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## **What's old is new again in Portland's gem**

### **Lively Pearl District teems with galleries, shops and clubs**

- Christine Delsol, Chronicle Staff Writer  
Sunday, October 2, 2005

**Portland, -- Ore.**

Oregon's No. 1 city has been mostly overlooked by Californians (not always to its great regret) as merely a "nice place" with rose-filled parks, pretty bridges and decent hotels -- more important as a stopover than a destination. A coterie of hippies and iconoclasts were drawn to Portland's individualism, and fans of Seattle's coffee and dot-com cultures might have had a look on the way, but mostly we haven't paid much attention.

News flash: When we weren't looking, Portland got hip.

While other cities were paving over or bulldozing places that were no longer profitable, Portland was turning them into attractive and affordable parks, restaurants, shops, music venues, art galleries, restaurants and brew pubs. It's managed to pack in all the big-city attractions while keeping urban aggravations to a minimum.

The Pearl District, whose reclaimed warehouses and rail yards have been populated in recent years with artists and designers, is an ideal vantage point for observing the city's evolution. With the recent immigrants came international flavors, sidewalk cafes, lively clubs and flashy lofts and townhouses. But art and design remain at its heart.

People pack the streets for a crash course in contemporary painting, sculpture and photography the first Thursday of the month, when galleries stay open late and offer food and entertainment. In response to growing interest in its urban style and interior design, the neighborhood staged Pearl CitySpaces, a weeklong public condominium and loft tour, in May.

The Pearl, adjacent to downtown, is also about a 15-minute walk, or a short ride by free public transit, from the city's latest arts buzz: The Portland Art Museum's new Jubitz Center for Modern and Contemporary Art, which opened Saturday. The landmark former Masonic Temple is now the Pacific Northwest's largest repository of modern art.

The museum's addition occupies the south wing of the temple, built to monumental proportions in 1925. The staid brick exterior is scored by a decidedly modern, faceted glass "pleat" that pulls natural light into five levels of galleries, and capped with glowing glass penthouses. But in its core, two ballrooms were meticulously restored for public use, complete with rusticated walls, Moorish flourishes and a circular frieze of painted quotations.

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The Pearl District is a similar marriage of modern culture and historic preservation. This is where young cosmopolitans, surrounded by plasma TVs and plates of Thai salad rolls, choose from 100 tap beers within the exposed brick walls and 24-foot ceilings of Henry Weinhard's original brewery. Today's Brewery Blocks house not only Henry's 12th Street Tavern but retailers, offices, restaurants, Peet's Coffee and possibly the world's most ornate Whole Foods market, in a former Chevrolet dealership facing the old brewery's smokestack.

My first glimpse of the Pearl, under the wing of my friend Renate, who lives across the river but regularly crosses the Broadway Bridge to shop or walk her dogs, was Jamison Square, a 3-year-old park where kids splashed in the fountain from morning to evening. A few blocks away, the Fremont Bridge arched beyond a red neon "Go by streetcar" sign, echoing nearby Union Station's classic "Go by train" sign.

As we strolled, Renate's boyfriend couldn't say he disagreed with complaints that the district has become too precious, a "fake" version of Europe or San Francisco. But he eagerly ushered me to Sinju, an uncharacteristically spacious and quiet sushi bar, and to the Ecotrust Building. This century-old warehouse's socially minded tenants include a Patagonia store, the Wild Salmon Center, Hot Lips Pizza, the nation's first environmental bank and Ecotrust itself, a nonprofit promoting environmental sustainability. Even the renovation was green, reusing old timbers and recycling 98 percent of the construction materials.

Returning to the Pearl on my own, I got lost in the endless stacks at Powell's City of Books, the country's largest independent bookstore. I had outrageously good Cuban chicken palomillo and a mojito at Oba. I saw the same model of running shoe that carried Jesse Owens to four gold medals in the 1936 Berlin Olympics at the West Coast's only Adidas Originals store, and bought a clever little notebook for my purse at Oblation. A couple sitting on their ground-level patio smiled as I passed, music spilled from bars and brew pubs, and I joined the briefcase-toting natty dressers milling around Whole Foods. It all felt so ... companionable.

When this was Henry Weinhard's neighborhood in the 1850s, it was called Couch's Addition. Union Station was built in 1896, and warehouses, manufacturing and storage facilities rose along rail spur lines throughout the district. Then the urban flight of the 1960s killed the momentum.

Artists started moving into the derelict neighborhood in the late 1970s, touching off a resurgence remarkable for its continuity between past and present. Sherman, Clay and Co., which operated here in the 1920s, returned to the Brewery Blocks in 2004. Even the district's status as a furniture and design mecca is old news: the Central Door Co., which exported building materials throughout the world a century ago, now houses JD Madison's contemporary furniture, rugs and design services.

The last train rolled in 2003, but the North Bank passenger station endures, full of townhouses. Burlington Northern's former storage yards house the Portland Streetcar, along with Jamison Square and trendy Portlanders' lofts and condos. The renovated Union Station is still a transit hub.

The juxtaposition of brick warehouses, sleek high-rises and picturesque storefronts does have a certain San Francisco feel. In the Pearl, though, stylish restaurants don't laugh if you

walk in without a reservation. Streets are narrower, and traffic moves at nonlethal speeds.

Maybe it's time to start paying attention. The Pearl offers a plenty good time, and it even seems to have gotten San Francisco right.

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If you go

## **GETTING THERE**

The Pearl District, about a half-hour drive from Portland International Airport, is adjacent to downtown, bounded north and south N.W. Northrop and N.W. Burnside streets, and east and west by N.W. Sixth Avenue and Highway 405.

## **WHERE TO STAY**

There are no hotels in the Pearl District, but several downtown hotels are just a few blocks away.

Mark Spencer Hotel, 409 S.W. 11th Ave. (800) 548-3934, [www.markspencer.com](http://www.markspencer.com). Comfortable, utilitarian; a block from Powell's. Standard doubles, \$59-\$129.

Hotel Vintage Plaza, 422 S.W. Broadway. (800) 243-0555, [www.vintageplaza.com](http://www.vintageplaza.com). Elegant but unpretentious. From \$159.

Hotel Lucia, 400 S.W. Broadway. (877) 225-1717, [www.hotellucia.com](http://www.hotellucia.com). Original art in lobby and hallways includes photography of Pulitzer Prize-winner David Hume Kennedy; plenty of creature comfort. From \$149.

## **WHERE TO EAT**

Oba, 555 N.W. 12th Ave. (503) 228-6161. Lunch entrees \$10-\$16.

Sinju, 1022 N.W. Johnson St. (503) 223-6535. Entrees \$8-27.

The Pearl District has dozens of restaurants, most of which get rave reviews. For listings, see information sources below.

## **WHAT TO DO**

Jamison Park, N.W. Johnson Street at N.W. 11th Avenue.

Powell's City of Books, 1005 W. Burnside. (503) 228-4651.

Portland Art Museum, 1219 S.W. Park Ave. (503) 226-2811, [www.portlandartmuseum.org](http://www.portlandartmuseum.org). \$10 adults, \$6 ages 5-18, 4 and under free.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Pearl District Business Association, [shopthepearl.com](http://shopthepearl.com). Pearl District Walking Map, also

available in many shops and restaurants.

Portland Oregon Visitors Association, (503) 275-9795, [www.pova.com](http://www.pova.com). General tourist information.

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