

Getaway Guide



The White Stag sign—a logo for a now-defunct sportswear store—sits atop a building at the foot of the Burnside Bridge, connecting south Portland to Old Town and Downtown



*Once a rough-edged logging town, **PORTLAND** has become a model of enlightened city-making with plenty of lessons for our own planners.*

BY CHARLES MONTGOMERY

PROCESSION OF SHADOWY FIGURES trudged up through the forest of Portland's northwest hills. The broad hull of a late-winter storm glowed incandescent orange, reflecting the streetlights of downtown. In the dim light, I couldn't see the faces of the crowd assembled on the summit, but I could make out the shape of their bizarre fleet: a battalion of kids' bikes with banana seats and fat pinkish tires; a custom-welded 10-speed on stilts; a skateboard; a Wal-Mart cruiser with a ghetto blaster strapped to its rack. A tall fellow leaned toward me and introduced himself as Solid Gold, apparently a reference to the colour of his bike. "We're all refugees from America," he said. "From the economy, the war, the insanities of American politics. Twenty years ago we would have moved to San Francisco. Now this is the place."

Freezing rain blew sideways. Beer cans crunched. Then someone shouted: "Zoobomb!" The people responded: "Zoobomb!" And we were off, dozens of tail-lights streaking red through the night, careening onto a winding road, arcing from shoulder to centre line, now blinded by oncoming headlights, now squinting into the approaching murk, shivering with cold euphoria as

John Clark

we plunged down the mountain toward the sparkling stars of downtown, where microbrews and music awaited.

It's tempting to write off Zoobomb, the suicidal Sunday night ritual, as a counterculture convulsion, a Day-Glo smiley face pinned to Portland's organic-fibre lapel. Bones have been broken. Bikes have been trashed. But the Zoobomb is not actually counter to the civic culture. The riders are bureaucrats, baristas, businesspeople, and urban planners. And the more time you spend in Portland, the more you realize that the Zoobombers and their weekly race are part of the culture that has transformed it into a North American poster city for good, green living.

Portland feels in some ways like a little sister to Vancouver. It's got the rain, the fir-clad hills, the sadly familiar legions of homeless wandering its Old Town. There are no kick-ass sports franchises and no starchitecture. But unlike Vancouver, Portland has eschewed world-class pretensions to embrace a distinctly local and convivial form of soulful urbanity. If you come for a weekend, you won't leave raving about the views or the museums (unless you happen to hit the Vacuum Museum, a temple to everyone's favourite home appliance). But chances are you will have eaten well. You will have imbibed well, thanks to the city's magnificent brew pubs. You will have socialized with strangers and wandered the few blocks back to your hotel, thanks to the dense walkable downtown. You will, at the insistence of the locals, have ridden the light-rail, or the streetcar. You may have skinned your knee on a bike trail. And you will, at some point, have imagined yourself living here.

PORTLAND IS HIP. In the last few years, *Men's Journal* declared it the best place to live in America, *Outside* named it one of the country's new dream towns, and *Monster.com* called it one of the 10 best places to work. Hell, Portland is even the best place to have a baby, according to *Fit Pregnancy Magazine*. All of this, while the city bucked national trends and shrunk its carbon footprint in the last 15 years, proving that sustainability can actually make city life more pleasant.

How did Portland get here? Some credit the urban-growth boundary that put a corset on sprawl. Others say it was the decades-long influx of a demographic that Portlander—and *Fight Club* author—Chuck Palahniuk has characterized as “fugitives and refugees.” Everyone you meet seems to have come from somewhere else. And all have come looking for the kind of city that is getting harder to find in North America: a place where you are more likely to play than work; walk than sit in traffic; make music, build things, monkey-wrench the sidewalks, and hang out with neighbours rather than sprawling at home watching the tube. The people who search for that kind of place just happen to be the sort of people who end up building better cities.

