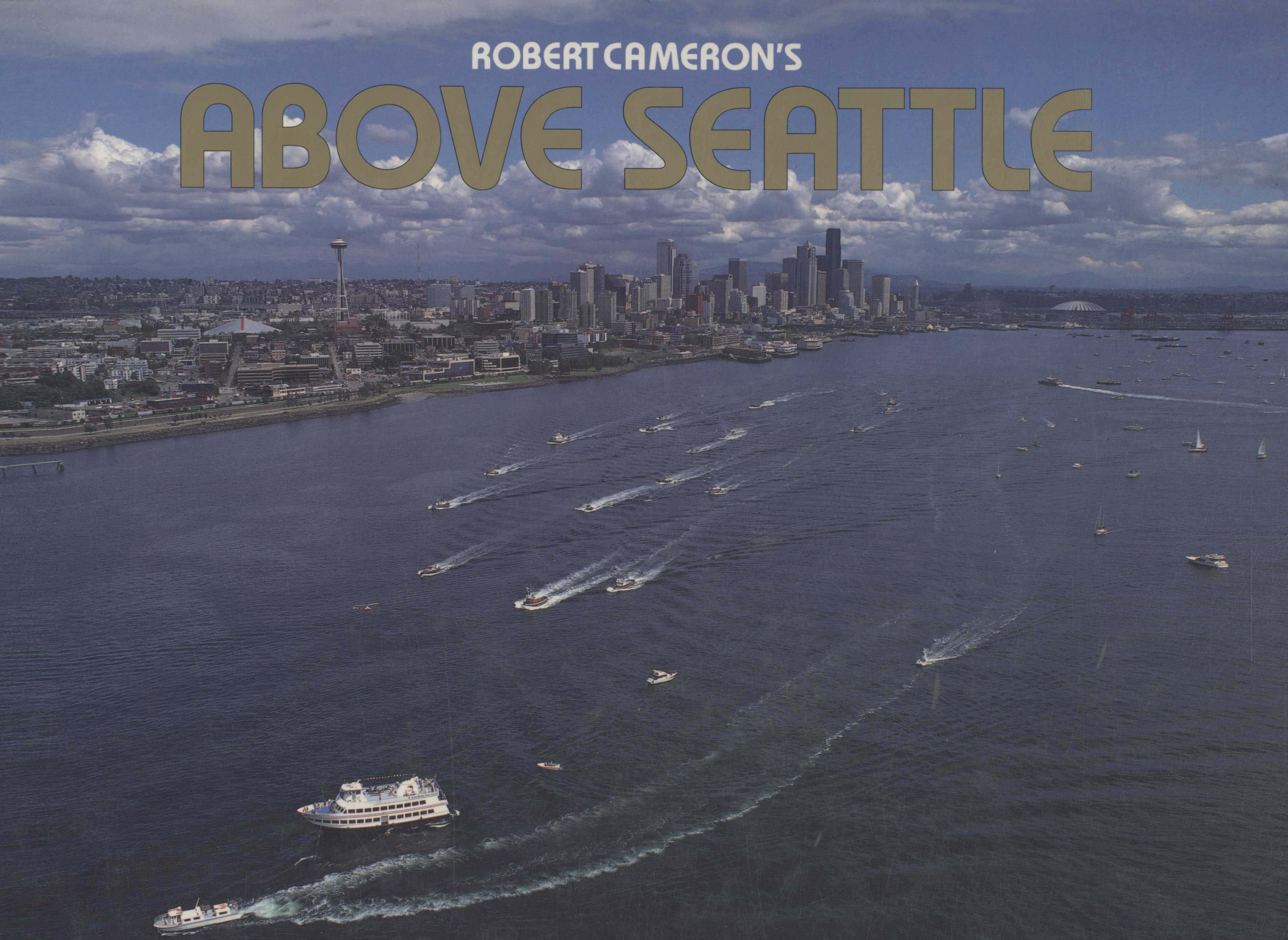
ROBERT CAMERON'S

ABOVE SEATTLE



TEXT BY EMMETT WATSON

ABOVE SEATTLE

by ROBERT CAMERON

A new collection of historical and original
aerial photographs of Seattle

with text by
EMMETT WATSON

CAMERON and COMPANY, San Francisco, California

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Viewed from the air, Seattle has an hour-glass figure, pinched at its downtown waist by two large bodies of water, Elliott Bay and Lake Washington. This shape calls to mind that of Lillian Russell, the buxom actress who dazzled the world from 1881 to 1908. The era is important. While Lillian consorted with Diamond Jim Brady on New York's turn-of-the-century fast track, Seattle was a distant, little-known seaport, a brawling, tough crossroads frontier town, whose chief claim to fame was being "the jumping off point" for the 1898 Yukon gold rush.

