



BY ANGELA HAWN • PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOZEF VANVEENEN

This Tyrannosaurus rex, found in Montana, and Giganotosaurus, located in Argentina, currently reside at RCI Trenton but are destined for the 'Ultimate Dinosaurs, Giants from Gondwana' exhibit at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.

WHERE 'T-REX STILL REIGNS

Trenton company keeps dinosaur age alive



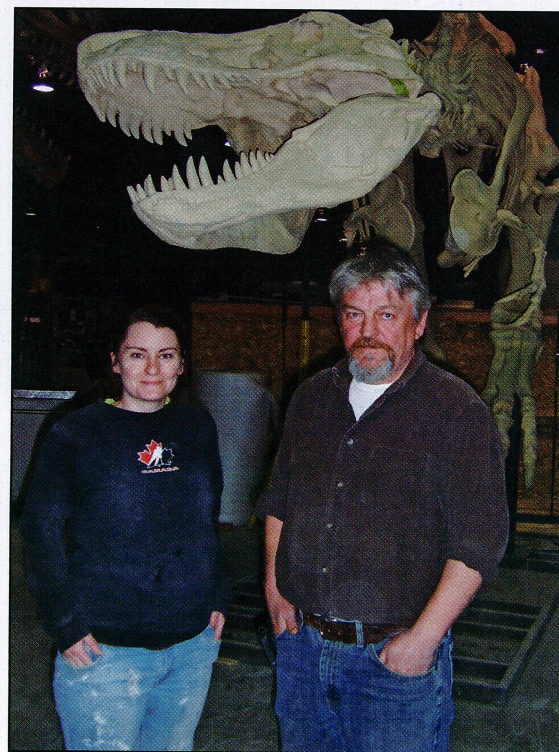
If you've seen the first Jurassic Park movie, you've already seen Peter May's artistic genius with dinosaurs in action. No, his Hastings County-based company, Research Casting International (RCI) did not make the crazed, people-hunting carnivores that run amok, causing the film's mad scientists to rue the day they toyed with dino-DNA. Which ones were Peter's? He smiles and describes a scene near the end of the movie where the 'born again' dinosaurs go berserk and trample a bunch of skeletons near the park's entrance.

"The dinosaurs that got smashed - those were ours," he says, the grin growing wider. He can tell I'm impressed.

For non-film buffs, RCI's handiwork is readily on view in a 'see it at your own pace' venue only two hours away. Head to the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto and go straight to the palaeontology section. This is where Peter got his start back in 1977. Almost 20 years later he would go on to co-edit a book about the subject (Vertebrate Palaeontological Techniques: Volume 1) with Patrick Leiggi, outlining the entire fossil preparation process from collection to conservation.

Peter reckons there are only three other companies world-wide who do similar work and Trenton's RCI is the biggest of the lot. So what exactly does RCI do? Its website promises a "complete suite of world class museum services." These include fossil cleaning, restoration and exhibit relocation. Are your specimens still in the field? RCI can collect them for you. Equipped to chisel these fragile bits of history from their surrounding rock matrix, RCI craftspeople can mount the finished product on a custom-made armature in the location of your choice. Missing some parts? In partnership with DINOLAB, a company begun by Peter's late friend Jim Madsen, RCI has access to over 170 specimens for casting purposes. Only the identification plaque in front of the exhibit can distinguish the real from the 'fake.' Need a dinosaur but have no original bones? RCI can mold and cast an entire specimen for you in a variety of materials. How does bronze sound?

If a project requires a particular environment, RCI can build it for you. And it doesn't just work in palaeontology, either. The company's experience in custom exhibit fabrication runs the gamut from archaeology to zoology. Peter gestures to-



Peter May and daughter Amelia have been working together for the past 13 years. Photo Angela Hawn



Peter points out fossil impressions on the wall-sized mold taken from Mistaken Point, NL. RCI's work represents the largest fossil cast of its kind and displays 4,700 species killed when their deep sea environment was doused with volcano ash.



A close up of one of the fossils found on the massive wall shows the incredible clarity of the imprint.

ward the beginnings of a 'cave' destined eventually for Ottawa's Museum of Nature.

