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# What's New?

A fresh crop of entrepreneurial dreamers is ready to ignite your summer.

BY SARAH MOORE

**J**UST WHEN YOU FEEL you've got the whole city memorized by heart, you turn a corner and dazzling new restaurants, bars, and shops waiting to be explored. Portland is as restless and shifting as the sea that surrounds it. So take a deep breath and dive into the new Old Port... and beyond.

## EXCHANGE STREET EVOLUTION

On the last night of 2017, we said goodbye to Sonny's cocktail bar and hello to **Black Cow** at 83 Exchange Street. Housed in the same gorgeous 19th-century former bank that provides the picturesque backdrop to Tommy's Park, Black Cow is nonetheless a very different beast from its predecessor. Gone are the sultry red walls and heavy drapes, replaced by a vibrant teal paint and dove-gray banquettes. Chef de cuisine Nicholas Nappi describes the casual restaurant as "elevated classic Americana"—think succulently greasy cheeseburgers made on dense, house-made buns and drizzled with caramelized tomato mayo and mustard, "cured and ground right here." Heady nostalgia is apparent in the playful menus (Slushburgers are Sloppy Joes for the Instagram world), newly installed soda fountain, and shake bar. Before you panic, the original Sonny's bar remains, along with much of its original staff and a pared-down list of 10 fancy cocktails. "We started afresh with the bar program," Nappi says. "The new menu features citrus-forward drinks and whiskeys that cut through the grease of the burgers." The air of



## DOWNTOWN



From left: Lobster grilled cheese at Highroller Lobster Co.; Tessa Storey and Mark Barnett of Higher Grounds coffee shop and apothecary hope to see a new wave of local businesses to Wharf Street; Carefully curated homewares and gifts at Fitz & Bennett.

classic kitsch and Black Cow's reasonable prices (\$5 hamburgers) are sure to appeal to parents and their kids alike. The restaurant looks a lot less friendly for those with dietary restrictions—most options contain meat and dairy.

### À LA CART

Across Exchange Street you'll find the brick-and-mortar realization of **Highroller Lobster Co.** food cart. The punchy design of the interior—a vibrant red and white canteen—and the creative menu list dispel the notion of a lobster roll joint as a seasonal enterprise. As if to prove this, Andy Gerry and Baxter Key opened the restaurant's (lobster-red) doors in the depths of December. If you like your lobster shacks with a little edge, you'll feel right at home with a tasty taco made of crisped cheese, filled with a bounty of lobster meat, fresh romaine, and lashings of lime mayo.

### WHARF STREET, BUT NOT AS YOU KNOW IT

The narrow, cobbled walkway tucked parallel to the bustle of Commercial Street is an after-hours destination for fine dining (think Street & Co., Central Provision) and after-after hours debauchery (think Bonfire and Oasis nightclub). Mark Barnett hopes to change your mind. The owner of Wharf Street's uber-chic new coffee shop and apothecary, **Higher Grounds**, has a

big dreams for this little street. He moved into 45 Wharf Street in October 2017, after he connected with landlord Joe Cooper over a shared vision for its future. "We really want to shift the public perception of Wharf Street. Imagine if it could be pedestrianized—we could create boulevard with a European feel right here."

Grab a Speckled Ax coffee and light bite and take a seat among the tropical plants and succulents (some of them whimsically adorned with name tags) amid shelves of locally made tinctures, tonics, and salves. Barnett hopes to expand his herbal offerings in the near

future—he's following state legislature closely to see if the possibility of expanding Higher Grounds into a cannabis retail space could become a viable prospect. "The space next door [49 Wharf Street] is empty. If cannabis retail becomes a legal possibility, we could always expand." In the meantime, "we'll be open till around 7 or 8 p.m. this summer, and we'll have patio seating out front of here and 49 Wharf."

### RETAIL-ORIENTATED

You can indulge more than your taste buds in the Old Port. A sleek set of boutiques and international brands has found its perch along these narrow streets in recent months. If the food scene leaves you feeling inspired to flex your own Epicurean muscles, **SKORDO** at 372 Fore Street has all the gadgets and ingredients you could desire to at least look the part of the Michelin-star chef. John Karonis and his family launched the business online in 2016. "SKORDO is Greek for garlic," he says, a nod to his family's heritage, though it's not all Hellenic wares. The tastefully designed storefront sells everything "from ceramic rice cookers to Tunisian tagine pots." Pick up a bag of Greek seasoning and a pot of Maine blueberry pork rub to add a rush to your grills and picnics this summer.