Take Hindi Iserhott. I met the green-eyed urban activist on a morning when the skies were as muddy as the Willamette, the river that runs through the heart of the city. “I had an idea in my head about how people could live, how people should live,” the 32-year-old Iowa transplant told me as we followed a cycle trail along the east bank of the Willamette, away from downtown. “When I got here, I saw it” CONTINUED ON PAGE 68



Due South

ONLY 50 MINUTES by air from Vancouver, Portland has emerged from its fleece-lined cocoon as a vibrant, cosmopolitan centre. The city is divided into quadrants by the Willamette River (running north-south) and Burnside Street (running east-west), but it's best explored as a series of neighbourhoods, each organized around strolls of arty shops and destination dining rooms.—*Rebecca Philips*

DOWNTOWN

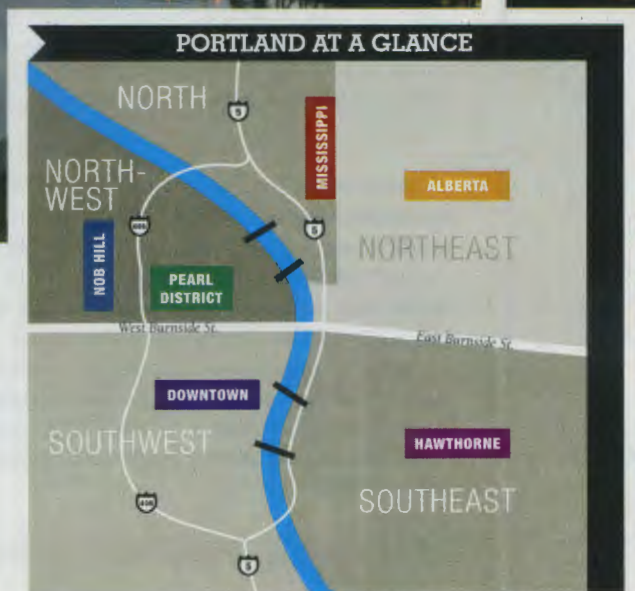
Office blocks are studded with cinemas, performing-arts centres, and high-end department stores; what makes it unique is the abundance of green space, where you'll often find nine-to-fivers sipping coffee and tossing a bocce ball.

► **Portland Saturday Market**, tucked under the north end of the Burnside bridge, runs March 1 to December 24 and features typical fare (jams, jellies, jewellery) and a crash course in the local craft movement that moves well beyond kitsch. Portlandsaturdaymarket.com

► Belly up to the bar alongside thirty-something suits at **Southpark Seafood Grill and Wine Bar** (901 SW Salmon St., 503-326-



The Hawthorne Bridge, one of several across the Willamette River, connecting North and South Portland; Doug Fir Lounge, a too-cool-for-school live-music venue; the MAX Light Rail



Clockwise from right: Basil Childers (x2); Bruce Foster; Map: Taryn Dufault

1300); refuel with shared seafood plates and wines by the glass before hitting up the deep discounts at **Nordstrom Rack** (245 SW Morrison St., 503-299-1815).

► Spend an afternoon taking in the impressive collection of photographs, and three separate galleries dedicated to the arts of China, Japan, and Korea at the **Portland Art Museum** (1219 SW Park Ave., 503-226-2811. portlandartmuseum.org). June to September the museum features the Contemporary Northwest Art Awards, which recognize emerging artists living in the Northwest.

► At **Cacao** (414 SW 13th Ave., 503-241-0656. cacaodrinkchocolate.com) find more than 150 pure, artisanal chocolate bars from around the world, and confections displayed like precious jewels in glass cases. Order a shot of the decadent drinking chocolate infused with chili; Hershey's will never taste the same.

► Large recliners, loveseats, full bar menu, luxury nibbles—all moviegoing experiences should be as civilized as that at **Living Room Theaters** (341 SW 10th Ave., 971-222-2010. livingroomtheaters.com). There's also live

jazz in the café/lobby area on Friday and Saturday evenings, and a hopping happy-hour scene.

PEARL DISTRICT

Think Yaletown: Originally an industrial zone, the Pearl sees warehouses reimagined as high-end galleries, clothing boutiques, and home-décor shops.