Still, it's the dinosaurs that loom large within the RCI facility. The company's achievements in that department read like a Mesozoic era 'Who's Who.' Among its most famous 'clients' is 'Sue', the largest and most complete T-Rex ever found. RCI has molded, cast and mounted several 'Sue' replicas. According to its website, RCI has worked on 21 T-Rex and over 20 Sauropod skeletons (including five Diplodocus, one Apatosaurus and three Barosaurus, one of which rears up in a frightful five-storey tall defensive pose within New York's American Museum of Natural History.) And there seems to be a never-ending line-up of dinosaurs to come. Peter shows off pieces of a fossilized Alamosaurus skeleton, still encased in rock matrix and the plaster 'jacket' used to remove a specimen safely from the field. The RCI team has been chipping away at this particular dinosaur for over a year.

It seems a peculiar business for a fine arts graduate who started out as a sculptor. Peter shrugs when I ask what first led him to the ROM.

"I had no idea about palaeontology or dinosaurs," he claims, but decided to apply to a Globe and Mail newspaper advertisement for a Vertebrate Palaeontological Technician anyway. New boss Gord Gyrmov was reassuring; Peter had what the ROM was looking for. To this day, a

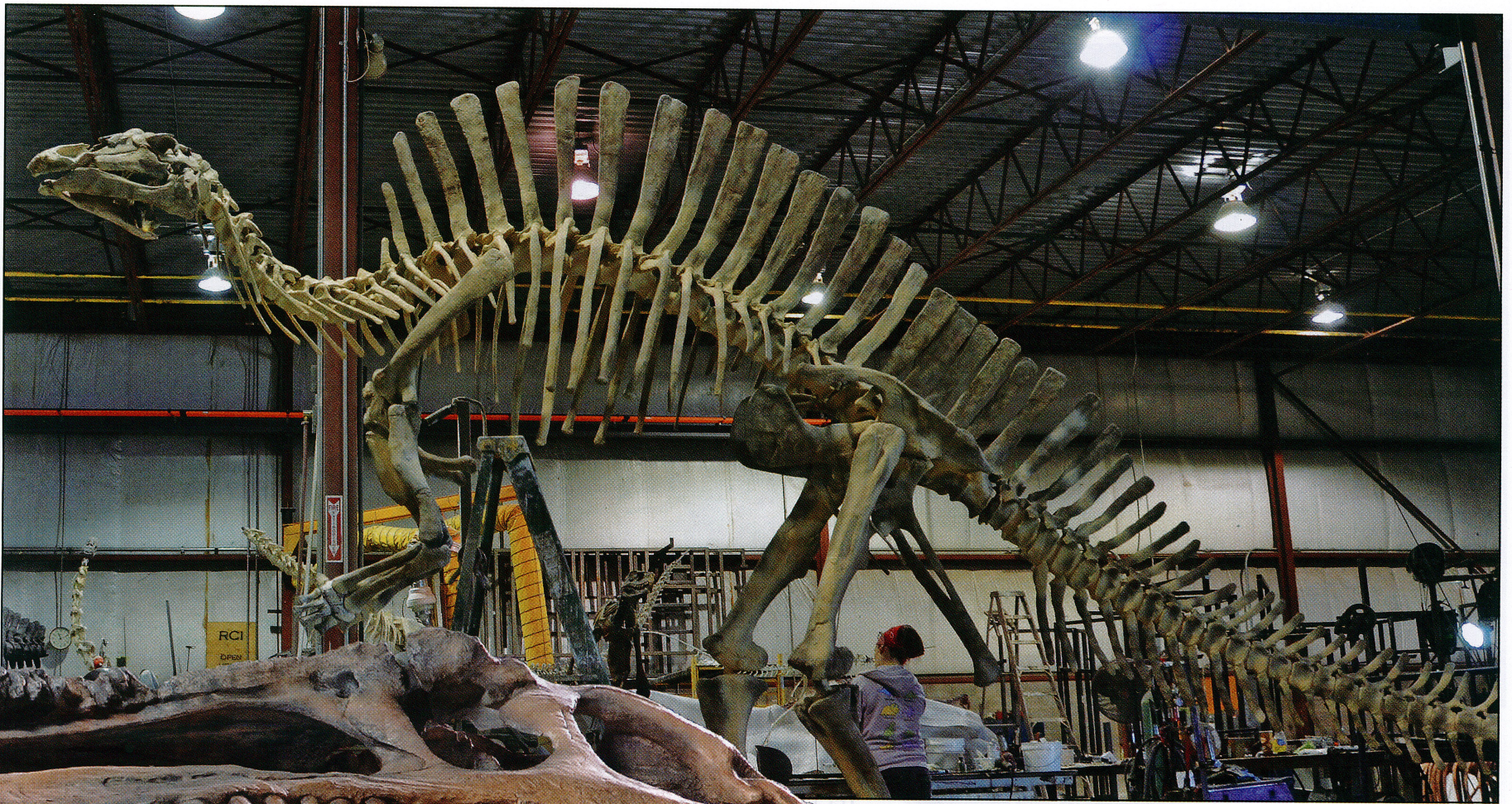
strong working relationship continues between the museum and the company Peter went on to open in 1987.