Beyond the kitchen, find interior design inspiration at the petite **Fitz & Bennett**

"We want to shift the public perception of Wharf Street. Imagine if we could create boulevard with a European feel right here."

—Mark Barnett



showroom on 43 Silver Street. The store is carefully curated to resemble a Pinterest-worthy array of enviable ceramics, throws, and *tchotchkes*. “Portlanders loves local art and handmade artisanal objects, but we’re practical, too,” says owner Lauren Siviski. “I want to make sure someone can come in with \$50 or less and find something really exciting to keep or give as a gift.”

On the corner of Tommy’s Park and Middle Street, clothing retailer **Rambler’s Way** installed a 5,000-square-foot storefront to showcase the brand’s upscale eco-clothing line. Launched by Tom Chapell (of Tom’s of Maine fame), the shop offers Merino-wool and organic cotton basics. The clothes are 100-percent American-made, though the style is classically British—think Meghan Markle crossed with Kate Middleton.

Jump aboard the “athleisure” train with a trip to **lululemon** on 18 Exchange Street. The global brand opened its first Portland store on Milk Street in 2010, but closed several years later. The new shop front on one of the Old Port’s busiest thoroughfares assures visitors it’s “Here to be, here to stay,” according to hand-lettering on the windows. The minimal, sleekly lined interior is an expression of the brand’s ethos of clean living, exercise, and authenticity. Pop in for a pair of snug yoga pants or information on the store’s exercise classes and events. Expect to leave with your wallet feeling significantly lighter.

FROM LEFT: COURTESY HIGHROLLER LOBSTER; MEAGHAN MAURICE; MIRA MCKENNEY

LobsterShirt.net

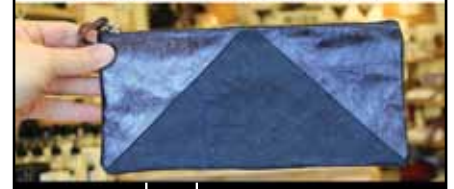


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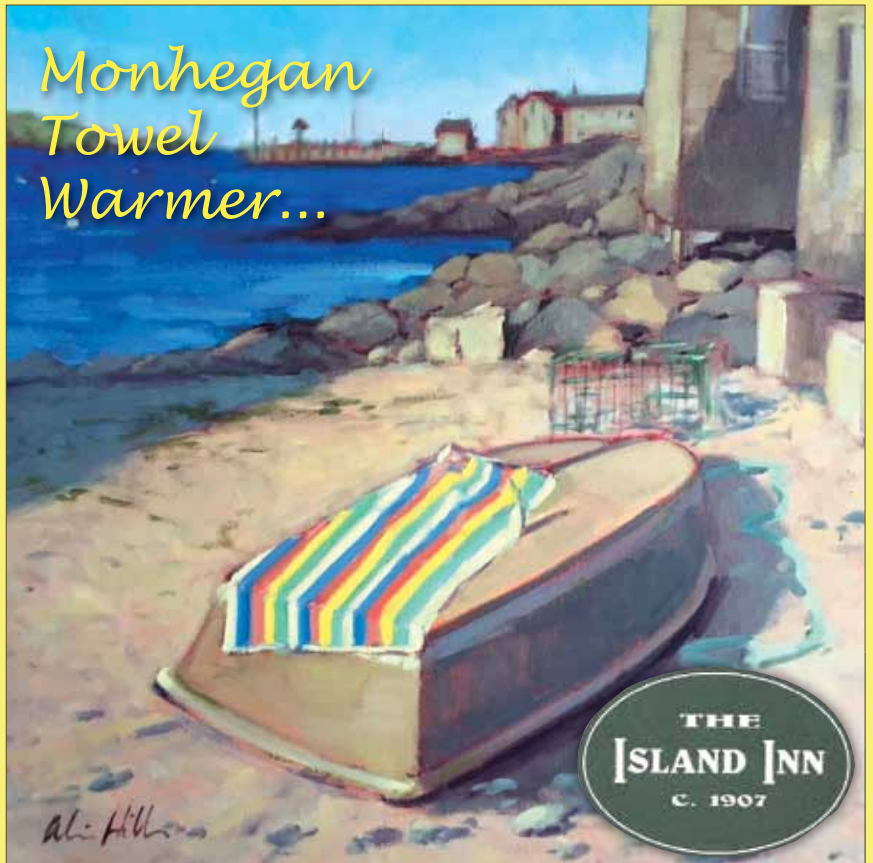


