



Standing next to stylist Destiny Cathman, Lori Weatherwax, left, beams with her new blue hair treatment. Deston Nokes / Special to the P-I

Portland's Laurelhurst is wrapped in charm **Area offers an eclectic mix of shops and trendy places to eat**

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By DESTON NOKES SPECIAL TO THE P-I

Portland's Laurelhurst area has such a harmonious mix of trendy diners, quirky cafes and a couple of old-school alcoholic dens that one can't help but feel a cozy, neighborhood charm.

Laurelhurst also is the East Portland neighborhood where my father grew up. I remember visiting when I was a very young boy and walking to Laurelhurst Park with pieces of bread so I could charm and then chase the ducks.

The park is still there, serving as a serene, green gathering place for the residents of large, older homes with lawns and covered porches. What has changed is the reputation and quality of the establishments lining the area's commercial section

along four blocks of Southeast/Northeast 28th Street between Southeast Ankeny and Northeast Everett streets. Getting there is fairly easy: just drive over the Burnside Bridge headed east and take it all the way to 28th.



It seems like every other storefront is a welcoming respite to sit and visit with

The few blocks make a perfect summer or fall stroll for those who love to poke into an eclectic assortment of thrift and gift shops, while licking a cone from Staccato Gelato. Or, if one's appetite calls for something more substantial, the boulevard offers everything from a gourmet hot dog slathered in homemade chili, to flights of wine with small plates of amazing food served at sidewalk tables.

My first stop was at Artemisia Garden Nursery and Gallery, which specializes in small, interesting plants, from moss balls to a prehistoric cycad, which I couldn't resist scooping up to serve as my only living houseplant. It resembles a punk-spiked coconut husk with palm fronds sprouting out of its crown.

Amy Bryan Aiello and her husband, Michael, have owned the nursery for four years, selling plants and their art. Michael is a printmaker and painter, while Amy specializes in photography, gold leaf and wax. Their works adorn a shop full of fun, otherworldly plants.

"In this neighborhood, a lot of business owners have the opportunity to do their heart's dream," said Amy. "In Portland, people can do things they couldn't in other cities because it's financially feasible to run a small shop. Here, we don't have to be a large garden center. We can be an urban plant seller specializing in plants that aren't so easy to find. This is what we love to do."

Around the corner on Southeast Ankeny, Gary Laird offered a myriad of hot dog options at The Dog House. "Here we have a nice, little artsy district with fun shops, the Laurelhurst Theater, and we sponsor the annual dog show every August," Laird said, setting aside my spicy Polish dog slathered in homemade chili in order to show me his scrapbook of costumed dogs. Think of a canine version of Greenwich Village on Halloween. But the sausages ... crisp, flavorful and easily the best I've had in Portland.

The Laurelhurst Theater is an old 1923 art deco movie house preserving the memory of what going to a movie used to be before sterile mall multiplexes consumed the masses. Those looking to escape a rare sticky hot day or a more frequent rain can drop in to enjoy a second-run feature while munching on gourmet pizza washed down with a microbrew.

But Portlanders relish their sun when they can get it, so on a summer day I found people letting their hair down, be it purple, pink or green, playing Scrabble outside Crema coffee house, or poking through vintage curiosities in S.M.U.T. (So Many Unique Treasures), which is probably the only place you'll find a velvet painting of John F. Kennedy these days. It also has lots of old boots, records and oddities. Next door, Lady Luck Vintage has an interesting collection of old wigs and gowns.

For newer knick-knacks, Butterscotch fits the bill as “a girl-friendly shop with things you didn't know you needed until you came in,” according to one patron. “Years ago, this street used to be pretty dicey, and there really weren't that many places to go around here,” remembers owner Lisa Bonneau. “Then the restaurants paved the way and blended well with the new funky shops. Now it's stroller central during the day, and then the dinner and wine bar crowd take over in the evenings. We even get a lot of regulars down from Seattle.”

Next door, Alma Chocolate features 73 percent dark chocolate encrusted with edible gold leaf. There's even an anatomically correct chocolate heart, perfect for eating and pretending that it's an ex's.

While I didn't indulge in any hearts that day, I did avail myself of the neighborhood's amazing small-plate wine bars. After we slid into a cozy booth at Noble Rot, at 2724 S.E. Ankeny, co-owner Courtney Storrs greeted us with wine recommendations served in flights of three, giving diners an opportunity to sample a variety of pours. Courtney and co-owner Kimberly Bernosky have secured Noble



Noland Magnuson oversees his eclectic collection of vintage curiosities at S.M.U.T. (So Many Unique Treasures). It might be the only place you'll find a velvet painting of John F. Kennedy these days.
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Rot's reputation as one of the city's finest restaurants, so I was happy to let them choose the selections.

