. And finally, that beauty, however you choose to find or define it, may or may not be skin deep—but it's certainly not cheap. **5**