► You haven't done Portland until you've visited **Powell's City of Books** (1005 W Burnside St., 503-228-4651. powells.com). The world's largest independent bookstore (68,000 square feet; so big that it provides maps) now has five satellite locations in the city, and is renowned for an extensive collection of rare and out-of-print titles.

► Housed in a former garage, **Park Kitchen** (422 NW Eighth Ave., 503-223-7275. parkkitchen.com), with its cozy nooks and crannies all facing an open kitchen, attracts serious foodies with dishes like lamb tartare with

spiced chickpeas and mint, and nettle fettuccini with cardoncello mushrooms and shaved goat cheese.

► Local designer **Michelle Decourcy's** girly boutique (916 NW Flanders St., 503-227-2971. michelledecourcy.com) is stocked with flirty frocks, in step with fashion's seasonal love affair with all things floral.

► Look no further than **Teardrop** (1015 NW Everett St., 503-445-8109. teardroplounge.com), for hands down, the city's best cocktails; every expert pour is a brilliant balance of flavours. Mixers (tonic water, liqueurs, bitters) are made daily in-house, and Coca-Cola is imported from Mexico (where cane sugar is used to sweeten). Ask to sample the highly aromatic, locally made Aviation gin, with its top notes of cardamom, lavender, sarsaparilla, and dried orange peel.

► **Hive** (820 NW Glisan St., 503-242-1967. hive-modern.com) carries Foscarini lamps, the limited-edition Eames plywood elephant, and many more emblematic modern designs for the home.

► Hop on the MAX Light Rail blue line to Washington Park

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 66 actually happening.”

Iserhott led me to an intersection in Selwood, a middle-class neighbourhood six kilometres from the city centre. The asphalt had been painted in extravagant whorls, blue and red and yellow, arcing out from the manhole at the centre of the intersection. “A few years ago, a little boy was hit by a car here,” she explained. “He recovered, but the neighbours decided they needed to change how their streets worked.”

The city’s transportation department wouldn’t do anything, so the neighbours turned the intersection into a plaza, complete with that painted pavement, a children’s playhouse on one corner, and a gazebo on another. It’s got a slightly hippie-dippie, homemade feel to it, but the new plaza has slowed down cars—and radically changed the personality of the neighbourhood. “The action brought together neighbours who had never even spoken before. Now these people talk to each other. They’ve created a different kind of community.” The redesign has spawned a movement dubbed City Repair. Volunteers have helped “reclaim” 90 sites around Portland; dozens more will get to work this spring. Portland’s citizens are reinventing the entire city.

They’ve even seized the reins of power, if Rex Burkholder is any example. The wiry 52-year-old Metro councillor joined me for a pint at a microbrew-and-pizza joint on Mississippi Avenue, one of Portland’s up-and-coming high streets. (And the first place I’ve seen a stormwater planter, a kind of sidewalk swamp designed to absorb drain water and ease pressure on the city’s sewers. Such hallmarks of conspicuous green urbanism are everywhere in Portland.) Burkholder peeled off his drenched biking togs, settled into his pint of oat stout, and outlined the trajectory that brought him to Portland. It began in a landscape of teen angst, amid the suburbs of Pittsburgh: “We had nowhere to go but the 7-Eleven, and nothing happened there but drinking, fighting, and sex—and I never got that lucky.”

He settled in Portland in 1980, just as a new network of freeways threatened to turn the city into a familiar patchwork of parking lots and strip malls. Burkholder fought the freeways, championed a new light-rail network, and eventually joined the establishment as a councillor of Portland’s new and powerful regional government. He’s convinced that changing the way people get around is what changed the soul of Portland.

Just look at downtown, he said, where never-to-be finished stubs protrude from the aging downtown freeway loop like so many severed limbs, and inner-city neighbourhoods like Mississippi are filling up with ex-suburbanites. The light-rail eases along downtown streets at a convivial speed, then whips out to select suburbs, making Vancouver’s SkyTrain seem brutal and alienating in comparison. While our own city hall dithered over widening the Burrard Bridge, Portland renovated four of its main river crossings to make room for bikes. Meanwhile its city centre is sprouting Yaletown-like development, with new condos clustered around the route of a new streetcar line.

