

Keep Portland

A Day In Portland

By Terry Currier

Let's get right down to what I think is unique about Portland. What helps to make it one of the most fun and livable cities in the country? The local businesses that are scattered among the national chain stores that grace every city in America keep Portland unique.

Our journey begins here: let's take a walk through the city of Portland. Maybe even hop in the car, take the bus or even ride the light rail from time to time. We start this beautiful Saturday by having a meal at one of our fine breakfast establishments, the Cadillac Café. Now the Cadillac, all decked out in sporting pink colors complete with an entire 1961 Pink Cadillac on display, now resides up the street from its original location on NE Broadway. Why? Because their great breakfast and lunch menus have tasty dishes to satisfy both meat eaters and vegetarians alike. The smaller original location made a tiresome wait many times on the weekend ... but well worth the wait as the lines continued from week to week.

After that satisfying breakfast it's time to take care of the arts and intellectional side of ourselves. Let's pop by Music Millennium, Portland's complete recorded music store since 1969, and see why they have been selected best independent store in the country...multiple times. We walk into the old brick building on 32nd and East Burnside, that doesn't look all that big from the road, only to find CDs, records and even some cassettes crammed in every nook and cranny as well as a staff that actually knows what it's all about. In addition to all the various genres filling the brick building there's a subdivision devoted entirely too classical music. Classical Millennium has an immense inventory equivalent to only a few in the US. Yep, one can find the biggest Hawkwind section in the country at Music Millennium but today we decide to pick up the latest by Radiohead and some Turkish Music.

Down the street about a mile and a half is book heaven, Powell's the biggest book store in the country. We could get lost for hours in this giant multi-storied building of both new and used books. Some even written by Portland's own, like "Geek Love" by Katherine Dunn, a both delightful and disturbing story about a different kind of family. We can find a great selection of books on the city and state along with about any accessible book you could ever imagine. Their color coded rooms are bigger than most book stores ... I'm not saying big is better but it's a book reader's fantasy and always worth the stop.

Now it's time to hit the matinee over at Cinema 21 just about 3/4 of a mile from Powell's on NW 21st. This theater is one of those relics from the first half of the 20th century and has been showing art and classic films since the 70's. It was the first place Portlanders got a chance to see the Rocky Horror Picture Show. The films change weekly in most cases with some showing only a few days. They print up a great handy Dandy Program quarterly with gives you a chance to mark your calendars way in advance as well as find out about some wonderful movies you might otherwise not know about.

Now it's time to grab lunch. We take a drive back to the East Side of the river to Esparza's Tex Mex Cafe, better know as Tex-Mex heaven. On the way we pass the Crystal Ballroom, a ballroom built

in an early first decade of the last century. It lay dormant from 1968 until about 6 years ago. The McMenamin Brothers, who own a ton of micro-brew pubs in town, bought it, restored it, and brought music and dancing back to the great room. Gary Ewing, Portland's own light show genius from the 60's was part of the grand re-opening. He spent some time in the building in the previous decade keeping the vibe alive. The main ballroom has a ball bearing floor, one of only four left in the world. It would have been easy for someone to tear it down and build a high-rise but thanks to the McMenamins, this room has become a great re-addition to our lives.

We are now approaching Ezparzas, located right next to another long time establishment, Holmans. They serve all three meals and good affordable drinks. However, we are here to have Tex-Mex, next door. Joe Esparza came to Portland some 10 odd years ago to try and locate a building for his restaurant. He found it in a building that had been the Blue Goose. A bar with 2 major brewery regular beers and 2 light beers, a wall of books the patrons rarely read and a clientele that seemed very glued to their bar seats...maybe for the past 40 years or so. Joe brought with him his wife and the recipes of his mother from Dallas. In no time the news spread of the fine dishes. The smaller front room transformed into an old curiosity shop type place, complete with a great 45-RPM jukebox. Great music from 6 decades could be found on it. However, it was the food that really brought in the customers. To accommodate Joe knocked out the back wall and enlarged it within few years. Lunch you can get into pretty easily but the lines for this non-reservation establishment can be long at dinner, especially between 6 and 8pm on Friday and Saturday. Well worth the wait as we downed the Oregon Trail enchiladas and a couple of shots from the famous Tequila shrine.

It is late afternoon as we head back across the Burnside Bridge, looking out on a meter close to the Saturday market. This Saturday and Sunday open market of handmade creations from Oregon area residents, has been going since the 70's. You can get wooden boxes made out of burrows, handmade soap, jewelry, plants and a ton of other cool and wonderful creations. Plus there are plenty of great eateries within, from springrolls to pasta, British Sausage rolls and falafel. They close at 5pm so we waste no time in strolling down the aisles. There are a variety of musicians, street clowns, and others that entertain. A guy playing a cardboard guitar, calling himself Elvis used to be here on the weekend but I guess he's not performing any longer. On occasion there is a guy in silver paint standing as still as a statue. It's a great way to spend the afternoon.

