

lets you relax under the stars (it's open until 10 p.m.). Rooms—mostly set in former classrooms—have hardwood floors, large windows, comfy armchairs, high ceilings and private bathrooms. The rates start at \$115 nightly (that includes theater and pool admission), but you can add value by opting for one of the hotel packages, themed around dining, romance and, sometimes, upcoming events.

Romance by the River

If there's one great reason for spending a night at a hotel in Portland, it's charming a date. Curl up in one of the mod rooms at the contemporary (and LEED-certified) Avalon Hotel (avalonhotelandspa.com), just a couple of miles south of downtown in the South Waterfront neighborhood along the Willamette River, and you can easily feel someplace romantic and far from home. This is especially true if you've been pampered with a treatment at the hotel's 13,000-square-foot spa. Although the Avalon is easy to reach, it's relatively secluded from urban bustle. If you're eager to stretch your legs, you can access the Portland Riverwalk. But it's tempting to stay on property throughout your visit given the hotel's on-site amenities, which include not just the spa but also an extensive state-of-the-art fitness center and a terrific riverside restaurant, Aquariva Italian Kitchen & Wine Bar.

The 99 rooms, most with private balconies and views overlooking the river or the Southwest hills, are spacious and light-filled—18 are full suites with separate sitting rooms and fireplaces. Bathrooms are done with marble accents, and the cushy trappings include soft robes, CD-clock radios and plush linens. Rates this time of year start around \$125, but you can also book the Everlasting Love Package for \$260 per night, which includes a three-course dinner, chocolates, in-room sparkling wine, free parking and late checkout (you can add a 60-minute couples massage for another \$175).

Downtown Epicurean

For barflies and socialites, staying at one of the many stylish downtown hotels is a worthwhile option—there are about a half dozen I regularly recommend, including the Heath-



ABOVE: The lobby at Hotel Modera
RIGHT: Pine State Biscuits

man, Nines, Monaco, Governor and deLuxe. For fans of the city's vibrant culinary scene, there's one somewhat lesser-known option I'm fond of, the contemporary, artfully designed Hotel Modera (hotelmodera.com), which is just around the corner from the exceptional Saturday farmers market at PSU (portlandfarmersmarket.org/index.php/markets/psu). The indie boutique hotel, which was fashioned out of a stunningly made-over Days Inn, also contains a fantastic restaurant, Nel Centro—an excellent choice for happy hour snacking, a full dinner or brunch the following morning.

Stay on a Friday night, and you can stroll over to the farmers market the next morning and fill your bags with fresh, local edibles while also filling up on breakfast from the outstanding vendors—get there early if you're hankering for the heart-stopping Reggie Deluxe (biscuits and gravy topped with fried chicken, bacon, cheese and an egg) from Pine State Biscuits (pinestatebiscuits.com), as this tends to sell out quickly. I'm also partial to the grilled sausages from Salumeria di Carlo. And if you're staying another night at Modera, you can store whatever perishables you've purchased (goat cheese from Fraga Farm? Or perhaps fresh Netarts Bay oysters from Gilson Marine?) in the mini-fridge—each room has one.

Nel Centro (nelcentro.com), helmed by renowned restaurateur David Machado, serves



exemplary contemporary Italian fare with an emphasis on local ingredients and recipes from the Italian Riviera. The hotel is also close to world-class Portland restaurants like Higgins (higgins.yppguides.net) and Veritable Quandary (veritablequandary.com), as well as being a good choice if you're catching a show at nearby Keller Auditorium (*Billy Elliot*, *The Musical* begins a two-week engagement on April 5) or the Schnitzer Concert Hall (Sarah Silverman performs April 7, and Lewis Black the following night). And it's not far from downtown gay nightlife. All in all, this is a great choice for a glamorous evening on the town, and at rates starting as low as \$99 a night this time of year, you'll still have plenty of money left over to spend on exceptional dining.

Read more about the frequent travels of ANDREW COLLINS at thecountyhunter.com and gaytravel.about.com.

Green Thumbs, Start Your Engines...

Kick off the 2011 season with *The Sassy Gardener*

BY LEANN LOCHER

It's a new year in the garden and as the season awakes, so do many of us gardeners—or should I say farmers? Urban homesteaders? Balcony gardeners? Inside herb-growers? Victory gardeners? There are many names and target audiences included in this lexicon, and I find myself shunning the labels like many of us shun the labels of L, G, B, T or Q—or not. It's a loaded topic. But if you simply find it a love to grow something in the ground (whether it be the ground connected to the earth or the ground of a pot on your balcony), there's a load of things to try out this year. This is what I have my eye on....

Evergreens—Late winter-early spring, gardens across Oregon demonstrate the barren sadness of gardeners who forego structure for our spring and summer's abilities to produce blooms. I am one of them. Visit my garden in July and you'll find a massive plot full of foliage and flowers but, right now, the dirt lies bare and I kick myself, as I am often wont to do this time of year, for not planting a base of evergreens to anchor my garden yearlong. Small conifers, broad-leafed evergreens? I have read books and attended talks on these exact topics and this year is the time I put my knowledge into action.

Herbs—I've been watching my waistline, and unfortunately, up until recently, watching it grow. However, I'm reversing that trend and one of my strategies is with the liberal use of herbs. Herbs bring flavor to roasted vegetables, dips and meat when you're cutting back sugars and fats. Who wants a poached chicken breast with no flavor? Herbs have zero calo-

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