“People come here because they want something different. They don’t always know what they want, just that it’s about walking, about knowing people. That’s the kind of city we’re building.”

The downside? Well, says Burkholder, the bike lanes are getting pretty darn crowded. CONTINUED ON PAGE 70



The Robert Evans sculpture mall at the Portland Art Museum

Station, where Bus 63 (which runs only once an hour) takes you to the **International Rose Test Garden** (400 SW Kingston Ave., 503-823-3636. Rosegardenstore.com); on a clear day, the view of downtown and Mount Hood from the hillside garden is spectacular.

NOB HILL

Centered on NW 23rd Avenue, Nob Hill, also known as the alphabet district (for the cross-streets), is ground zero for established Portland designers, and chic restaurateurs and café owners.

► **Blush Beauty Bar** (513 NW 23 Ave., 503-227-3390. Theblushbeautybar.com) stocks cult-status makeup and skin-care lines (many unavailable in Vancouver), like smudge-proof, ultra-thick Eyeko mascara.

► Local tastemakers Kathryn Towers and Holly Stalder offer up a carefully edited selection of indie fashion labels at their **Seaplane** shop (827 NW 23rd Ave., 503-234-2409. E-seaplane.com).

► Dishes like juniper-rubbed roast quail with house-made sauerkraut, and a fish stew crammed with catalan, shellfish, monkfish, mussels, squid, Alaskan spot prawns, and Manila clams make **23Hoyt Restaurant and Bar** (529 NW 23rd Ave., 503-445-7400. 23Hoyt.com) a local favourite.

ALBERTA

On the last Thursday evening of the month, galleries and studios on NE Alberta Street open their doors to display new works by established and emerging artists; restaurants, bars, and clothing boutiques all do double duty displaying artwork on their walls.

► Beach babe meets prairie-girl chic at **Tumbleweed** (1812 NE Alberta, 503-335-3100. Tumbleweedboutique.com); the focus is casual dresses, but you’ll also find cute cardigans, stockings, and locally designed accessories.

► Travel in style with fuchsia crocodile-skin carry-on luggage from the sunshine yellow **Mabel and Zora Boutique** (1468 NE Alberta, 503-335-6169. Mabelandzora.com).

► Order the ploughman’s lunch, or a crusty baguette sandwich, and a glass of locally produced Pinot Gris, at **Foster and Dobbs** (2518 NE 15th Ave., 503-284-1157. Fosteranddobbs.com), a gourmet deli featuring European and American farmstead cheese, cured meats, craft beer, wine, and fine groceries.

HAWTHORNE

Hawthorne, the city’s original alt ’hood, has kept its quirky

charm despite a slow march toward gentrification. (Think Commercial Drive, Starbucks included.)

► **Local35** (3556 SE Hawthorne Blvd., 503-963-8200. Local35.com) was recently recognized by *GQ* magazine as one of the best men's stores in America; they carry tailored, street-inspired clothing from labels like Umbro by Kim Jones, Nudie, and J.Lindeberg.

► Chris Tsefalas has spent over 40 years amassing his collection of fine fragrances at **The Perfume House** (3328 SE Hawthorne Blvd., 503-234-5375. Theperfumehouse.com). It's one of the few fragrance shops in the world to carry Le Vainqueur, a scent commissioned by Napoleon and Josephine.

MISSISSIPPI

Once the city's light-manufacturing centre, Mississippi Avenue is now home to young professionals and start-up shops.

► Go for breakfast at **Gravy** (3957 N Mississippi Ave., 503-287-8800) and load up on hearty portions of scrambles, omelettes, and challah French toast. Locals love the Sweet Bowls, an oatmeal brûlée with bananas and pecans, or brown sugar and berries.

► Portland, and especially Mississippi Avenue, is crowded with vintage/antique/knick-knack shops. Bypass the rest and head straight to **Flutter** (3948 N Mississippi Ave., 503-288-1649. Flutterclutter.com) for a stylish, if eclectic, collection of antique French vanities, luxurious soaps, vintage jewellery, art books, and reworked costumes.

