



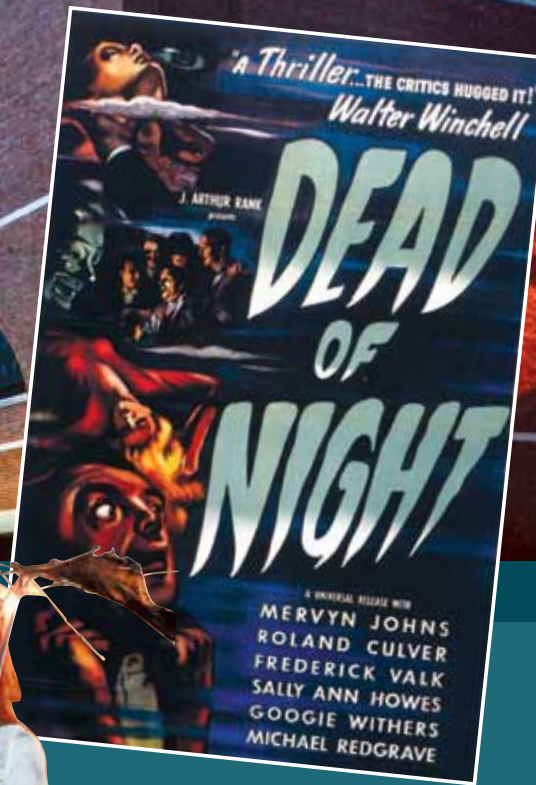

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8 Great Dates

Find new magic in the city with your sweetheart or your spouse. BY OLIVIA GUNN



Romance & the Silver Screen: Candlelight dining at 555 & a vintage film at PMA, costumes optional.

1 PMA Movie

After a week of work, errands, balancing acts, bills (and did I mention work?), there's nothing more appealing to a Portlander than oysters on the half shell at happy hour. Fil and I meet at Street & Co. on Wharf Street, where some folks have already settled in for dinner. Inside it's bustling, and we're welcomed to the bar with one sweeping gesture. Our bartender leads us through the specials though he sees in our eyes the reflection of oysters

glistening on ice. We'll do a half dozen of the two locals and two Ishmael Rip Tides. We catch one another up on our weeks and soon decide to order a \$4 tapa, the smoked white anchovy served with pesto. It's enough to whet the palate before heading to Portland Museum of Art to catch a film.

Most city dwellers know or should know that every Friday after 5 p.m. admission to the museum is free. It's then when you'll find couples walking through after a long, brain-numbing week at work. You may think you're not the museum type, but



FROM TOP: COREY TEMPLETON; COURTESY OF THE PMA; JULIE ANN ART (JULIEANNART.COM); FROM 555 BY JEFF ROBERTS



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Hallows Eve

let your eyes dance in the colors and light of French Impressionists and you may find yourselves lost in a Renoir. The film of the week starts at 7 p.m.

Later, we ruminate on French painters and French subtitles over a nightcap at Five Fifty-Five on Congress Street.

It's an inspiring night. When a date revolves around beauty and reflections on life, it's all there right before your eyes. Just look closely.

2 Brushstrokes

Kurt Vonnegut observed that "Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow, for heaven's sake." And who better to grow it with than your soulmate?

Muse Paint Bar is the latest hot spot for date night. In the Old Port at 245 Commercial Street,

locals and visitors are invited to explore their inner artist with the help of everyone's favorite muse, a glass of wine or a bottle of brew.

While the bar lines the back wall, the rest of the studio is filled with easels and the walls covered in art. Even some of the instructors' own work can be found.

Each painter is given one canvas and the colors for that night's painting, which is listed on the website when you sign up. Some twosomes join the regular evening sessions or wait for that month's Couples' Night, when each person paints half of one painting.

As I wait for the session to start I notice one couple who just can't stop smiling. "What brought you here of all places?" I ask as they order their first round. He grins goofily and

Explore your inner artist with a glass of wine or a bottle of craft brew.

she smiles: "We like trying new things." He chuckles and I begin to wonder if there's a hidden dirty joke in the works.

