

## Fit for foodies: Portland, Oregon, prizes its diverse dining scene



French comfort food is on the menu at **Bistro Adler** in downtown **Portland**. Courtesy of Katherine Rodeghier

**By Katherine Rodeghier**  
**Daily Herald Correspondent**

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From humble food carts to high-end eateries, Oregon's biggest city nurtures an incredibly diverse dining scene. Portland prizes its food-centric culture whether it be ethnic restaurants finding new ways to showcase their culinary roots or doughnut shops coming up with inventive -- some might say wacky -- toppings. And just outside the city, wineries in the Willamette Valley welcome afternoon tastings amid their vineyards.

## Food carts



**Sous chef Jose Camarena creates a five-course chef's dinner at República, named by Bon Appétit as one of the 10 best new U.S. restaurants in 2022.** - Courtesy of Katherine Rodeghier

## New standout restaurants

An evening of culinary theater unfolded at República, named by Bon Appétit as one of the 10 best new U.S. restaurants in 2022. Sous chef Jose Camarena hunched over plate after plate working with implements pulled from his apron to add just the right touch to his five-course chef's tasting dinner. "Manos," he called when finished, using the Spanish word for "hands" to signal the staff when each carefully crafted plate was ready to be served.

The menu changes nightly with dishes a far cry from typical Tex-Mex fare. Instead, they contain ingredients pulled from Mexican history mimicking foods of the ancestors. Tonight's ingredients included rabbit, venison, maize, pumpkin. On another evening, the chef might incorporate chicatana ants, cactus or chapulines (grasshoppers). Each course can be paired with a selection of mezcal or wine, usually from Mexico.

Another exploration of ethnic flavors unfolds at Phuket Café opened in March 2022 in Northwest Portland's Nob Hill neighborhood. Chef-restaurateur Akkapong "Earl" Ninsom creates dishes inspired by the culinary innovations of his native Bangkok, Thailand, and the blend of Chinese, Malaysian and Muslim flavors of Thai holiday hot spot Phuket.

An albacore ceviche comes sprinkled with peanut brittle and Thai paella is loaded with seafood. Steakhouse lovers choose between an 18-ounce pork chop or 16-ounce rib-eye. The menu changes seasonally and in pleasant weather diners may choose to sit outside in a modified trolley car. Libations by business partner and cocktail genius Eric Nelson include the whimsical Tricked-Out Hyundai with black pepper vodka, haldi doodh, cacao, Galliano, coconut water and coconut cream.

Visitors with a ticket to Portland Japanese Garden can relax over tea and traditional Japanese snacks at Umami Café. Among the choices: matcha and chocolate mochi ice cream, miso soup, hojicha and chikara cake. Part of a \$33.5-million cultural village expansion in 2017, the cafe building resembles Kyoto's Kiyomizu-dera temple. It appears to float over a hillside with expansive views of the surrounding forest.

Classic French fare offers comfort to diners at Bistro Alder, opened in September 2022 in downtown's Dossier hotel. Ingredients of the Pacific Northwest become traditional bistro dishes such as steak frites, filet au poivre and croque monsieur.

Also new to downtown, Dolly Olive showcases Southern Mediterranean fare with an emphasis on its in-house bakery, fresh-made pasta and Italian aperitifs. The menu introduced in June 2022 features a roasted beets antipasto, roasted squash ravioli primi piatti and Spanish octopus from the grill.



Voodoo Doughnut rose to fame in Portland in the early 2000s. It's especially known for its bacon maple bar. - Courtesy of Katherine Rodeghier

## **Don't forget the doughnuts**

When Portlanders quote the mantra "Keep Portland Weird," Voodoo Doughnut is an oft-cited example. Two entertainment-minded friends opened the first shop in 2003 combining their penchant for showmanship with pastries. Both became ordained ministers who performed both fake and legal weddings in their shops. They offered weekly Swahili lessons. They booked concerts in a loft space atop a duct tape-muraled bathroom. Word got out and long lines began to form at the entrance.