► Mismatched china, gilded artwork, chandeliers, pink wallpaper—**Lovely Hula Hands** (4057 N Mississippi Ave., 503-445-9910. Lovelyhulahands.com) is just the right mix of ladylike parlour and '70s bordello, but the menu is totally modern—American slow food highlighting local ingredients.

► **Mississippi Studios** (3939 N Mississippi Ave., 503-288-3895. Mississippistudios.com), a tiny recording studio and music hall on the site of a former church, offers wine by the glass, local brews by the bottle, and an intimate setting to catch local singer-songwriters and jazz musicians.

Listen UP

Portland's vibrant live music scene is legendary. Three hot spots:

► Blink and you could mistake the **Crystal Ballroom** (1332 W Burnside St., 503-225-0047. Mcmenamins.com) for our own Commodore ► **Doug Fir Lounge** (at the Jupiter Hotel, 830 E Burnside, 503-231-9663. Dougfirlounge.com) hosts bands most nights in its lumberjack-meets-club-kid basement ► **Tube** (18 NW Third Ave., 503-241-8823) hosts everything from live punk rock to DJ-spun hip-hop. It's one of the few places in Portland where you can smoke indoors; the 20-something crowd takes advantage

Bed Check

Portland has a number of grand dame accommodations, but these three recently opened, design-forward hotels are in keeping with the city's youthful, urban vibe

HOTEL LUCIA



400 SW Broadway, 503-225-1717

Hotellucia.com **WHO STAYS:** High-flying executives; low-lying celebs (recently spotted: Lance Armstrong) **NICE TOUCH:** Aveda bath products, iPod docking stations (with preprogrammed Nanos available from the front desk), and a bedside spiritual library that includes the Koran and the Book of Scientology. Walls are lined with photographs by Portland native and Pulitzer Prize-winner David Kennerly **NOTABLE NEIGHBOURS:** At **Saucebox** (214 SW Broadway, 503-241-3393. Saucebox.com), happy hour goes gourmet in a sleekly appointed room. The Halekulani Mai Tai is a work of art, garnished with fresh mint and a live orchid; the fruity Poolside with David Hasselhoff cocktail is a popular choice **ROOMS: \$149-\$709**

ACE HOTEL



1022 SW Stark St., 503-228-2277

Acehotel.com/portland **WHO STAYS:** Budget-conscious hipsters; musicians on tour **USED TO BE:** Clyde Hotel, built in 1912. Much of the original woodwork and hardware remains—see high ceilings, beautiful wood floors, and claw-foot tubs **NICE TOUCH:** Hand-painted murals adorn each room (check out the whimsical illustrated mural by Evan B Harris in the fourth-floor stairwell); headboards are made from recycled army ponchos; suites come with Czech-manufactured turntables and a selection of vintage vinyl from Jackpot Records on Burnside **NOTABLE NEIGHBOURS:** Enamoured with the snout-to-tail dining trend, neighbouring restaurant **Clyde Common** serves dishes like smoked beef tongue with beets, frisée, and horseradish, and a ravioli of chicken liver, tomato, and grana. Go lowbrow and hit up the wildly popular **Kenny & Zuke's** Jewish deli for pastrami Reubens and fried kreplach. Portland's celebrated **Stumptown** coffee has an outpost adjacent to the lobby **ROOMS: \$95-\$250**

JUPITER HOTEL



800 E. Burnside, 503-230-9200

Jupiterhotel.com **BEST FOR:** 24-hour party people; couples looking for a dirty weekend **USED TO BE:** A seedy motel built in the 1960s. Refurbished with Blu Dot, IKEA, and lots of white paint **NICE TOUCH:** Wall-size photoscapes of nature and city views in each room, platform beds covered in shaggy pillows, and tryst-friendly rates (\$59) after midnight. Oh, and there's an all-night adult-toy shop set up in one of the motel rooms **NOTABLE NEIGHBOUR:** **Doug Fir Lounge** is a must-visit, but be sure to trip half a block down Burnside to **Le Pigeon**, where 26-year-old rock-star chef Gabriel Rucker turns out new-wave bistro dishes in a tiny room with an open kitchen and communal tables. Order his signature dessert: apricot combread with bacon, topped with maple ice cream **ROOMS: \$94-\$144**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 68 Indeed, more people commute by bicycle in Portland than any other major city in North America—one in every five trips across the Hawthorne Bridge to downtown is by bike. This is one reason why the city's per capita carbon footprint—the amount of greenhouse gas each citizen spews—has fallen since 1993. "A well-designed city can save the world," Burkholder offered, then gulped the last of his stout and wheeled off into the greasy night.