Chef Greg Smith's creations that night included an appetizer of Rot Charcuterie with pork terrine and rillets, a butter leaf lettuce slathered in creamy blue cheese, and an unforgettable macaroni and cheese made with bechamel and Parmesan, with a perfect hard crunch on top. I would have walked 10 miles for the tender, flaky pork roast, bathed in a rich, sweet brown sauce that left me speechless.

On a different night, I sat at a sidewalk table outside of Wine Down on 28th. Chef Robert Erickson took a seat and talked about his craft for about half an hour. He was pushing the burgers, but then steered us to the foie gras, which was phenomenal. It's not every day a diner can kick back with a chef who worked at Maxim's in Paris (where he was yelled at for not having all the peas on the plate arranged exactly at 2 o'clock), Le Cirque in New York, Spago in Los Angeles, and even in Ketchikan, Alaska. Oh, and he drummed for a bit with the Ramones.

"I think we're the surprise fine-dining restaurant in the city," he said while checking on my lamb chops and a portobello mushroom stuffed with blue cheese, roma tomatoes and feta. "We've revamped our whole menu this season. I want little works of art on our plates."

The renowned eateries along the boulevard are too numerous to detail. Ken's Artisan Bakery always has a line waiting for some of the best thin crust pizza made. Tabla Mediterranean Bistro, la Buca East and Navarre each have their devoted followings.

And when the restaurants close, many venture over to Beulahland Coffee and Alehouse, which serves as a bit of a grunge hangout where late-nighters and restaurant workers gather. Another famous hole-in-the-wall is Holman's Bar & Grill, which promises smoke, an amazing Bloody Mary, more smoke, alcohol, and the kind of food you're looking for at 5 a.m., such as deep-fried macaroni and cheese. Patrons even can spin a wheel to see if their meal is free. Everyone I spoke to in the neighborhood champions Holman's as an important institution.

Even if you don't need a haircut, you'll have to poke your head in to Bishop's, Portland's only rock 'n' roll barbershop, where people are handed a cold Miller and urged to kick back and let the stylists create.

What's popular these days? Manager Nikolos Rice said the street urchin look is what's happening now. "People want their hair long, with tendrils and just basically to appear very socially unacceptable." I know what he means. Years ago it's where my daughter spent \$150 to make her head resemble a skunk's black-and-white coat.

“It reminds me of Europe, where the blocks are smaller,” Rice said of Laurelhurst. “There are wine stores, thrift stores, Whole Foods, \$3 to get into the Laurelhurst Theater, and even Chinese food. This neighborhood is perfect.”

IF YOU GO

1. Alma Chocolate — 140 N.E. 28th Ave.; 503-517-0262; almachocolate.com

2. Artemisia — 110 S.E. 28th Ave.; 503-232-8224; artemisiaon28th.com

3. Beulahland Coffee and Ale House — 118 N.E. 28th Ave.; 503-235-2794

4. Butterscotch — 144 N.E. 28th Ave.; 503-234-6877; shopatbutterscotch.com

5. Crema Coffee & Bakery — 2728 S.E. Ankeny St.; 503-234-0206; cremabakery.com

6. The Dog House — 2845 E. Burnside St. at Northeast 29th Ave.; 503-239-3647

7. Holman’s Bar & Grill — 15 S.E. 28th Ave; 503-231-1093

8. Lady Luck Vintage — 2742 E. Burnside St.; 503-233-4041

9. Laurelhurst Theater — 2735 E. Burnside St. at Southeast 28th Avenue; 503-232-5511; laurelhursttheater.com

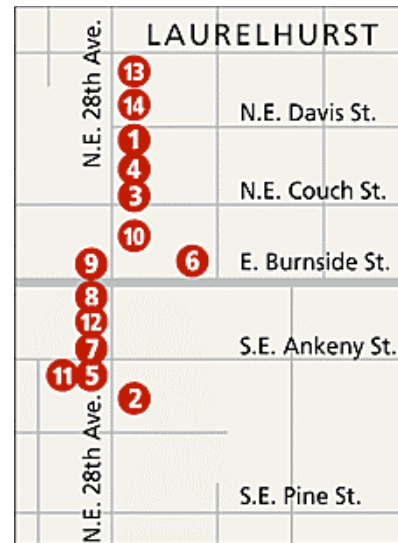
10. Navarre — 10 N.E. 28th Ave.; 503-232-3555

11. Noble Rot — 2724 S.E. Ankeny St.; 503-233-1999; noblerotpdx.com

12. S.M.U.T. (So Many Unique Treasures) — 7 S.E. 28th Ave.; 503-235-7688

13. Staccato Gelato — 232 N.E. 28th Ave.; 503-231-7100; staccatogelato.com

14. Tabla Mediterranean Bistro — 200 N.E. 28th Ave.; 503-238-3777; www.tabla-restaurant.com



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