But the path between the ROM and setting up shop in Trenton five years ago was by no means a straight one. There were a couple of interesting forks along the way.

While on a month-long internship at the British Museum of Natural History in 1980, Peter encountered the earth sciences curator for the Provincial Museum of Alberta. Phil Currie was looking for someone to help set up a brand new museum in the Canadian West and Peter fit the bill. Newly married and used to Toronto as home base, he and wife Teresa initially hesitated to make the move. But Currie's generous salary offer eventually convinced them to head for Alberta's fossil-rich badlands and Peter spent the next few years running the extensive field program for what would later become the world renowned Royal Tyrell Museum in Drumheller.

Summer of '85 saw the Mays, now with two young kids in tow, back in Toronto and Peter resumed work with the ROM. Around the same time, the beginnings of RCI started to evolve. Pe-





An Ouranosaurus, found in Niger, Africa, will also find a home at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, as part of the 'Ultimate Dinosaurs, Giants from Gondwana' exhibit.



ter rented some space just outside Toronto's Princes' Gates and spent evenings developing his own molding, casting and mounting business. During the day, he continued to work at the ROM.

Word in the museum world spread fast and calls started to come in from places as far flung as Japan. From there, Peter says, things snowballed. He had to hire a crew to run things for him during the day. Soon business was going so well, Peter was able quit his own day job.

Constant expansion prompted the first of a series of moves. For a while, the team operated out of the old Planter's Peanut Factory at Bathurst and Dupont. Next RCI relocated to Oakville and then to Beamsville, where they stayed put for 10 years. When the company outgrew that facility, Peter started looking eastward, where a 45 000 square foot building was available on the Bay of Quinte. Hastings County also appealed to both Peter and his staff on a personal level. When he polled his employees, 80 percent of them decided to follow the company to Trenton.

"The cost of living was lower and the quality of life higher," explains Peter. "When you live here, you're not tied so much to the city."