Indeed, it was the expertise of Alaska miners that made Seattle into a city. Too many hills? We'll sluice them down, by god. Starting early in the century and continuing into the 1930s — using high-powered hoses and techniques developed in Alaska gold mining — city fathers performed 62 "regrades" to level Seattle's hilly terrain. Millions of cubic yards were washed into Elliott Bay to create a deep-water harbor and fill in tidelands. Dozens of in-city sawmills raised a cacophony as islands rose, rivers split, canals and harbors formed. Much of what you see in Bob Cameron's remarkable aerial views of Seattle is man-made. A great industrial area, even the famous Kingdome itself, rests on ground reclaimed from the sea. In this book, too, is a view of Harbor Island, within a stone's throw of the city's skyscrapers. Harbor Island, the locus of Seattle's immense trade with Pacific Rim countries, was created out of silt from nearby hills; a river, the Duwamish, was divided to provide deep-water shipping five miles inland. We've got world-class mud, and we know that to do with it.

And water everywhere! From the sky, from the rivers, from Puget Sound and the lakes, water means islands, inlets, harbors, breakwaters, marinas, great freighters, tugboats, ferries and perhaps more privately owned pleasure boats than any other American city.

There are no fewer than 112 bridges inside Seattle's city limits, including three that float on concrete pontoons across Lake Washington. Of the 91 square miles of land within the city, 80 percent are surrounded by water. Puget Sound, an inland salt-water body, stretches from Olympia and Tacoma north to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, a lighthouse flicker away from Canada. When Seattle's Chittenden Locks were completed in 1914, thus equalizing the 33-foot difference in height between Puget Sound and Lake Union and 20-mile long Lake Washington, the builders and power brokers were ecstatic. "We will make Lake Washington an industrial giant, the Pittsburgh of the West," they boasted.

"Like hell you will," the people said.

They said it by buying up would-be lakefront industrial sites for homesites. Some wealthy, some not, Seattleites settled along the city's shorelines — 193 miles of waterfront, including 100 miles of fresh-water mooring space. Could a city like this ever have an identity crisis?

The short answer: yes. As the half-century mark passed, the joke was, "When the end of the world comes, Seattle will have one more year." This was meant to underscore the city's backwardness, its damp distance from the mainline of America's fads, fashion and energy.

Seattle chafed at its anonymity. It was America's best-kept urban secret, isolated by geography and insulated by a mind-set of chauvinism. Everything east of the mighty Cascade range and Mt. Rainier was "them," and some people liked it that way.

Then, on a bright, clear August day in 1955, a moment of change occurred. Some 200,000 people witnessed it, but few probably understood that they saw. This throng had gathered ashore and on pleasure boats to watch the annual hydroplane races on Lake Washington — yet another of Seattle's festive water celebrations. Somewhere out over the Puget Sound a totally new airplane was being wrung out by Tex Johnston, the famed test-pilot of every American jet produced since World War II and himself a willing captive of Seattle. Now he was pushing the limits of a new jet designated as the Dash-80, a product of Boeing, which had begun in "a little red barn" on Lake Union during World War I. Up there at 12,000 feet, Tex Johnston and his crew could see all the glory of the Pacific Northwest, the glory you will see in this book. The vista: Two great mountain ranges, the ocean, the shoreline, the lakes, the rivers, the harbors, the boats, the skyline of Seattle. It was a panorama to half-blind the most casual of visitors.

As planned, Tex brought the Dash-80 down low over Lake Washington. Spectators craned their necks for a first glimpse of Boeing's heralded new airplane. Silence fell on the huge crowd, which included, by special invitation, the chiefs of all the world's major airlines. And then, in a dramatic departure from the script written by Boeing's brass, Tex slow-rolled the giant jet only 200 feet above the water, as if it were nothing more than a little military aircraft. While blood drained from his bosses' cheeks ashore, Tex returned and repeated the swashbuckling gesture, delivering emphatic notice that the jet-age had arrived.

