

Portland, Where it's Hip to be Square

Written by Written by Karen Loftus

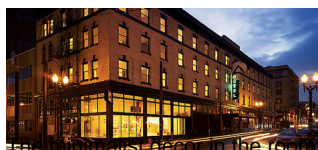
Thursday, 12 March 2009 13:06 - Last Updated Thursday, 12 March 2009 14:12

If you want to get your chic geek groove on head to Portland where it's hip to be square.



Portland, the smaller city sibling to the other Pacific Northwest city of Seattle is starting to seriously steal the urban limelight. She's not trying. She just can't help her square, sexy self. Portland has it all, from hip to heaving bookstores, movie theaters with full-blown dinner service, an edgy, arty and inspired music scene, a raging culinary culture and a love of all things liquid. Portland's got something in store and on pour for all folks from the purists to the party people. It's a truly intoxicating place. Whether you're a round or square peg, you're sure to fit in.

The Pacific Northwest with reigning geek God Gates in neighboring Seattle is the epicenter where chic meets geek. It is so hip to be square there. No place is that more prevalent than in Portland's Ace Hotel. The low-key lobby lounge filled with the overly educated and underpaid, is too cool. You'll want to write poetry, embrace your inner demons and odd social quirks and go on tour the minute you walk through the door.



The Ace Hotel on their own alone or in a hostel type setting, sharing accommodations because it's cool, eco chic and cheap. Many well-known bands, New York tech types and film folks that can afford otherwise still choose The Ace, because it's their bed and their vibe of choice.

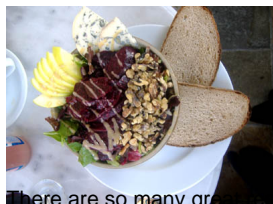
The lobby filled with laptop loving, literatti snotties naturally have a hot cup of Joe in hand, but not your average Joe. Au contraire! For a no proof boost they all worship at the Coffee Altar known as Stumptown's Coffee Masters, which is also steaming up the corridors in Chelsea's hip downtown market in New York. It's for the oh so serious coffee connoisseur. This is not your average fat free, flavored blend, latte land. SoCal caffeinators need not apply. Stumptown is all about the bean babe and the staff ain't bad either. Your heart will gallop as you access your inner cowgirl when you see the Euro looking chic geek brewer with the huge horse tattoo on his neck. Giddy u girls!

If you dare to take a shot as in pic of the steaming hot crew, you too risk being shot. Apparently, it's so not cool to pose for pix in Portland. When they band together like a union or an impassioned political group with a cause and say in unison with their Northern Euro specs, hip grimaces and mono chromatic monologues, "No, no pictures." You'll really feel like a geek, not a chic geek, but an odd, awkward, slash borderline groupie geek, as you realize you are so not in Kansas let alone LA any more. Exhale...

Next door to The Ace is Clyde Commons one of Portland's favorite restos where tables are shared. Groups and couples alike or lone riders join in at a big table, creating a common space and a shared experience. This is quite common in Portland. Even wildly guarded Jen Anniston & Woody Harrelson hit Clyde Common while filming in town last year.

Try Simpatika Dining Hall on the opposite side of town for a shared Sunday brunch. The prices are crazy great, the food is excellent and the crowd is effortlessly sexy for a Sunday. Couples, kids and hangovers are all welcome.

FLOSS is the noted and well-followed culinary standard in Portland with Fresh, Local, Organic, Seasonal and Sustainable. Portland has been eco chic and evergreen since way back when. They are only too happy that the rest of the country has *finally* caught on.



There are so many great restaurants and exceptional chefs in town, it's hard to keep track. The icing on the culinary cake is that the prices are not bank breaking. Here are a few, can't misses for a festive night out. For a hip fix, VINO Paradiso is the best pre dinner stop in the city. Their menu changes monthly and their pairings (inclusive of apps) worked on by both the sommelier and the geek chic sexy chef are so precise. Their synergy is celebrated on every plate and in every pour. Between the fab foods, amazing wine list, groovy décor, lounge music and the local insider vibe; you won't ever want to leave. Oh and famed filmmaker Gus Van Zandt lives upstairs and is said to pop by often.

Park Kitchen, on the edge of the city park is an urban oasis with the sweetest, geekiest, highly awarded waiter in town. At Park, they are known for their cocktails, as much as they are their expansive wine list. Go for a sipping mix of cocktails, the CK & PK, The Adam's Apple or the Salt & Pepper to shake things up.

Forget your desert diets or your Cali calorie counting. The food is so good at Park; you will want to dive in and go family style to try as much as you can. Go for the Pomegranate, squash and fresh goat cheese salad, the Dungeness crab chiles and persimmon and the Roasted pears with lentil and curry for your cold start. For hot dishes (on the plate), the Catalan pasta, snails, rabbit and salsify and the Chickpea fries and squash

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ketchup will have you in a delirious state. But leave room for more. The Black Cod and matsutake mushrooms...will melt in your mouth.

