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eatingout



TREAT YOURSELF!

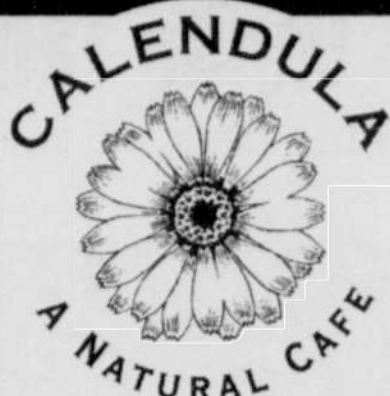
castagna



dinner castagna wednesday...saturday
café castagna 7 nights a week

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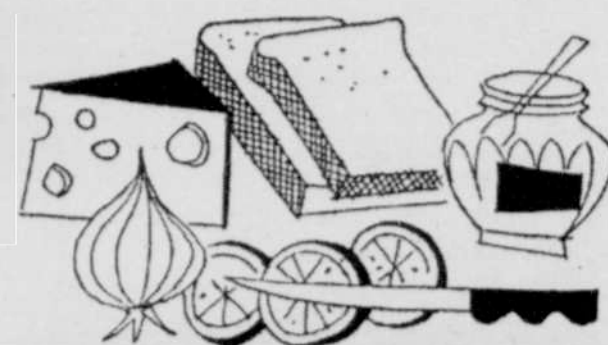
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BY MICHAEL E BARRETT

Destination: 97214

Downtown may be the heart of Portland, but its soul is just across the Willamette in the city's most famous zip code: 97214. Linked to downtown by four of Portland's bridges and buttressed by Hawthorne Boulevard and Belmont Street, this area is known for its alternative culture, a large lesbian population and an East Village-esque night life...OK, so maybe that's an exaggeration, but here's what's not: The restaurants are fab!

Utopia Café • 3308 S.E. Belmont St.

A longtime breakfast favorite of mine, the Utopia Café is a morning and lunchtime mainstay frequented by businesspeople, neighbors, couples and those of us who just want to sit down with the latest issue of *Just Out*, a good cup of coffee and a side of bacon. On many mornings, the featured pastry is a blackberry scone that truly reflects the restaurant's name. Big day ahead of you? Start it off with a Utopia scramble. A bowl of oats with brown sugar and hazelnuts and a side of sour-dough toast doubles as winter comfort and late-night recovery food.

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Buckman Bistro • 213 S.E. 12th Ave.

Sharing its kitchen with the more elegant William's on 12th, Buckman Bistro will please your taste buds without burning a hole in your wallet. A gorgeous antique mahogany bar dominates one end, while huge fishbowl windows overlook passersby out front. Add some mood lighting and a handsome, menu-savvy waiter with a white apron, and you'll feel like you're in a quaint European cafe without the smoke. Buckman's food emphasizes simplicity and variety. You'll savor each and every "escargot baked in champagne, garlic, hazelnuts and parsley" before advancing toward your entree. The restraint in the quantity of ingredients results in dishes with discernible flavors, making it a great choice for those nights when you'd rather forego "rich and saucy" for something more wholesome.

Clarklewis • 1001 S.E. Water Ave.

The newest addition to Portland's list of trendier, spendier eateries, Clarklewis is an offshoot of Ripe and its "family suppers." Like Ripe, the dishes are unique and sometimes experimental, the ingredients are fresh, and the menu is never the same. Available in small, large and family portions, you can choose from an assortment of starters. Be sure to ask for the "fritto of the day." The pasta dish I tried was spelt noodles with guanciale pork and wine sauce. The flavor was heavy and sophisticated, yet somehow reminiscent of home cookin'. The pan-roasted yellowtail fish with stewed artichokes and meyer lemon salsa tasted like spring. At Clarklewis, rich and saucy is definitely on the menu: The "pork shoulder braised with prunes and balsamic" is fit for a king...make that a queen.



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