Progeny of the prototype Dash-80 became known as Boeing 707s — America's first passenger jets. More than a thousand of them were produced in Boeing's Puget Sound factories, and millions of middle-income people flew for the first time on "that plane from Seattle." Johnston would later drawl, "We have shrunk the world by a factor of two." And, incidentally, carried Seattle's name around the globe.

Still, it wasn't enough. The city's identity crisis persisted. Seattle drifted along at the edge of America's consciousness. Underneath the placid surface, however, a mysterious alchemy was taking place, an explosive combination of local big thinkers and bright, restless newcomers attracted by the area's natural beauty. All this energy seemed to come together in the 1980s, when Seattle burst onto the world scene . . . as, well, a better place to be, a place of limitless commercial, intellectual, recreational and artistic possibilities — as well as a great place to raise a family. And a place where the imperative of the '90s, ethnic and racial accommodation, is bringing new vitality to a city where once a stodgy, lily-white power structure held absolute sway.

Much of Seattle's newly-discovered greatness was home-grown. A young bond lawyer, Jim Ellis, rallied the citizens to save Lake Washington from pollution. He exhorted his region to provide money for more parks and greenery; out of this effort came the Kingdome and major league sports. Ellis and his supporters also brought forth a convention center and a downtown park — both built over a soulless freeway. A local architectual firm, Jones and Jones, designed a revolutionary type of zoo, now imitated all over the world.

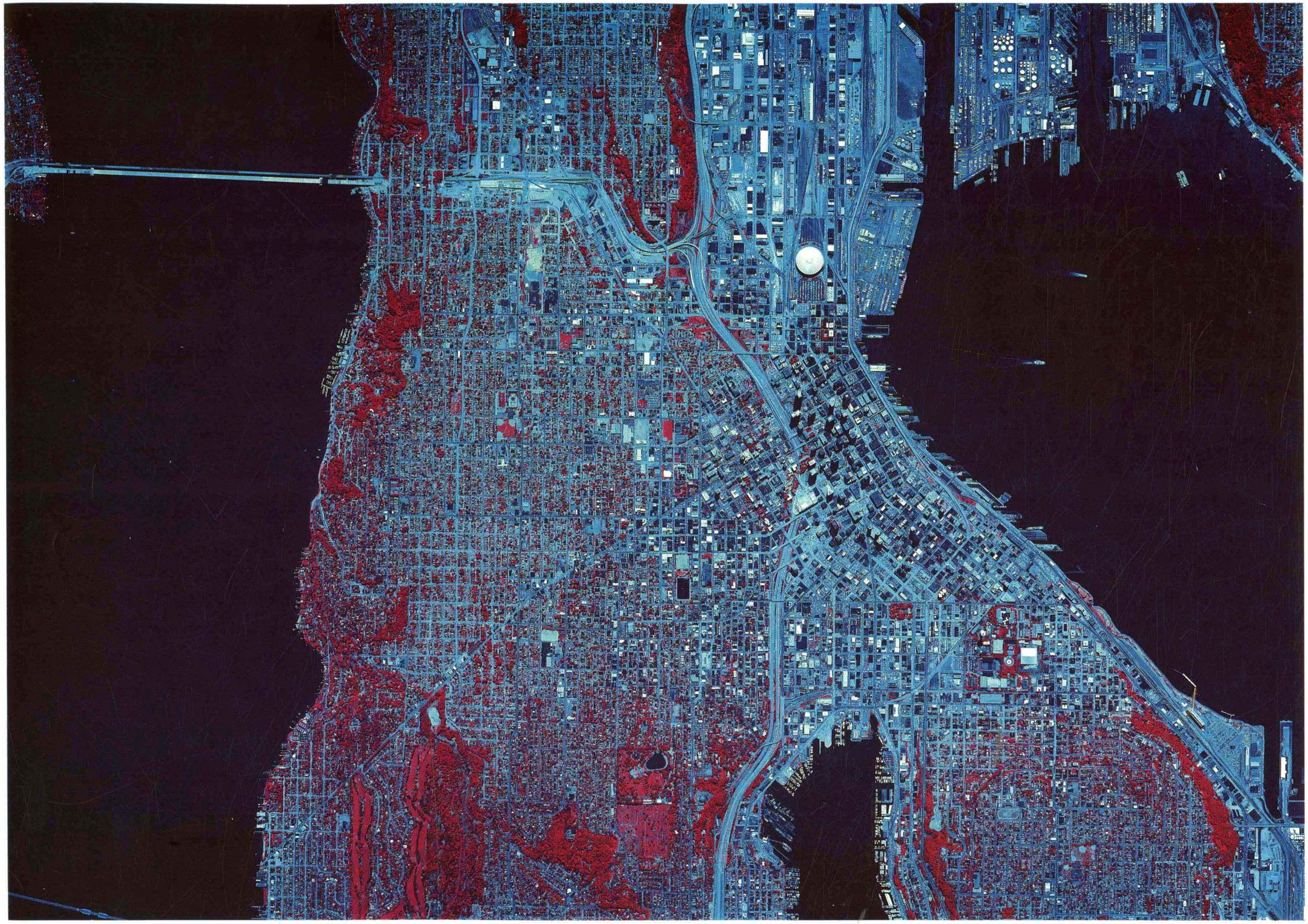
Nordstrom, founded by a Northwest family, became a national force in fashion retailing. Eddie Bauer, once a little downtown sporting goods store, set national standards for recreational outdoor clothing. Jim Whittaker, a home-grown mountaineer and the first American to ascend Mt. Everest, helped establish a co-op called REI, now a famous outdoors outfitter. Two native computer whizzes, Bill Gates and Paul Allen, barely out of Lakeside High School, founded Microsoft, which exploded into the world's largest software company. Local theater groups nurtured plays that went east to become Broadway hits. Movie companies became common sights on city streets. Grunge Rock (forgive us) burst out of Seattle's little clubs and swept across the country.

