



# COUNTER CULTURE

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Photography Dave Lauridsen

In Portland, Oregon, a new generation of chefs and producers are serving up local food that combines creative flair with a sense of community





Left: The sprawling Forest Park. Opposite, clockwise from top left: Tyler Malek serves up ice creams at Salt & Straw; watermelon salad, with Jacobsen sea salt, at Imperial; Bee Local's Damian Magista with one of his rooftop hives; grilled octopus at Tasty n Alder. Previous spread: Ryan and Jace in their food truck, Fried Egg I'm in Love; a dad takes a coffee break at Cup & Bar.

the hipsters, the hikers, the artists and – perhaps gathering most momentum – the foodies. This leafy metropolis has become THE place to eat – a culinary hotspot, thanks largely to its location in bountiful northern Oregon. The state's wet winters and balmy summers nurture a boggling variety of produce, including meat and crops from the rugged plains out east, and ample seafood from the Pacific to the west. What doesn't grow here, friendly neighbour California generously supplies. It's no surprise that chefs and producers are heading to Portland to make their mark. It's like a throwback to the pioneering spirit of the Oregon Trail era, when Americans packed their covered wagons and rolled on out here in search of greener pastures.

These days, the wagons have given way to food trucks, now numbering more than 600, and the burgeoning street-food scene is now embraced as part of the city's culture. You could eat at a different Portland food truck almost every night for two straight years before you had to revisit one. The original encampments of vendors are downtown – tucked among the towering office blocks and quirky independent shops, and serving up veggie burgers and bibimbap morning to night – but the revolution is growing across the Willamette River on Portland's east side, too.

Four years ago, buddies and bandmates Jace Krause and Ryan Lynch left the rat race to make breakfast sandwiches here in their pun-tastic yellow food truck, Fried Egg I'm In Love. "It's less expensive to start a food cart than a restaurant," explains Jace, expertly cracking a yolk onto a sizzling hot plate with one hand while wielding a spatula in the other. "Plus, you don't have to be constantly moving. Some cities won't let you stay in a stationary spot, like we are here." I bite into my egg sandwich (the 'Free-Range Against The Machine') – light, slightly crispy egg, pimped up with havarti cheese and a wedge of perfectly ripe avocado. Ryan gives me a cheeky smile as Jace remarks, "You know, you'd think we'd have reached peak food cart at some point... but it really doesn't seem like it."

Portlanders are the first to poke fun at themselves, well aware of the city's reputation

Portland is pretty weird. At least, that's what Portlanders tell me. And the more I delve into the heart and soul of Oregon's largest city, the more I discover it's a difficult claim to contest. Within Portland's leafy limits you'll find a 2,000-hectare urban forest, a doughnut shop that's licensed to conduct weddings, solar-powered parking metres, what might be the most authentically zen Japanese garden outside of Asia and the world's largest independent used bookstore. Portland's very name was decided by the perfunctory toss of a coin, although you can take your pick from an assortment of alternatives: Bridgetown; Stumptown; Rose City; Puddletown; PDX... It seems that this city's knack for variety is its greatest quirk. The locals, who live by the slogan 'Keep Portland weird', are a conglomerate of tribes:





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**Above: Portland’s famous White Stag sign greets traffic heading downtown. First installed in 1940, the sign is now an official historic landmark.**

**Opposite: Christian Ettinger, founder and brewmaster of Hopworks Urban Brewery, taking time out with an ice-cold pint of one of their organic craft ales.**

as the original incubator of bearded baristas and eco-warrior chefs with an obsession for provenance. But those who know Portland understand that these stereotypes stem from authentic intentions: people here want to create something in harmony with their community.

The best place to see this ethos in action is the leafy south-eastern corner of town where, tucked among bright, cheerily painted houses, well-tended gardens and ramshackle bicycle repair shops, you’ll find small producers creating artisanal products, from cheese and salt to beer and coffee. Here there are breweries, distilleries and even one or two urban wineries. Locals refer to it as ‘Portland’s larder’.

It’s here that Damian Magista runs Bee Local, an expanding honey empire that he started in 2009 with a few humble hives in his backyard. Those now number more than 120 and rising, dotted around the city. Damian speaks gently yet passionately about his dedication to natural, organic honey making, and how he hopes to teach these skills to a new generation of beekeepers. Listening to him makes you never want to look at commercially produced honey again – but the proof is really in the product.