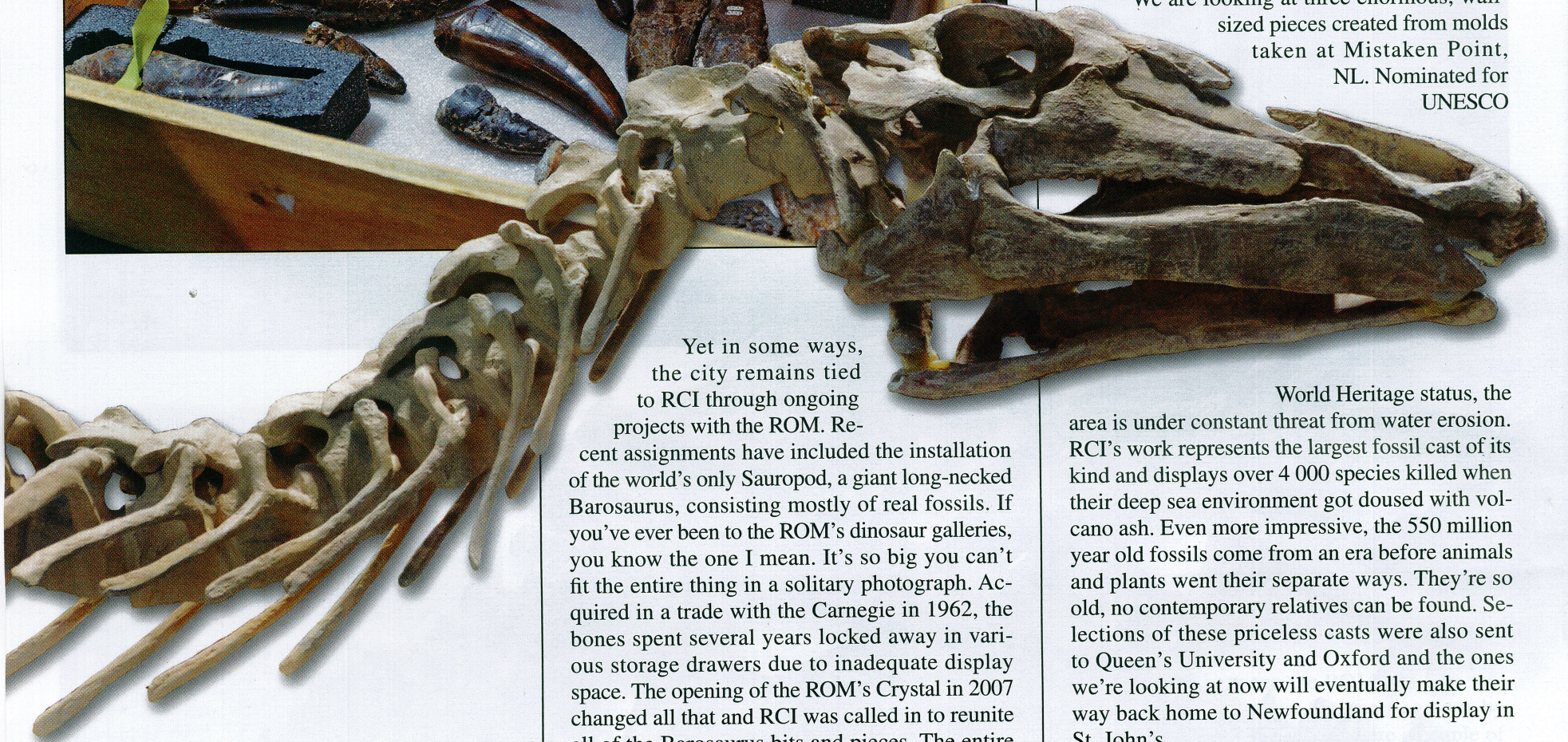


RCI's collection of dinosaur teeth includes one from one of the largest T-rex's ever found in East End, SK.

skeleton measures 27 metres in length and the actual animal, when alive, probably weighed in at 15 tonnes.

Peter proudly points out casts identical to another series of incredible ROM installations.

We are looking at three enormous, wall-sized pieces created from molds taken at Mistaken Point, NL. Nominated for UNESCO



Yet in some ways, the city remains tied to RCI through ongoing projects with the ROM. Recent assignments have included the installation of the world's only Sauropod, a giant long-necked Barosaurus, consisting mostly of real fossils. If you've ever been to the ROM's dinosaur galleries, you know the one I mean. It's so big you can't fit the entire thing in a solitary photograph. Acquired in a trade with the Carnegie in 1962, the bones spent several years locked away in various storage drawers due to inadequate display space. The opening of the ROM's Crystal in 2007 changed all that and RCI was called in to reunite all of the Barosaurus bits and pieces. The entire

World Heritage status, the area is under constant threat from water erosion. RCI's work represents the largest fossil cast of its kind and displays over 4 000 species killed when their deep sea environment got doused with volcano ash. Even more impressive, the 550 million year old fossils come from an era before animals and plants went their separate ways. They're so old, no contemporary relatives can be found. Selections of these priceless casts were also sent to Queen's University and Oxford and the ones we're looking at now will eventually make their way back home to Newfoundland for display in St. John's.



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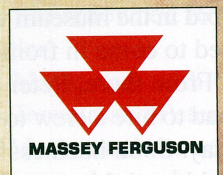
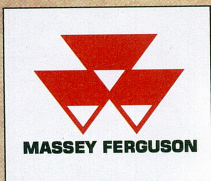


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This original fossil Duck Billed dinosaur from Alberta will be part of a museum collection in the future.



A close up of the Duck Billed specimen shows the rare fossil find of dinosaur skin; a pebbly texture of a Hadrosaurus, identifiable in the middle right side of the photograph.

Then there's RCI's latest project for the ROM. 'Ultimate Dinosaurs: Giants from Gondwana' features some dinosaurs that usually don't get much press up here. Slated to open June 23, the exhibit showcases dinosaurs from Madagascar, Africa and South America. Peter explains these dinosaurs from south of the equator took entirely different evolutionary paths from their northern counterparts. Included in the show is the largest ever meat-eating dinosaur, aptly named the Gigantosaurus, as well as one of the largest land animals to walk the earth, the 85-foot long Futalognkosaurus.