And, without even trying, Seattle became, of all things, the coffee capital of America. Three young advertising people, with nothing more in mind than to create a better brew, founded a tiny coffee shop in the Pike Place Market called Starbucks. Now Starbucks shops are hop-scotching across the nation, along with several other Seattle specialty coffee roasters. Visitors are bewildered by the city's ubiquitous espresso stands; we have more espresso carts than cash machines, and some people wonder if Seattle's new prominence is nothing more than an outsized caffeine jag.

In short, Seattle has become a kind of "happening" — in food, in lifestyle, in the arts, in high tech, in ideas. For whatever reason, the magic glass slipper fits. In the national consciousness, Seattle is the belle of America's urban ball. Midnight seems far away.

— E. W.

DOWNTOWN



(Opposite) There she is, in all her glitzy glory, the once ugly, rain-soaked fishing and lumbering town, now voted by many national magazines as "America's most liveable city." The piers to the left of the jumbo ferry were once an honest, hard-working waterfront. Today they're a row of restaurants, bauble shops, T-shirt emporiums and tourist-catching souvenir places. The old working waterfront is now far south, along Harbor Island. On the right is the white peaked tower of the L.C. Smith Building, erected in 1914 as "the tallest building west of Chicago." The elegant old Smith Tower is dwarfed, but still proud, next to the black 76-story Columbia Center building, more than twice as tall as Seattle's signature Space Needle. Natives are sometimes wary of the great, intimidating skyscrapers that make up Seattle's skyline. But there it is, modernity run amok, the image somehow softened by Lake Washington and the Cascade Mountain range in the backgı
that "lies well in the arms of the land."

This NASA photo from space presents a dramatic view of how Seattle is pinched at the waist by water. Elliott Bay is on the right, Lake Washington on the left (note the floating bridge). Also shown is Lake Union (at bottom), which nestles close to downtown. This perspective is a dramatic demonstration of the water-oriented city Seattle is. The red-tinted sections are really the city's abundant greenery, no small reason Seattle calls itself the Emerald City.

Seattle's massive skyline, with Lake Washington in the background, then the Cascade mountain range shrouded in clouds some 60 miles away, is the city's statement of its greatness. The ancient image of the waterfront shows the city as it once was. From the dark line to the waterfront is the area destroyed by fire in 1889. The water and tidelands to the right are now completely filled and form the city's industrial area. Built upon this fill are much of Pioneer Square and Seattle's indoor stadium, the Kingdome.

