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## Special Feature



# Portland Perfected

By Mina Williams, editor

The interchange between the Rose City and the Emerald City gets lost in our day-to-day activities. Smugly in Seattle, I think chefs and restaurants in Seattle are on the cutting edge. Yet, those whispering in my ear tell me about the virtues of Portland. Besides some of the smartest operators I know, some of the most creative cooks to hit the kitchen festoon to PDX. I have vowed to make my twice-a-year exploration more often. I have vowed to dish up more, and more better, coverage of Portland.

This summer I planned a multi-day stay in the lovely river city, centered around the *Best of Oregon Food & Wine Festival*. With the Festival as the foundation for the trip, I sought to use my time wisely and get into the feel of the city. But first some housekeeping. During my stay NorthWest Stir added to our staff, securing Angie Jabine. I have long admired Angie's reporting, writing and editing prowess and NorthWest Stir is lucky, lucky, lucky that she has carved out some time to be our Portland Bureau Chief. You will notice as you read this issue that our coverage of Portland, it's restaurants and chefs has markedly stepped up.

Yet I still want to maintain my quarterly goal of haunting PDX. Next trip, this month for the Dundee Hills Winegrowers Association's "Showcase."

Despite the anticipation of this visit, I fondly reminisce on last June's expedition.



At the end of a dusty road, along the Thai coastline we found Pok Pok. Well, it seemed that way. Actually we were on SE Division and the wait for seating in the outdoor/indoor foodie magnet was an hour, so we took a trip to Paris. Caught me again, we stepped into Pix Patisserie just down the block for some sweet

appetizers. Oh, those macaroons. Life may be short - eat dessert first.

Returning to the wait at Pok Pok you start getting into the joint's vibe and all spirit of anxious disappears. The whiskey helps. Finally seated, the decision to venture with a colleague and his spouse meant FOUR main dishes to share alongside special sides. Prawn clay pot, fish sauce chicken wings, grilled boar collar meat rubbed with spicy spices and soy



### SEATECH



Premium Crab Meat



and a charcoal rotisserie roasted hen scented with lemongrass and garlic. Plenty to eat. And plenty of flavors juxtaposition in the mouth. A hallmark of classic Thai cuisine.

Even though I'm not fond of firey food, the boar satisfied by soul. Spicy goodness, balanced and flavorful. And the clay pot with those delightful glass noodles. Chicken wings prepared in a way I have been trying to duplicate at home for weeks have become part of my food memory chamber as that roasted chicken has.

The noisy, carefree clientele provided the entertainment for the evening as I tried my best to figure out the servers line of march. Pok Pok has several kitchens, located on several levels, in several buildings on the property. How they pull a ticket together seamlessly is like trying to deconstruct Swan Lake.



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Seattle's Pike Place Market and Vancouver's Granville Island have their own stationary charm. Portland's Farmers Markets offer up a Euro-appeal of the one-day market where artisans and farmers, butchers and bakers converge for a window of time and fold up their tents and steal away into the afternoon as silently as they arrived that morning.

Assortment is another distinctive quality of Portland's Farmers Markets. Pate from Chop, the butchery & charcuterie on NW 21st Ave., olives and olive oil from Victory Estates, garlic scapes from Allium Acre, mouthwatering street food

options and ever constant is the lilt of music. Street performers - a harpist, a violin duo, a classical guitarist each provide a backdrop for their section of the market.



Ever since opening week, Nostrana has been a target of my desires. Plenty of perfectly prepared Italian country food. Pizza, antipasti, salad, honest and pure ingredients. If you can tear yourself away from the pizza hot and bubbly out of the traditional brick oven the best deal in town is the flight of 3 small plates (\$12) for

lunch. Just want to nibble, go for \$5 each then.

As you push back from what could be Nona's table the panna cotta arrives. It's so light, just a bit couldn't hurt. It's so good, you finish the plate. The secret? Nancy's yogurt, not too much gelatin and just the right amount of lemon. Gotta get that recipe!

Another scene Cathy Whims has crafted at Nostrana is late night happy hour. Nostrana offers Campari and soda at a rate that lowers the gate of entry for 20-somethings. Cathy says she loves watching the faces of guests sipping their first Campari beverage. Molto beni!

In short, Nostrana is my first stop when I'm in PDX. The good food, the comfortable service and you just never know who else will be in the house...it's always someone interesting. This trip I was introduced to a food journalist from Rome who is visiting for a few months.



How often do you go to a newly opened spot (1 week) and everything clicks. Cocktails are balanced, service is homey, food is inspiring. That happened at **Beaker & Flask**. The barman has amassed a vintage collection of glassware, shakers and cocktail trinkets which makes imbibing take on a cool cast as I sipped my "Chimney Sweep" a Scotch, Ramazzotti, Punt E Mes and Oregon Ouzo concoction.

The season's darling - deviled eggs - came out for apps alongside a plated pretzel, mustard dipping alongside, with the cutest mini-stein of beer to chase away the thirsties both delivered by Benny Bettinger, chef

(pictured above).

For entree - beef, of course! Teres Major with caramelized Endive and Onions Agrodolce. The muscle, cut for tenderness and grilled for flavor, was one of the more succulent pieces I've encountered. With **Beaker & Flask's** open kitchen I watched, and learned, how to handle this potentially tough and dry piece of flesh. Good job Kevin Ludwig...should be - his pedigree includes Wildwood and Paley's Place.

Then, for me a re-deux, Panna Cotta...but with bruleed apricots. Great stuff, but Nostrana has you beat.



Yes, I'm in lust with Moonstruck's spicy hot chocolate....but honestly have you ever seen any chocolate shop owner so cute?! That's Elizabeth Montes of **Sahagun** on NW 16th.

Truffles are made uses hormone-free Oregon cream infused with fresh herbs, some of which she grows herself. She uses single origin chocolate. Everything is

hand-dipped and decorated to perfection.

But it is summer for this visit and the woman MADE me chilly chocolate sorbet to order in her Pacojet. It was based on Costa Rican DeVries 77%, served in a shot glass. My sidekick treated himself to a Chile Limon, lemon juice, soda and cayenne...the summer version of spicy hot chocolate.

With all the eating, and the chocolate, I had to have a place to rest my weary head.

Just a few blocks from Sahagun is the **Hotel de Luxe**. I vote the most friendly staff in the Rose City. Classic,



elegant, with old movie shots adorning the hall and room walls (the one outside my door, oddly was the lady who lived across the street from me in New York - Katharine Hepburn). Maybe that's what caused me to believe I was in New York. Or was it the walk-in closet, tiled bath or impossibly high ceilings and large windows only a pre-war building can wear?

The hotel's bar, The Driftwood Room, is now my favorite hang, meet the girls and Scotch sipping spot. It's like Trader Vic's without all the tiki trash. It is dark and sultry, cozey with out of the way corners.

For another night I shifted to the more modern **Hotel Lucia**. Conveniently located by the Pearl and the herbal infused cocktails at Saucebox. Again, the hotel's staff is fantastic in dispensing advice on what hip spots to go to and what events or activities can keep you amused, and more importantly: How to precisely get there!

The Lucia is in the thick of the city, perfect for a stroll on a restless night to a must-do - Voodoo Doughnut. For best results, go late (or early) for front row seats of the Portland night-crawling clubbin' freak show.

Who says a strip of bacon ontop of a maple bar isn't a balanced breakfast?

Portland, for me, is a manageable city with pockets and outposts that transcend space making you feel you could be somewhere else. The Italian countryside, Thailand, Paris, New York. Click heels three times - There's no place like Portland.



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Industry news of the Northwest for culinary professionals