IT JUST SO HAPPENS that the world-saving city can also be an engine of easy pleasures. Portland celebrates the local, the recycled, and the joys some people mistakenly call simple. Its most famous retailer happens to be Powell's, a city-block maze of used books. Its most sacred traditions are extended chatty breakfasts featuring such wonders as orange-anise toast, and the sipping of fair-trade drip coffee.

If Seattle's gift to the world is Starbucks, Portland's is McMenamins, a group of brew pubs that eschew chain-style conformity for antique warehouse bric-a-brac. The group fixes up old buildings, then lets these venues shape the brew experience. How's this for civilized: at the Bagdad Theater on Hawthorne, you can enjoy your "hand-crafted" ale and a burger beneath the big screen.

Only in Portland would pub chain proprietors declare that their businesses should function as community centres. My first McMenamins visit illustrated the point. I wandered into the Crystal Ballroom complex, 94-year-old cousin to Vancouver's Commodore, on a Sunday afternoon to find a tavern packed with kids—not club kids, but actual children—rocking out to a live band while their BabyBjörn-strapped parents toe-tapped on the edge of the dance floor.

Upstairs, around carnival-painted vats, furry young men offered samples of the McMenamins brews. The ales were good, and the people were warm. The roof shook as an all-ages crowd shuffled on the sprung floor of the ballroom proper upstairs. After a dozen or so samples, I couldn't help feeling like I was witnessing the good life and the green life converging in a kind of Hobbiton-meets-Main-Street dream.

Cultural institutions like the Crystal Ballroom are indeed thriving, especially now that Portland's downtown is drawing thousands of new residents. The Pearl District, once a grid of warehouses, has grown into a human-scaled version of Yalatown, dominated by low-rises, cafés, and, yes, more brew pubs.

The empty-nesters have arrived. Land prices have shot up. Burkholder insists this is good news. ("If rental rates are a measure of happiness, then we have been very successful," he says. "We're creating a more valuable place.") But Portland's younger citizens and cultural creatives have no illusions about their future. "Developers love the work we're doing. Though we know that by making this town more sustainable, more livable, we just may be working ourselves out of a place to live."

There's hope, and it's coming in the unlikely form of the real-estate meltdown triggered by the U.S. sub-prime crisis, which is beginning to trickle through the Pearl District. Developers of at least one of the district's mid-rise apartment blocks have given up trying to sell units in the softening market and will instead lease out the building. The fugitives and refugees may be able to stick it out a few more years before the rest of the world lays claim to their city's unique appeal. **vm**

What \$1-million (or less) buys in PORTLAND

NOB HILL



\$989,000

2327 NW Northrup St.

THINK: Kitsilano **SPECS:** 2,972 sq. ft. townhouse built in 2000. Features 3 bedrooms, 3 ½ baths, 4 private balconies, tonnes of natural light in an open layout **CONTACT:** Kristen Staver, 503-807-5888

HAWTHORNE



\$995,000

1005 SE 28th Ave.

THINK: Commercial Drive **SPECS:** 4,420 sq. ft. restored Craftsman built in 1907. Features 4 bedrooms, 3 ½ baths, gourmet kitchen, formal dining/living/library rooms, large front porch **CONTACT:** Jim DeMarco, 503-515-5574

FOREST HEIGHTS



\$1,060,000

3005 NW Chapin Dr.

THINK: West Vancouver **SPECS:** 4,068 sq. ft. contemporary home built in 2000. Features 3 bedrooms, 2 ½ baths, wine cellar, corner lot, views over the city from every room **CONTACT:** Becky Jackson, 503-416-4178

Middle photo: TC Brown