The 42-story SMITH TOWER, built in 1914, was once America's tallest building west of Chicago. Though dwarfed today by modern skyscrapers, the pointed tower, visible on the right edge of downtown, maintains its regal dignity. In the earlier 1933 photograph, the Smith Tower rises unrivaled. The water in the background is Lake Washington.

Somewhere on an Alaska beach is the battered, abused remnant of the KALAKALA, the tear-shaped oddity shown here in 1935 along Seattle's waterfront. The Kalakala was designed by one of America's avant garde industrial designers, Norman Bel Geddes. It was the brain-child of Capt. Alex Peabody, head of the Black Ball Line, a private ferry company later bought by the State of Washington, which runs the Puget Sound ferry system. In her time and in her day, the Kalakala ("Flying Cloud") was world renowned. She was as much a Seattle symbol as the Space Needle is today.

The Kalakala was built over the burned-out hull of the crack San Francisco Bay ferry Peralta, launched in 1927. Capt. Peabody bought the hulk, had it towed to Seattle, and commissioned Bel Geddes, famed for his stage sets, to design something that would take Seattle into "the streamlined age." The Kalakala cruised at 15 knots and vibrated like a foot massager.

The contemporary view of Seattle's waterfront shows two modern ferries at the city's ferry terminal.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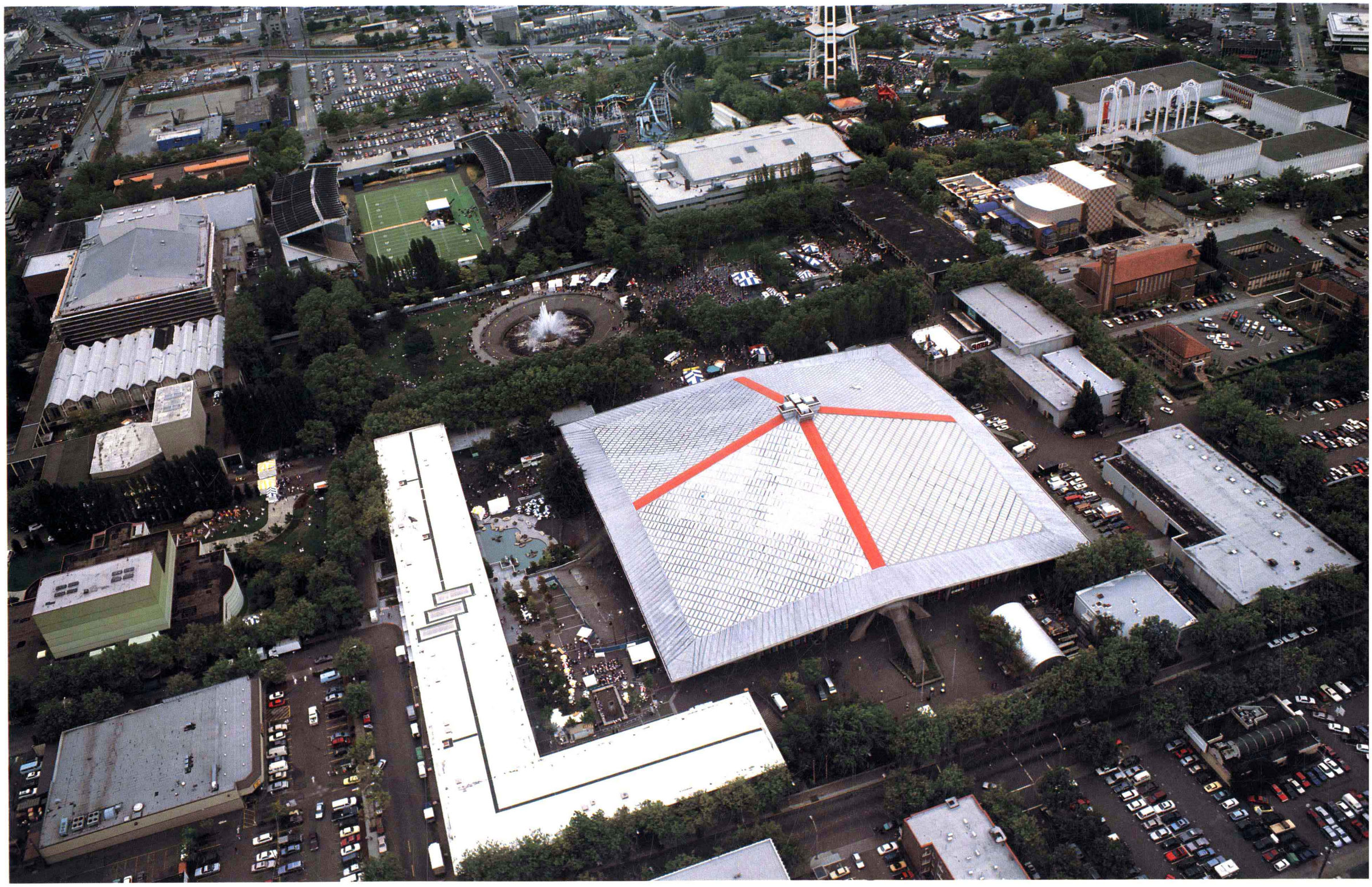
Trident Imports