Since Bee Local honey isn’t blended, mixed or cooked, you can taste the terroir of each hive encampment: think rich, resinous amber from the Oregon high desert, sweet, fruity honey with notes of blueberry from Portland farmland, or floral and early-season, pollinated in the Willamette Valley. It’s little surprise Damian is the go-to honey guy with chefs and restaurateurs. Even his little winged workers are in demand, their services regularly called upon to pollinate organic farms. “Not only do we get to produce incredible honey, but affect our food-supply chain directly and be involved with these incredible farmers,” he says, ruffling his dark hair in wonderment. “I don’t know how to explain it, but it creates this cycle – these amazing critters tie everything together.”

A few blocks away, in the sun-dappled western corner of Hawthorne, one of Bee Local’s early adopters is serving up something a little different. Five years ago, Salt & Straw was Tyler Malek and his cousin selling ice cream from a push cart; now they have three Portland stores and have recently launched in LA. Famous for their unusual flavours – such as olive oil and blood orange, or strawberry honey balsamic



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make a range of world-class lagers and ales, using organic and sustainable ingredients wherever possible, powering their operation with renewable energy. As we sit at HUB's lively brewery bar, checked-shirted regulars munch on chunky house-made pretzels with lager mustard and have a chinwag with their neighbours. Above us, brightly coloured bicycle frames hang from the ceiling while the craft beers du jour are handwritten on the wall opposite.

We crack open a couple of single-hop pale ales as Christian explains that the beer community is one that pulls together, despite so many different brews jostling for space on Oregon's fit-to-bursting shelves. "There are so many breweries opening now that I can't even keep track of 'em," he admits. "But we love to support the young guys, and the bigger breweries are really friendly and supportive of us. We're not afraid of competition - we like to drop by any brewery and have a great pint."

The next morning, I'm waiting for the eco-tram that runs from the north-west's fashionable Nob Hill through to the south end of the city. It's not long before I find myself in conversation with a friendly retiree, who tells me that while craft beer is a big deal here, coffee might just be bigger. Or, as she amusingly puts it, "Portlanders take their uppers as seriously as their downers". This is, after all, the home of third-wave artisan roasters. The city boasts more than 40 of them, not to mention plenty more out-of-towners peddling their beans.

Perhaps one of the best-known vanguards of the coffee scene is Stumptown, founded in 1999 by bearded coffee aficionado Duane Sorenson. This is the guy credited for getting the ball rolling on now-favoured practices, such as negotiating directly with the growers and championing single-origin brews. You'll find Stumptown coffee poured in cafés, food trucks and restaurants all over the city, as well as in

with black pepper - their 'farm-to-cone' concept has them working with some of the region's best producers. It makes for seriously wicked ice cream. On the pavement outside, customers jostle for shade, dogs on leashes tied around wrists, as they lick their pastel-coloured scoops. After sampling the seasonal menu, I plump for a pear and blue cheese ice cream: velvety, creamy, with a subtle, lingering tang. Tyler tells me the cheese hails from a dairy down in southern Oregon and that the fruit is also locally grown. "This state is one of the world's leading exporters of pears," he says, smiling proudly. "So we've gotta represent, you know?"

Everyone wants to make the best of Oregon's offerings. In a city also known as Beervana (yet another nickname), there are more than 65 microbreweries and brew bars, making good with local hops and clean glacial water from nearby Mount Hood. "It's amazing water - all we gotta do is pull the pine cones out of it," jokes Christian Ettinger, founder and brewmaster of Hopworks Urban Brewery. Ettinger and his team

**Above:** Perusing the menu at the Fried Egg I'm in Love food truck. **Opposite, clockwise from top left:** Stumptown serve creamy, cold-brew coffee on nitro; Powell's famous City of Books occupies a whole city block; Ranger chocolate; starting the day with coffee and a fried egg sarnie; Imperial's golden fried chicken with honey; hand-printing labels at Trailhead coffee; double-scoop delight at Salt & Straw; avocado on toast at Cup & Bar; Stumptown cold brew.



New York, Seattle and LA. Even the iconic lobby of downtown's hipper-than-hip Ace Hotel has its own Stumptown brew-bar attached.

There's plenty of love here for the city's younger roasters, too. Trailhead Coffee was launched in 2009 by Charlie Wicker, a keen cyclist who sends out orders of his small-batch coffee beans by push bike. It's an intimate operation - even the labels are stamped and painted by hand. Last year, Charlie partnered up with his friend George Domurot of Ranger Chocolate, who uses Peruvian cacao to craft his luscious dark chocolate bars. Given that both companies focus on ethically sourced beans, single-origin flavours and a direct fair trade with their sources, this partnership makes a lot of sense.