Karrie, the instructor for this evening, works the room like a TV emcee, cracking jokes and rousing the crowd, all the while painting a glowing crescent moon land-

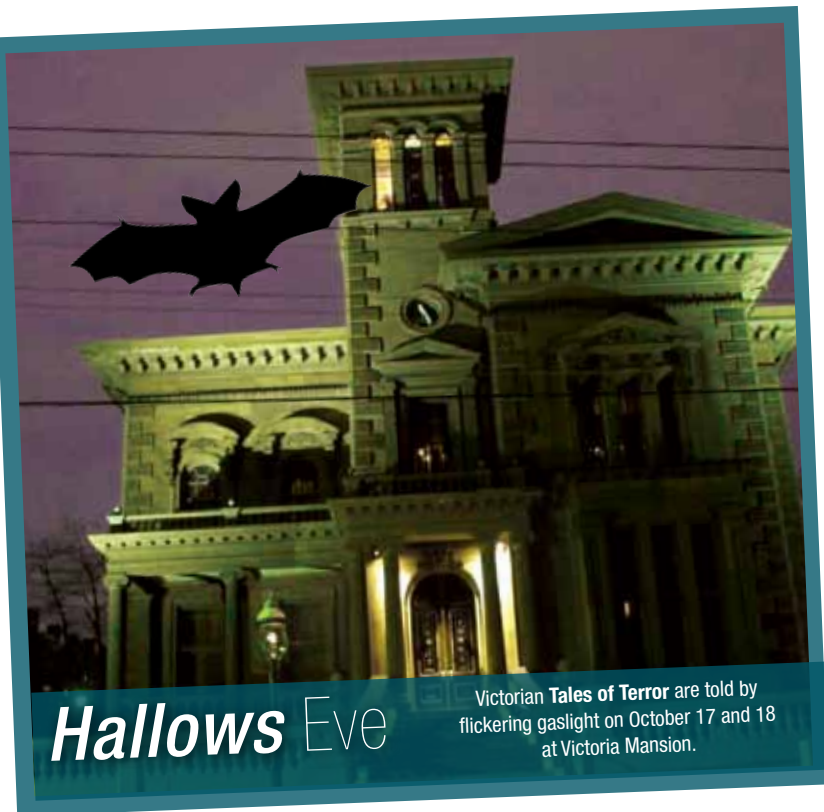
scape. "Everyone loves it when I go over the brushes." This gets a giggle from the women, who make their way for glass number two.

Though couples are welcome any evening, Couples' Night works as a collaborative effort. Briana, another artist and Karrie's assistant for the evening, tells me about her own experiences painting with her boyfriend, who's never too shy to join the group sessions. "He is so into it," she beams. "Sometimes we just paint on the



Spark your creativity with a paintbrush.

FROM TOP: CYNTHIA FARR WEINFELD; COURTESY DOWNEAST PRIDE ALLIANCE; MEAGHAN WAURICE; COURTESY MUSE PAINTBAR



Hallows Eve Victorian **Tales of Terror** are told by flickering gaslight on October 17 and 18 at Victoria Mansion.

floor of our apartment together. He says I need to be famous.”

Looking around the room, that love and support isn't hard to see, even in a room of strangers. I notice a woman who is grooving to Stevie Wonder on the sound system. “My name is Jeanne. Rhymes with fun.” I ask if she's on a date and she shrugs, “Nope, but I'm working on someone.” She winks and with that is back to her paint strokes.

This session will last a little over two hours, depending on the group and the painting, but it's two hours of bonding and laughs. “It's perfect for all couples,” Karrie promises. “Your personalities are going to leak out onto these paintings. You can't help it.”

3 On a Roll

One of the benefits of living in Portland is full-time access to fresh, traditional sushi. Sure, you can find sushi almost anywhere, but do you really go just *anywhere* for great fresh fish? I think not. So when Filipp returned home from a month-long shoot, his first wish was a Benkay Rainbow Roll, salmon sashimi, and one tall tokkuri of sake.

We arrive at 2 India Street around 9 p.m. and take two seats at the sushi bar, where the chefs greet us and chat baseball before leaving us to ourselves as they begin slicing and dicing our orders.

Sitting side by side at the bar with fresh plates handed to us

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directly, we find an intimacy here we haven't found at Miyake or Yosaku, often the go-to choices in town. Benkay feels the most authentic to us and has become our spot on the edge of the Old Port. It's got a look you might find replicated in a Tarantino film, but it has a class and style all its own.

We end the meal with lemon-drop cocktails and are the last to leave, but not rushed. Outside, the neon sign casts a sexy glow over the street, and the ocean breeze beckons us to take a late night walk to the promenade.

Tiny boat lights sparkle in the distance, mimicking the stars, and we're quickly lost in a fantasy aboard our schooner on which we'll sail to Honshu and—well, maybe someday, but for now Benkay will do.

