

The Willamette's genuine side

Arts, eateries, deep roots, and revival in Portland, Ore.

By Beth D'Addono
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

PORTLAND, Ore. — The other side of the tracks has come up in this city.

Twenty years ago, the Division/Clinton neighborhood was a gritty collection of rambling cottages and light industry, its population blue-collar and many with immigrant roots. Today it is some of that and more, a hip destination for Portlanders in search of the genuine. An ordinance bans any single business from taking up more than 10,000 square feet, so most of the shops, cafes, and businesses are mom-and-pop, owner-operated, often by people who live in the area. No big boxes here.

While the community struggles with issues such as rising rents, which recently forced one beloved cafe, Red and Black, to take its poetry readings elsewhere, its character and sense of itself remain strong. Defined by two important commercial streets, Division and Clinton, the area stretches from the Willamette River to the railroad tracks.

"For a long time, Portland's more affluent west side didn't cross the river to this neighborhood," says David Machado, whose restaurant, Lauro Mediterranean Kitchen, was one of the forces for change when it opened in 2003.

Situated in a long-vacant plumbing-supply house, Lauro proved naysayers wrong, and was named one of the country's best by Gourmet magazine in 2005, helping to define Division/Clinton as a destination for unique, authentic ethnic food. The neighborhood is home now to a melting pot of cuisines, including Thai, Mexican, and Indian.

"A restaurateur like David, who came from working-class roots himself, really understood the



PHOTOS BY BASIL CHILDERS/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Lauro Mediterranean Kitchen, which opened in 2003, helped revive Division/Clinton, joining area businesses like Langlitz Leathers, makers of the first custom leather motorcycle jacket.

character of the neighborhood from the beginning. He wanted to be part of it, without changing it too much," says Robin Corrigan, who 20 years ago shocked her well-heeled Seattle father by buying a fixer-upper in Division/Clinton. She had strangers stop her on the street to say she'd been gouged. Today, the house has appreciated 600 percent. "We couldn't afford to move here now," she says.

While real estate spiked 67 percent between 2002 and 2007, attracting an influx of Californians who viewed the housing prices as a comparative bargain, Division/Clinton's personality is as pronounced as ever. Indie, edgy, fiercely green, and community driven, it's a place that (so far) has resisted the vanilla sheen of gentrification.

Stroll along Division Street, with its many shops and cafes, and it's hard to believe the street was facing the wrecking ball in the 1970s to make way for an eight-lane freeway. Local residents and business owners joined in protest, refusing to let Division be turned into a ghostly frontage road. Typical in this city where crunch is ele-

vated to an art form and liberal sensibilities rule, grass-roots protest won out, with the city opting to put in a light rail system instead.

"People are invested in the neighborhood," says Julie Higgs, who opened a flower shop, Fleur de Lis, seven years ago. Her husband, David Stricker, is also invested in the community as a partner in the nearby Kung Fu Bakery recording studio, where Pink Martini regularly records its fetching blend of jazzy Latin, lounge, and classical music.

When Higgs decided to retire, her clients would hear none of it. "Most businesses survive just fine by word of mouth. I never advertised. The shop just wouldn't die," she says. Instead, she sold it to Rachel Payton, a longtime employee, and is working with her to ease the transition. "It's our neighborhood. It's a fun place to be. I can't seem to leave," Higgs says.

Although the neighborhood has boomed of late, it does have a pop-culture history worth noting. It was here, at Langlitz Leathers, that the first custom leather motorcycle jacket was created in 1947. And at Loprinzi's Gym on

Division, one of the nation's first bodybuilding gyms opened in 1948. At the Clinton Street Theater, an art house that hosts everything from hip-hop to underground screenings, "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" has been screened every Saturday night since 1978, the longest run in the world for the cult classic.

Division/Clinton is a gem of a neighborhood, a place where residents tend to get deeply rooted. People like Mike Pardew, 27, a jazz guitarist who, with his brother, could have opened Cadenza Academy anywhere, but chose this place. Pardew likes that he can walk to work from his apartment, that he knows people when he goes for coffee at the Clinton Corner Cafe or lunch at Eugenios, and that word of mouth seems to effortlessly follow his performances at Vindalho, a restaurant around the corner from the studio.

"The edgy vibe has been around for decades," Pardew says. "This place feeds on itself. That's what makes it so special."

Beth D'Addono, a writer in Belmont Hills, Pa., can be reached at bethdaddono@comcast.net.

If you go . . .

Where to stay

Division/Clinton lacks a hotel. Staying across the river, a 10-minute ride over the Morrison Bridge, makes good sense.

Hotel Lucia

400 South West Broadway
877-225-1717
hotellucia.com

This well-located boutique hotel doubles as an art gallery for Oregon native and Pulitzer winner David Hume Kennerly's striking black and white photos of historic figures such as Presidents Kennedy and Ford and Mikhail Gorbachev. Doubles from \$159.

Hotel Deluxe

729 South West 15th Ave.
866-895-2094
hoteldeluxeportland.com

Retro glamour rules here, complete with framed film stills and celebrity portraits. Great location, right on the Max line, the city's light rail. Doubles from \$179.

Where to eat

Dots Café

2521 South East Clinton St.
503-235-0203

Looking for all the world like it was decorated by John Waters, this beloved slacker lounge, music venue, and eatery is ultra cool, pours terrific drinks, and offers pub and Mexican fare. Try the cheesy fries \$4.50-\$5, depending on topping.

Lauro Mediterranean Kitchen

3377 South East Division St.
503-239-7000
laurokitchen.com

With its menu from olive-growing regions of Europe, Lauro delivers dishes like grilled lamb sirloin with saffron pilaf and seafood paella. Entrees \$11-\$21.

Pok Pok

3226 South East Division St.
503-232-1387
pokpokpdx.com

This old bungalow is home to both Andy Ricker and his restaurant, a snappy take on Thai street food. \$6-\$11.



Nuestra Cocina

2135 South East Division St.
503-232-2135
nuestra-cocina.com

Opened in 2004, chef Benjamin Gonzales and his wife Shannon serve authentic central Mexican cuisine. Try the house meatballs and chile infused tequila. Dinners \$9-\$17.

Vindalho

2030 South East Clinton St.
503-407-4550
vindalho.com

Local restaurateur David Machado forgoes his Portuguese roots to create fresh Indian food cooked without heavy fats and lots of dairy and you get the idea. Entrees \$14-\$18.

What to do

Cadenza Academy

2727 South East 21st Ave.
503-963-9600
cadenzaacademy.net

Check out this school run by local jazz musicians and brothers Kevin and Mike Pardew. Their garage door facing the street may be rolled up for jam sessions on the sidewalk.

Langlitz Leathers

2443-A South East Division St.
503-235-0959
langlitz.com

The name in custom motorcycle jackets since 1947, the family-owned Langlitz has made jackets for the likes of Marlon Brando, Johnny Depp, and Jay Leno.

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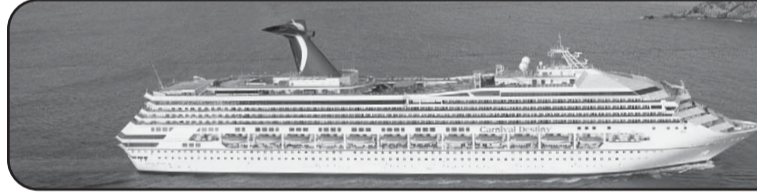
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