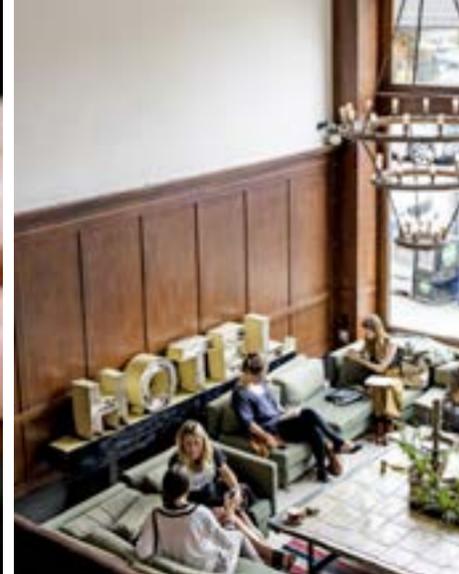
Ranger's chocolate factory and Trailhead's coffee roastery share the space in a refurbished warehouse, fronted by a joint café, Cup & Bar. The warming smell of espresso fills this bright, airy space, beanie-clad locals sitting with laptops and books enjoying lemon-curd toast, caprese sandwiches and curiously refreshing cold-brew mocktails. After sampling the rich selection of beans and bars, I sip on a Dirty Charlie, a gloriously frothy Trailhead macchiato scattered with grated Ranger chocolate. Portland really has this collaboration concept nailed.

"It's a very small town and an even smaller community, when you really break it down," says Matt Jarrell, sous chef at Imperial. This rustic restaurant, nestled within downtown's stylish Hotel Lucia, is the newest joint from concert-pianist-turned-chef-legend Vitally Paley, renowned for his modern American fare. At Imperial, all dark wood and homely vibe, this means everything from wood-fired meats to the most unforgettably gooey pecan pie. The atmosphere is comforting and so is the food; I tear apart hunks of tender fried chicken with its crunchy, deep golden crust, the accoutrements an eyedropper of fiery chilli sauce and a jug of honey. Matt tells me the honey is produced from some of Damian's Bee Local hives installed up on the hotel roof. I realise this collaborative spirit is not just another quirk of this city - it's what makes it tick. "Everybody knows everybody and we all like to help each other," says Matt. "You can always borrow a cup of sugar, you know?"

Earlier, having crossed the mighty stretch of the historic Hawthorne Bridge, I'd noticed a crude sign nailed to a lamppost, making the cheering, hand-painted affirmation: 'You're doing great!' For all Portland's cool and quirky veneer, at its heart it's a community of neighbours, giving each other a leg-up and making food that's worth venturing west for. Nothing weird about that.



Clockwise from above: Portland's brand-new car-free bridge, Tilikum Crossing; the deliciously messy 'Dirty Charlie' from Cup & Bar; the stylish lobby of the Ace Hotel; memorial fountain for sculptor Frank E Beach, at the International Rose Test Garden; Hopworks beer; coffee lovingly poured at Coava.



## The Guide

### EAT & DRINK

**Bollywood Theater** Two locations; [bollywoodtheaterpdx.com](http://bollywoodtheaterpdx.com). Bright and breezy Indian food in a colourful setting, this is a favourite among local residents - you can't order wrong here.

**Coava Coffee** Two SE locations; +1 503 894 8134. The short and sweet menu lets the coffee do the talking. Pop into its espresso bar or hang out in its brewbar, which shares an attractive space with a bamboo warehouse.

**Cup & Bar** 118 NE Martin Luther King Jr Blvd; +1 503 388 7701; [cupandbar.com](http://cupandbar.com). Where Ranger chocolate and Trailhead coffee meet, this welcoming café also serves up simple yet creative dishes all day. The cold-brew mocktails are particularly brilliant.

**Hopworks Urban Brewery** 2944 SE Powell Blvd; +1 503 232 4677; [hopworksbeer.com](http://hopworksbeer.com). Brewery and bar with sustainability in mind. Also visit their bike bar on N Williams Avenue, which keeps cyclists fed and watered.

**Imperial** Hotel Lucia, 410 SW Broadway; +1 503 228 7222; [imperialpdx.com](http://imperialpdx.com). A modern, seasonal take on classic American fare by Vitally Paley, with a rotisserie and wood-fired oven at the heart of the menu.