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## DOWNTOWN

### YOU CAN ALWAYS GO DOWNTOWN

Further uptown, the action continues with exciting new eateries popping up along the fertile stretch of Congress Street. Here, two architectural treasures recently found their second lease on life. **The Roma Café**, which brought foodie delight to Portlanders long before we were ever considered foodies, rises from its ashes to offer classic red-sauce Italian fare in The Rines Mansion at 767 Congress, where the restaurant lived from 1936 until 1989. If you're weary of modern dining, with its communal tables and trend-driven ingredients, find a table at the tastefully reimagined Roma and order up a plate of spaghetti, meatballs, and Caesar salad...and enjoy.

Just 250 feet away, **The Francis Hotel** in the Mellen E. Bolster House has shaken off its dust sheets to begin a new life as a hip boutique hotel with accompanying restaurant, **Bolster, Snow & Co.** Described by owners Nate DeLois, Tony DeLois, Jake DeLois, and Jeff Harder as a "restaurant with rooms," the petite hotel (named for famed



Times they are a-changin' at the intersect of India and Fore Street, where a crop of new buildings have sprouted up in the past year.

architect Francis Fassett) is an homage to its history, with restored fireplace and classic furnishings dotted around the living spaces and 15 bedrooms.

### LAFAYETTE, WE ARE HERE

Another historical face peeks out from the corner Park and Congress from the lobby of the Lafayette Building. When you catch a glimpse of Teddy Roosevelt's toothy grin, you've come face-to-face with the area's latest high-end cocktail joint, **Sagamore Hill Lounge**. Owner Ryan Deskins describes Sagamore as "a world-class place to get a

drink inside a former luxury hotel—which happened to be built during Roosevelt's first term." There will be beer and wine along with "a selection of presidentially inspired drinks. The Rough Rider himself was fond of mint juleps, with fresh mint from the White House garden. Sagamore Hill is a place that we think Teddy would happily saddle up to today."

On the same row, tucked in beside Merchant & Co., **Poké Pop** will fuse the popularity of Hawaiian poké bowls (fresh, raw tuna served with assorted vegetables and rice) with Asian delicacies rarely seen in

MIRA MCKENNEY; COURTESY COWORKERS; MIRA MCKENNEY



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Female empowerment is the focus of CoworkHERS collaborative work space on Congress Street. Right: SKORDO spices things up on Fore Street, offering kitchenware and an eclectic mix of spices and herbs.

Maine. Owner and sushi chef Anusat Lim-sitong plans to familiarize us with tasty, healthful treats like bubble tea and bingsu—a type of dessert made from shaved ice and sweet toppings.

### ELECTRIC AVENUE

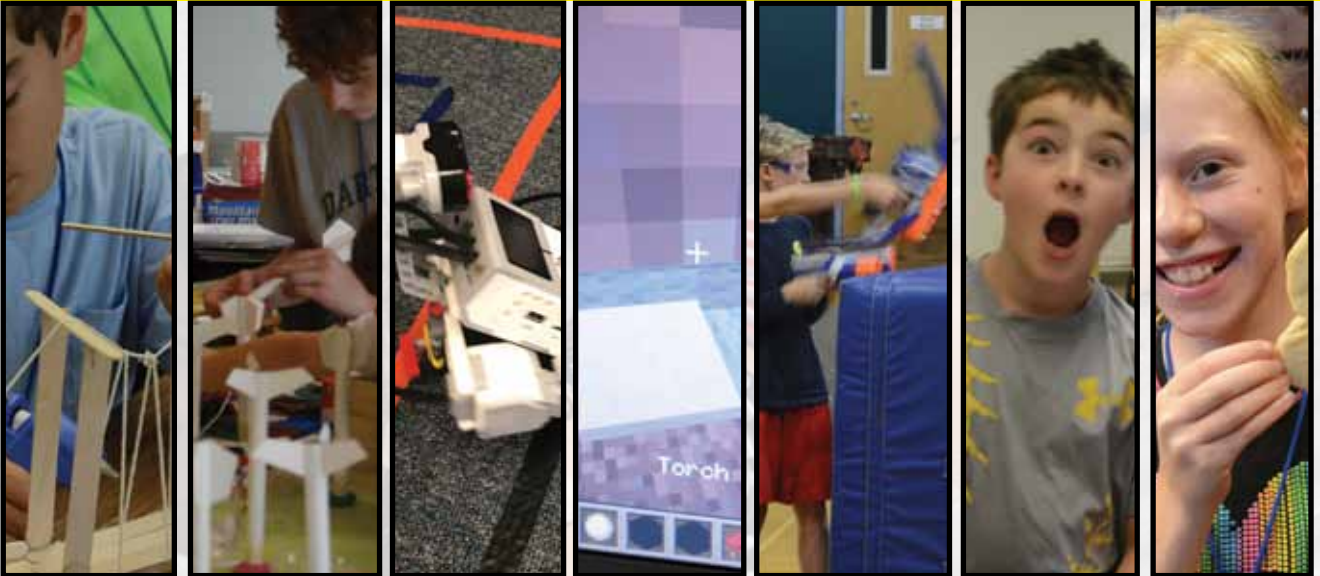
The dark horse of the Portland scene, **Washington Avenue** keeps on giving us more reasons to go east. After two years of speculation and planning, an unusual development on the corner of Washington and Marion Street has finally come to fruition. “Yes! At long last, the