Doughnuts come in more than 50 varieties including vegan options. Two no longer appear on the menu after being banned by the health department: the NyQuil glazed and the vanilla Pepto crushed Tums doughnuts. Among its most popular remaining varieties are the bacon maple bar covered in maple glaze and bacon; oh captain, my captain topped with Cap'n Crunch cereal; and Memphis mafia with banana chunks and cinnamon, topped with glaze, chocolate chips, peanuts and chocolate and peanut butter drizzle.

Voodoo Doughnuts now has 13 shops in six states, but the expansion may be contributing to its fall from favor. Some Portlanders, fiercely subscribing to the belief food should be kept local, bristled when Voodoo opened in Houston, Hollywood, Orlando and Denver.

Now a rising star in Portland's doughnut world, Blue Star Donuts + Coffee uses a classic brioche recipe from the south of France. Among the best-sellers are the O.G. (orxata glaze), the chocolate bergamot old-fashioned and blueberry bourbon basil combining blueberries, basil and bourbon -- local of course. Blue Star has four shops in Portland plus a cart at Portland International Airport.



**The Willamette Valley stretches for 150 miles south of Portland and has more than 700 wineries.** - Courtesy of Katherine Rodeghier

**Napa of the North**

Portland stands at the confluence of the Columbia and Willamette Rivers marking the northern end of the 150-mile-long Willamette Valley, considered the land of milk and honey by emigrants traveling west on the Oregon Trail in the 1800s. In the 1970s and '80s, winemakers -- many from California -- turned the rich soil deposited by Ice Age glaciers into vineyards producing award-winning wines. Now producing two-thirds of Oregon's wines, the valley comprises 11 wine appellations with more than 700 wineries.

Sampling them is easy. Around Portland Tours customizes tours for day-trippers visiting the city.

Over a tasting at Blizzard Wines, owner and winemaker Dana Blizzard said her roots go deep into soil. Her parents grew up on a farm near Lafayette, Indiana, but a job transfer brought them to the Pacific Northwest and a rural home with a 1.5-acre vineyard in the Willamette Valley. She grew up on the land and took over the property in 2006, joined a winemaking club, enrolled in wine school and started making wine in her parent's garage. Husband Nick designed the winery building they opened in 2017 with just three wines to sell. Now they offer 16 wines plus artisan Champagnes they import from France. Their classic tasting menu features four pours.

Five wines are sampled in flights at Dominio IV. Guests are welcome to take their glass to sip while relaxing on the 1916 farmhouse porch or head to the hayloft of the 100-year-old barn that doubles as a weddings and special events space. Starting in the 1840s, the farm grew apples, pears, plums, cherries, walnuts and hazelnuts, crops not unlike those planted by Oregon Trail settlers. Now small groves of these crops grow alongside row after row of grape vines, testimony of the evolution of agriculture in this plentiful river valley.

### **If you go**

Details: Travel Portland, [travelportland.com/](https://travelportland.com/)

Lodging: The Bidwell Marriott Portland, a \$20 million renovation and relaunch of a traditional downtown Marriott property into a boutique hotel in 2022; spring rates from \$185 per night, [marriott.com/en-us/hotels/pdxct-the-bidwell-marriott-portland/overview/](https://marriott.com/en-us/hotels/pdxct-the-bidwell-marriott-portland/overview/)

Tours:

- Around Portland Tours, scheduled and customized walking, biking, driving tours, [aroundportlandtours.com/](https://aroundportlandtours.com/)
- Lost Plate Tours, Portland Food Carts, Pods & Patios Tour \$79, Downtown Coffee & Donut Tour (does not include Voodoo or Blue Star), \$59, [lostplate.com/](https://lostplate.com/)

Information for this article was gathered during a research trip sponsored by Travel Portland.

<https://www.dailyherald.com/entlife/20230108/fit-for-foodies-portland-oregon-prizes-its-diverse-dining-scene>