**Multnomah Whiskey Library** 1124 SW Alder St; +1 503 954 1381; [mwl.pdx.com](http://mwl.pdx.com). The secret hideout for anyone keen on something harder than craft beer. An intimate gem with a floor-to-ceiling whiskey selection, and a seasonal small plates menu that complements the single malts.

**Olympia Provisions** Two locations; [olympiaprovisions.com](http://olympiaprovisions.com). Serving up

rustic European fare; but it's their award-winning charcuterie they're renowned for - this place launched Portland's first salumeria.

**Pok Pok** 3226 SE Division St; +1 503 232 1387; [pokpokpdx.com](http://pokpokpdx.com). Famously hip Thai street food from chef Andy Ricker. Go for the sticky fish-sauce chicken wings - but expect to queue.

**Salt & Straw** Three locations; [saltandstraw.com](http://saltandstraw.com). You simply cannot come to Portland and not have ice cream from Salt & Straw. Curiously inventive flavours put the region's growers and makers to good use.

**Sterling Coffee** Two locations; [sterling.coffee](http://sterling.coffee). Charming coffee roasters serving genuinely lovely small-batch artisan coffee.

**Stumptown** Multiple locations; [stumptowncoffee.com](http://stumptowncoffee.com). There's a reason why people queue for caffeine

at the daddy of all Portland coffee chains. Single-origin coffees as well as a few twists - their nitro cold brew coffee is the closest you can get to knocking back a Guinness at breakfast. **Tasty n Alder** 580 SW 12th Ave; +1 503 621 9251; [tastynalder.com](http://tastynalder.com). Locals adore this place - and quite rightly. Offering small plates and modern comfort food from chef John Gorham, it's great for dinner but also a brilliant spot for brunch. Don't miss the griddled banana walnut bread; it's heavenly.

### SHOP

**Bee Local** 602 SE Salmon St; +1 503 619 5609; [beelocal.com](http://beelocal.com). Pop in for a tour and a taste of Damian Magista's gorgeous honeys, produced from hives through the city and across the state. Bee Local has partnered with Jacobsen sea salt, so you can stock up on two fantastic local products under one roof.

**Farmer's markets** Various locations; [portlandfarmersmarket.org](http://portlandfarmersmarket.org). There are 40 farmers' markets in the metro area, carrying local produce that runs from baked goods to fresh seafood, ideal for pottering around and sampling Portland's wares. The most popular is the Saturday market at Portland State University, held all year round.

**Powell's City of Books** 1005 W Burnside St; +1 503 228 4651; [powells.com](http://powells.com). Be prepared to spend a hefty chunk of time here, getting lost among 70,000 square feet of new and used books. You haven't done Portland if you haven't flicked through the pages at Powell's. Open late.



Illustration: Jason Sturgill

**DO**

**Cycle** Portland is one of the most bicycle-friendly cities in America, so make the most of it, whether you want to head out for a tasting tour of the city's foodie hotspots or hit the off-road trails of Forest Park. Hire bikes from [pedalbiketours.com](http://pedalbiketours.com) or [waterfrontbikes.com](http://waterfrontbikes.com).

**Forest Park** [forestparkconservancy.org/forest-park](http://forestparkconservancy.org/forest-park). Incredible 15,000 hectares of forest and trails in the Tualatin Mountains overlooking north-west Portland. Go for a hike, get on your bike, or just take a leisurely stroll and you'll forget you're in the city.

**International Rose Test Garden**

400 SW Kingston Ave; +1 503 823 3636; [portlandoregon.gov/parks](http://portlandoregon.gov/parks). Created in 1917 to preserve European roses at risk of decimation during WWI, this is now a collection of more than 7,000 rose bushes. A chorus of colour, particularly from April and October.

**Portland Japanese Garden**

611 SW Kingston Ave; +1 503 223 1321; [japanesegarden.com](http://japanesegarden.com). The USA's largest and most authentic Japanese garden, opened in 1967. Japanese maples, intricate trails and landscaped gardens make this the ultimate spot for quiet contemplation.

**STAY**

**Ace Hotel** 1022 SW Stark St; +1 503 228 2277; [acehotel.com/portland](http://acehotel.com/portland). Cool downtown digs in the historic Clyde Hotel building. The magic is in the details - custom robes, freshly baked cookies, Malin + Goetz bath products... Modest, comfortable rooms, each with its own unique wall art; deluxe rooms come with record players, and Dutch bikes are available from the lobby. Hipster heaven, but in all the right ways.

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