**Black Box shipping-container project** is moving ahead,” says Jed Harris, commercial real-estate developer. The vision for pop-up commercial spaces housed in six reused shipping containers has been on Harris’s mind for several years, inspired by the success of similar projects in other U.S. cities and London. “We have a reservation agreement with **The Cheese Shop of Portland** and a new espresso bar. The containers have been modified by a company in Brewer called SnapSpace. If all goes well, they’ll arrive onsite this month, and tenants will be able to occupy by June

1. We’re very excited to see what types of businesses show up.” Take a trip past the Nissen Building to see the new industrial-chic structure come to life, as this stretch of Portland evolves before our eyes. Sometimes the new energy feeds on new energy: The Cheese Shop owners Will and Mary Sissle were put in contact with Harris by Pete and Orenda Hale, the restaurateurs who recently expanded **Drifters Wife** bistro and wine shop a few doors down. “Washington Avenue is one of our favorite places to visit,” Mary says. “It felt natural to open our shop among those places we love the most. This was the perfect way for us to get our shop going in our ideal neighborhood quickly and cost efficiently.” The little storefront will offer cheeses cut-to-order and an array of dairy and deli items from Maine and beyond.

Ogunquit’s **Bob’s Clam Hut** owner Michael Landgarten teased back in January that the building (formerly 3 Buoys seafood shack) at the corner of Cumberland and Washington would soon be transformed into “an urban Bob’s,” complete with a

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## DOWNTOWN

large outdoor patio for hungry visitors to devour fried clams and lobster in a less frenetic, more local-centric hangout than the Old Port. Landgarten aims to open before summer gets underway.

By day, Portland Pottery is the cozy cafe-cum-workshop that has inhabited 118 Washington Avenue for over thirty years. But by night, it transforms into something altogether more romantic. When dusk falls and the candles are lit, **Lena's Italian** dishes up wholesome slabs of parmesan (in eggplant, veal, or chicken iterations) baked in sweet and sharp tomato sauce and generous amounts of oozing mozzarella with a side of crisp romaine Caesar salad. Seated in mismatched spindle-back chairs and surrounded by handmade pottery, you could've been transported back to Nonna's kitchen.

### GET DOWN TO BUSINESS

Despite appearances, there's more to Portland's urban ecosystem than bars and restaurants. Entrepreneurial Mainers are sending waves out from our little seacoast

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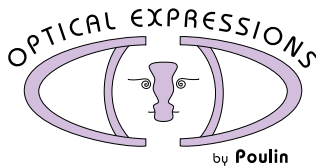
state across the globe. Figures from The Maine Department of Labor suggest unemployment rates in the state have dipped to 2.9 percent—the lowest since 1976. Portland caps in even further beneath the curve at 2.5 percent. According to *The Financial Post*, 2018 looks set to be another bumper year of lobster exports, with China hungrier than ever for our lucky red lobsters. So what's happening under the surface of The Forest City?