You'd think all these museum projects would keep Peter busy enough, but about four years

ago RCI diversified and got into an interesting sideline as part of its cement and concrete work: playground construction. Of course, these aren't just any kind of playgrounds. RCI's sister company, Exploration Playgrounds specializes in kid-sized 'dinosaur and archaeological digs.' Imagination stations like the one at Batawa Ski Hill incorporate structures made from casts of real fossils. If you want to crawl inside a dinosaur egg or make 'rubblings' of ancient fossil forms or perhaps just give a baby dinosaur a hug, this is the place for you. More of their dinosaur handiwork can be spotted at Trenton's Centennial Park. And if dinosaurs aren't what make you tick, Exploration Playgrounds does

custom work to make the playground of your dreams.

"But museum overhaul is still the biggest part of the job," Peter says, explaining an 'overhaul' involves going into a museum, dismantling specimens, getting rid of the aging adhesive holding things together, making repairs as part of the conservation process and then remounting everything. It can be a lengthy process, often done on site. One job for a German

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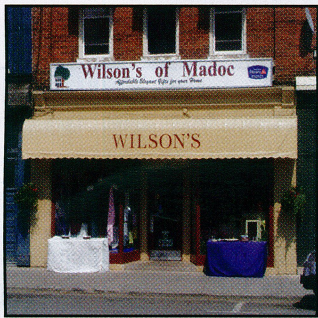
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Isobel and Maddie experience just how large a dinosaur egg is at the Batawa Ski Hill Imagination Station created by RCI. For the past four years, RCI's sister company, Exploration Playgrounds has specialized in kid-sized "dinosaur and archaeological digs."



Known as a Mosasaur (platecarpus) dinosaur and discovered in Oklahoma the skeleton will be part of the Perot Museum of Science and Nature, in Dallas, Texas.

museum lasted two years. Members of Peter's team (along with their families) actually picked up and moved overseas until the job was done.

This is starting to sound like the coolest company in the world. Dinosaurs AND travel opportunities? RCI's client roster lists customers from New Zealand to New York and the company's fame goes well beyond museum circles. Some recent projects were documented on the

History and Discovery channels. How can I get my resume to the top of the pile?

Although RCI's website notes it isn't hiring at the moment, the company does keep job applications on file for future reference. RCI looks for skills as diverse as blacksmithing and metal fabrication. There's even a foundry on site. Knowing your way around fossil preparation certainly couldn't hurt. Like Peter, several employees have



Discovered in Argentina, this Herrerasaurus skeleton will find a new home at the Royal Ontario Museum.



The RCI plant also has a foundry and gas furnace used to melt bronze. They can cast an entire specimen in the metal, allowing for a 'hands-on' experience when viewing.

a fine arts background. Of course, showcasing your flexibility is always a good idea. Peter introduces me to Stephen Lee, who recently got pulled off his regular job mounting specimens to fill a gap in the IT department. Be prepared for a steep and ever-growing learning curve. Peter points out what he calls the future of the business: a five-axis router, a 3D scanner, as well as

a 3D printer that looks like it came straight out of a Star Trek episode. Technology is bringing change to the way RCI does things.

As we make our way out of the fossil room, past shelves stacked high with bins of molds, Peter introduces one last employee. Her name is Amelia and she's Peter's daughter. While siblings Alex and Jaqueline pursued other interests (though both science-based!) Amelia has been working with her dad for the past 13 years.

What's it like to work with your father every day? Both Mays look at each other and shrug matter-of-factly.

"Amelia started 'fibreglassing' (casting specimens in fibreglass) for me when she was 16," says Peter, looking to his daughter for a nod of confirmation. Father and daughter chat briefly about some yardwork Amelia has waiting at her house in town and she heads off.

The place is starting to empty out. Anxious to get back to his own home in Warkworth, Peter has begun to make pointed references to the time and the amount of work still left to do. A load of Argentinean dinosaurs arrives tomorrow, along with a Cineplex film crew shooting footage for a ROM movie trailer. The RCI team are busy people; I am apologetically but firmly ushered to the door.

In my car and homeward-bound myself, I'm halfway there before I think to ask: did Peter ever get to meet Steven Spielberg? Next question: where can I get my hands on a copy of the movie Jurassic Park? ●

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