That thing you are looking at is called a hyperbolic paraboloid concrete dome, and now don't you feel better for knowing that? THE KINGDOME, its official name (after King County), was conceived in controversy, perhaps a dozen lawsuits, and suggested alternatives that bordered on lunacy. One magnificent proposal was to build Seattle's covered stadium so it would float on Elliott Bay. Nobody thought to worry about seasick sports fans.

The Kingdome has hosted major league baseball and NFL football, paper airplane contests, car-wrecking extravaganzas and one record-breaking attendance (see Guinness Book of World Records) of 103,152 for a two-day Christmas party put on by the Boeing Co. Seattleites call it "the orange juice squeezer." The Rev. Billy Graham brought major league religion in 1976; the Reverend still holds the single-event Kingdome attendance record of 74,000 souls, saved and unsaved.



SEATTLE CENTER. Here you see the site of the World's Fair in 1962. In the center is the Coliseum, home to trade shows, circuses and Seattle's NBA SuperSonics; nearby is a carnival-like Fun Forest. In the upper far right are spindly legs that go up to become the Space Needle. A bit further to the right are the spirals of the Pacific Science Center, designed by Minouro Yamasaki. Off to the left of the Coliseum is the greenish yellow Bagley Wright Theatre and beyond that the white-roofed brick Opera House; next to that, High School Memorial Stadium. Between the stadium and the Coliseum is the great Center fountain. The Coliseum holds one major distinction: it is the only such place in the world where an NBA basketball had to be postponed because of rain. The roof leaked.

SORRENTO HOTEL. This Italian Rennaissance hotel, desiged by Harlan Thomas, first dean at the University of Washington's architecture school, has been a Seattle landmark for 84 years. Its opening in 1909 coincided with the Alaska-Yukon Exposition. Thomas also designed the Corner Public Market Building in the city's famed Pike Place Market. The seven-story Sorrento was given a $4.5 million facelift in 1981. Each room is designed differently, and the Sorrento now ranks among the best of Seattle's small luxury hotels.

Since 1924, when it opened, THE OLYMPIC HOTEL has been Seattle's grand dame of social gatherings, and boosters claimed it as "bigger and more important than the Klondike Gold Rush." The Olympic was originally built on public subscription — a fund-raiser involving 3,000 rain-soaked patriots who raised the $5.5 million needed. Over the years, the Olympic has hosted six presidents, some kings and emperors and a few leftover dukes and duchesses. Where the Olympic sits today was once the University of Washington — indeed, the university still owns the property under the hotel.

In 1980, the Olympic, by then on the National Register of Historic Places, was given major surgery, both cosmetic and physical, by the Four Seasons of Toronto and Urban Investment of Chicago. The Olympic featured small rooms, some 756 of them, known as "Willy Loman rooms." The investors reduced the number of rooms to 451 and called it the Four Seasons Olympic. The operation took some $60 million and nearly two years to complete. It is once again Seattle's most elegant hotel.

(Opposite) Mark Tobey, the late great artist, called the PIKE PLACE MARKET "the soul of Seattle." The city saved its soul in 1971 when citizens rose up in righteous balloting, voting to save the ratty, run-down public market from developers. The Market, spread along Seattle's downtown, attracts millions of visitors, native and tourist, each year. It is a Rabelasian strip of vegetable stands, fish markets, shops and restaurants, each approved by a Market Historical Commission. The soul of Seattle is now regarded by its citizens as hallowed ground.


MARKET PARKING
PUBLIC MARKET PARKING