Portland has one of the best downtown's in the country. We take the following hour just to stroll the streets of downtown before most of the shops close up. Things have changed with many a local coffee vendors surviving between the plethora of Starbucks. Many old time businesses are still around. Calvin's Novelties has moved but still with us. I do miss the great old theaters in downtown on Broadway, torn down to put up 30 to 40 story buildings. There are many local entrepreneurs that help keep things in balance but the rent is high and harder to keep it all in check. There is even Joe Brown's Carmel Corn located downtown. Joe Brown's Carmel Corn may be the only local business left with a location in the Lloyd Center Mall, once noted as the largest shopping center in the country. Joe Brown knows popcorn: regular, caramel and cheese. It's a rarity these days to see local business in a shopping mall. Malls are all homogenized with the same stores, the same restaurants and for the most part and the same stale feeling. There is nothing weird or unique to most of them.

Chinatown still thrives with its many wonderful restaurants and late night haunts such as Hung Far Low. Chinatown is on the edge of some very cool music venues: Dante's, Berbat's Pan, Roseland and Ash Street Saloon. Live music performed by both local and national artist. Portland has an amazing amount of great local artists as well as a vibrant performing arts and artists community. The first Thursday of each month the artist community hosts an event simply called

First Thursday. All the artist galleries are open that evening and throngs of people go from gallery to gallery. Ten years ago, many of the artists lived in the Pearl District where this event takes place. Unfortunately, most can not live within the district any longer due to the high rents from the changes to the area: over 30 new restaurants and many lofts being built for rent and sale to live in. It happens like that in most cities; cool area become popular and the people who made them cool places can not afford to be there.

Portland has a great bunch of self-contained bohemian communities within the city. Hawthorne Street still keeps itself weird with a great mix of local business. Looking for clothes? There's The Red Light, specializing in cutting edge, retro and even cheesy fashion. The Cats Meow offers a great array of items for your cat as well as items that have a cat motif. The Hawthorne Street Café has been a staple on the street for breakfast, lunch and sometimes dinner. The Bread & Ink is a longtime resident to this street and a fine one indeed. They always have the best bialys. Portland Wine Merchants always has a wonderful selection of great import wines at really affordable prices. It's nice to find \$10.00 good bottles of wine. There are a lot of regular street characters on Hawthorne, much reminding us today of our major hippie culture. The evidence of the late 60's exists on the street as well as in a few shops. The Third Eye is a great place to re-visit the culture or add to your existing culture. McMenamins owns a couple properties on this street, one being the landmark old theater, The Baghdad. They saved it and enshrined it to its original past ... almost. There are some tables and chairs in there and you can drink beer, eat pizza and watch second run movies for cheap, on a big big screen like the old days before the metroplex. And sometimes they show classics from the past. The McMenamin Brothers first theater/pub located on NW Glisan was a success some ten years ago. They also bought some other properties, such as Kennedy Elementary School, and have turned them into hotels with restaurants, theaters and a variety of other fun things to do.

It's 6:00 PM and most of the shops are closing up on this Saturday downtown. The sun is starting to set and lights on the signs and marquees are glowing. Downtown doesn't stop when nighttime arrives in Portland. It stays vibrant with people walking down every street. We decide to stop into Stumptown to grab a coffee and look at the movie section of the Willamette Week, a weekly newspaper that has been here over 30 years. We decide to go see a showing of an all-time classic, "The King of Hearts" at the Hollywood Theater. This theater was bought in recent years by a group who plans to restore it to its original splendor. It was built in the 30's and has an elegance to it that is beginning to show again as restoration in some areas has taken place. As we drive up Sandy, you can see the great old 7-Up sign as you approach the Hollywood area. It's a landmark now, as the bottling company no longer occupies that building.

After the film, we decide to take in a light dinner and a beverage or two. No better place than The Horse Brass Pub at 46th and Belmont. The Horse Brass Pub has been going since 1975, when brothers Bill and Don Younger opened its doors. The special thing about the Horse Brass, other than its authentic British Pub feel and charm, was the extensive array of beers it carried from around the world. It opened the pallet and minds of many Oregon beer drinkers and paved the way for Portland to be known as the beer capitol of the United States. The Horse Brass serves British Pub grub as well as a few American Pub Favorites. Their Ploughman Lunch and bangers were never equaled in quality during a recent trip to England. Their cast conditioned ESB is one of the finest beers in the world.

It's time to call it a day. We are all lucky to live in this great city. It's these and other locally owned businesses that help keep Portland unique (or weird). It's important that the people in this city don't take it for granted. There is not another City in America like Portland. To keep it this way, we must patronize and support these local entrepreneurs. Remember that next time you explore a Portland neighborhood, decide to go shopping or even go out for a meal. You'll be happy with the results

years down the road