**ON THE MOVE**

Moving eastward beyond the Maine State Pier, you'll notice big changes underfoot. After all, the rumbling construction vehicles are hard to miss. Several large firms have made moves to this end of town in the past year, eager grab a position close to the beating heart of the Old Port. CEO Joshua Broder chose 16 Middle Street from among 20 other properties to establish his new **Tilson HQ**. It was a strategic move: the tech information service company is listed as one of America's 5,000 fastest-growing companies by *Inc.* this year,



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## DOWNTOWN

and “we’ll probably add another 30 people to our 115-strong Portland team in 2018,” Broder says. “There’s a lot of young talent in Maine.” The tech-savvy employees can enjoy a walking commute to work, “affordable condos,” and choice lunch spots—“We’re responsible for the lines outside **Miccucci’s** these days!” Tilson took a gamble on this relatively quiet neighborhood last year, but now they’re in good company. **WEX** has chosen the corner of Hancock and Thames Street, a former city parking lot, as the downtown site for its new headquarters. The 100,000-square-foot, five-story space will give 450 of the company’s population enviable sea views. Sensing opportunity, **AC Hotel** will open the doors to its swanky 150-room hotel at 158 Fore Street, no doubt hoping to entice visiting businessmen and women.

### FRESH PICKS

It’s not all big corporations taking steps this year. A number of startup incubators around the state are giving wings to small-scale entrepreneurial efforts. **CoworkHERS** launched a glossy female-only workspace at 411 Congress to nurture women-lead businesses and freelancers—not a bad move, considering Maine leads revenue growth among women-owned business, according to the 2018 State of Women-Owned Businesses Report. “What I aim to do is bring a community of women together to help them connect with like-minded women and find their confidence, be independent, successful and unafraid to tackle their dreams and goals,” says founder Heather Ashby. “After touring numerous coworking spaces in Maine and Boston, I realized that they’re quite dude-centric. At CoworkHERS, women not only have a place to work, but they enjoy free coffee, wine, snacks, lockers, high-speed internet, printers and meeting rooms, plus a whole community of amazing women.”

On the foodie front, **Fork Food Lab** on Parris Street was bought out by Brooklyn’s Pilotworks, a nationally leading commercial kitchen and business incubator enterprise. The Maine Center for Entrepreneurs has launched the **Cultivator Food, Beverage & Agriculture Accelerator** program. The new start-up food business initiative will nurture its first crop of local entrepreneurs this year. ■



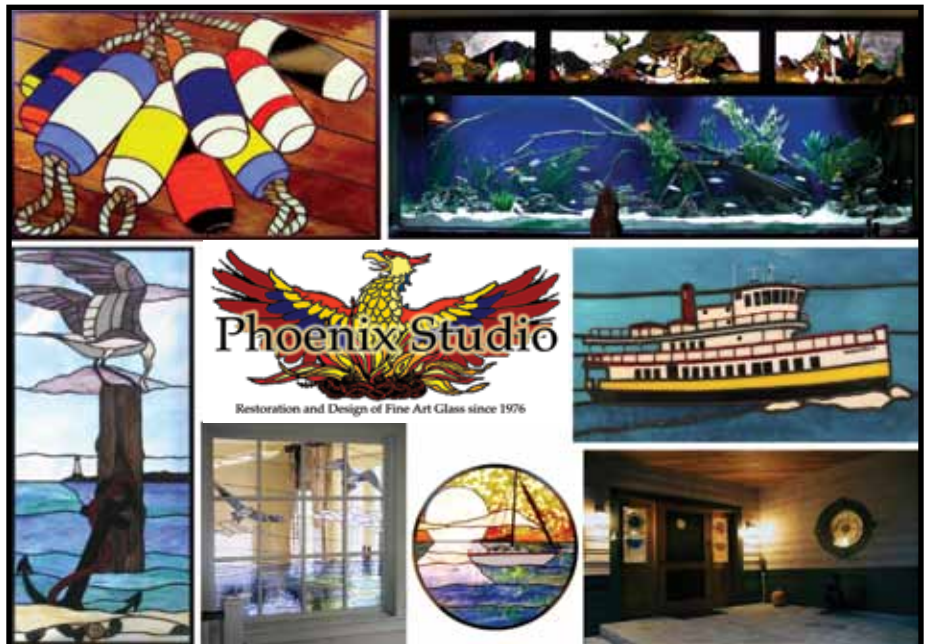
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