Mind you, wines will be flying as the staff is exceptional and they take their paired suggestions super seriously. After our cocktails we had a Ganache Blanch, a Lower Willamette Valley Red, and finished with a Spanish Oloroso Sherry. Now that's a park I can play in, come rain or come shine.

Another institution and James Beard winner (the equivalent of an Oscar for a chef) is Paley's Place. This lovely French style Bistro was packed and full of fun on a sexy Sunday night.



operandi in town is to start with a cocktail as most restaurants have a long list of fresh Specialty Cocktails. Go for Paley's Negroni, a combo of locally crafted Desert Juniper Gin, Campari & Punt E Mes served with a twist. Or perhaps you're feeling fetching? Then it's off to the Pear Brandy Kamikaze. It's made with Clear Creek (one of the many locally made boutique brandy's) Pear Brandy, Cointreau & Fresh Squeezed Lime juice served straight up. You'll be on the hot tin roof in no time, kitten. Meow!

Our jazzy five some was all about the family style. *We are family*, started with Venison Carpaccio, Escargot a la Bordelaise, roast marrowbones & garlic and Dungeness Crab Bignets. For my main I couldn't hold back from the American Kobe Beef Top Sirloin, Beef Bourguignonne. It was hard to share. So, I didn't.

Hand in hand with the celebrated plates are the perfect pours. You can't pull in to Portland or Oregon without hitting Oregon's acclaimed wine country; Willamette Valley is a mere 30 minutes from downtown Portland with all the aesthetics of any great wine country with cobalt blue skies, rolling fields and picturesque, stunning vineyards.



Pinot, clearly the state's star is quickly becoming a globally recognized wine star. Portland's Pinot is very different than the California Pinot with a bit more of a kick. She's a full-bodied babe due to the cool climate and has a bit more spice, as the Oregon oak is smokier than the French oak.



Jerry Marshall the winemaker at the family run and operated Oswego Hills says that Willamette Valley Wineries are lifestyle wineries, meaning they are not in it for the money. It's a practice of passion. Pre or post recession, no one is losing his or her shirt; these mavericks have a closet full of options. Typically, it's a second or perhaps third career.

Jerry, an ex military man, who spares none, has an excellent and very extensive portfolio of wines from Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Pinot Noir Vintage, Viogner, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Marechal Foch, Celia's Cuvee, Avery's Blend and Tempranillo Port.

He doesn't pour, he preaches. I felt the vino spirit move me. I loved when he waxed poetic about the feminine reds, the sultry mistress of reds with their evolving nature. By the time you leave, you're not only a follower, but also a firm and committed believer in all things grape related. He and his passion are as intoxicating as his bevy of beautiful wines. Yes, may I have another...

On the other side of the beverage fence, Portland has long been known for their craft brewing culture. Hit any of the many McMenamins

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brewpubs around town where they brew their own beers. McMenamins is a quirky bird, with a true blue local pub crowd and feel and crowd with odd haunted hotel rooms and paintings of passed patrons on site.



If you want to take it higher, Portland is home to Sake One; the world's only American owned and operated sakery with one of the world's top Japanese sake masters at the helm. Hit the plant for a tour. You will want to slink in to a tub of the brewing beauty. But hold off and hit their well-stocked sake shop on the way out. If you weren't a fan before, one tip and you're in!

If all this liquid bliss is giving you Pacific Northwest stress, the Timberline Lodge in the Mount Hood area is a must. The old world aesthetics inside and the natural winter wonderland outside will make your winter heart sing. You can kick it up a notch with ski and some serious board activity or kick it way back in the hotel's Ram's Head or Blue Ox bar with local wines paired perfectly with provocative conversation for geeks and chicks alike.

Before dinner in the award winning Cascade dining room, sneak away for a wee nap. After a small Timberline red left in your room, watching the loop of the lodge's history and a fire crackling sweet nothings in to your weary urban overly educated ear, you'll be sweet dreaming in no time. Dinner is divine, so ask for that wake up call.

You can finish off your love of all things liquid, at the tranquil, Portland Classical Chinese Garden in the heart of Portland's city center, with a blissful Tao of Tea tasting and a series of small inspired bites. As you reach a new level of liquid Nirvana and you embrace your inner hipness, you'll be so happy you'll want to slap your square, sated self. So, do it and enjoy...Ommm.



To Stay: Ace Hotel: www.acehotel.com

For higher end geeks, the **Heathman Hotel** in downtown Portland is pitch perfect: www.portland.heathmanhotel.com

Outside the city, head to **Timberline Lodge**: www.timberlinelodge.com

For more info on Portland: www.travelportland.com