4 Start Climbing

All right, I'll just come right out and say it. We're not hikers. There is no reveling in nature's wonders for this pair. Perhaps I spent too much time in the woods of Western Pennsylvania while my father marked lum-

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PORTLAND AFTER DARK

ber, or maybe it's the fear of finding a tiny, disease-bearing bloodsucker that outweighs any inkling of interest I may have, but at age 25 I am finally not ashamed to admit that I do not enjoy hiking. That said, Fil and I were recently convinced to take to the trails of Bradbury Mountain in Pownal, assured that the fall foliage would enchant us. Looking *nothing* like L.L. Bean catalog models, we head north in hopes of hearing our own call of the wild.

Bradbury Mountain's summit is about a mile-long climb and can be completed in around 20 minutes. The hike isn't difficult, and the surrounding area is bright with fall's best. Looking out over the shades of orange, red, and yellow that paint the horizon of the peak, I was nearly persuaded to stop by Reny's on the way home for spankin' new gear. That was until the conversation turned to lions and tigers and bears on the way back. The main trail has several branches that lead deeper into the trees, and if you're new to trail maps you may end up in front of a "Private Property" sign surrounded by swampy grounds and no sign of human existence.

"Was that a banjo?"

All jokes aside, Bradbury Mountain makes a perfect afternoon adventure. Childhood memories and tall tales are aplenty when walking hand in hand through the trees, and getting just a little bit lost is fun.


Before heading home, we drive through Freeport and stop in at the Broad Arrow Tavern for the Lobster Sunday Brunch and root beers. It's the perfect ending to our first Maine trail adventure, and if every hike ends like this, I think we could easily get the hang of it.

5 On Stage

Theater season is here, and I'm overjoyed that movies will now be replaced with dinner and a play. It's one of the few times we overdress and play a refined city couple.

There are the obvious theaters in Portland, but we'll usually take the drive over the bridge to see what drama Mad Horse Theatre has conjured up for us. The company is located at 24 Mosher Street in South Portland and has converted The Hutchins School into a two-story space with studios and a black box theater. We've arrived several nights to sold-out shows, so I suggest ordering tickets online a day ahead of time.

This season they're bringing Arthur Mill-



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er's *A View From the Bridge* and *Kimberly Akimbo* by David Lindsay-Abaire.

6 Do It Yourself

It's a chilly, sunny fall Saturday and the perfect time for Momma Kotsishevskiy's borscht recipe. "Fresh, you need fresh ingredients," I'm reminded. "If they are not fresh, it won't taste the same." Fresh. Got it.

Filipp and I make our way to Deering Oaks for Saturday morning's Portland Farmers' Market. Families surge among the vendors down the path lined with fresh bouquets of sunflowers, pumpkins, squash, apples, and more. Our grocery list? "Big beets. Three or four big beets. Cabbage. A good



cabbage. Carrots and celery." And they must be— Yes, Momma. We know.

Our list doesn't take long to complete since whichever way you turn, you're sure to come across just what you need or what you didn't know you need but now you do. A toddler reaches to touch a string bean as a German shepherd stops to sniff a crate of potatoes. One farmer couple sneaks in a smooch behind their display before a short elderly woman peeks over to pay for cukes. Fil stops for the perfect shots of earthy colors and worn hands.

He tells stories of his grandmother at the Moscow bazaar, and his eyes sparkle with memories.

Back in our own kitchen, we snap a photo of our goods for Momma K's approval and then get to work. By noon the entire floor of our building smells of homemade borscht and the rich red stew simmers for tonight's dinner.

7 Arcadia

Within walking distance of Slab, only the best pizza in Portland, Arcadia National Bar is the perfect place for a double or triple date. Grab some pizza and a few drinks, then head across the street and enjoy your favorite arcade games. Fil and I arrive to a bar packed with couples and groups of friends. We order two beers, exchange cash for quarters, and go merrily a-gaming. Our first stops are Tetris, Pac-Man, and Donkey Kong before heading to the wall of pinball machines.

The bar is dark and has a slight grunge feel, but no one shows up to play Nintendo in stilettos and bling. The couch in front is usually overtaken by groups of friends playing MarioKart, and couples playfully compete over laundry duty. Out of quarters, we take a seat at the bar and watch a motley crew of gamers argue over who plays Yoshi. Arcadia is not the place for romance, but if you're looking for fun, laughs, and a little competition, I think you'll get a high score for this date.

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8 Flick @ The Nick

Not into dancing, theater, or the galleries? And you know your friends are bound to be at every pub? Well, there is nothing wrong with playing it safe with a good old-fashioned blockbuster, my friends.

Though most would save it for Saturday, which has for too long reigned as date night, in Portland, it's Tuesdays that have become our movie night at the Nickelodeon. For six dollars each, we've seen everything from local films and indies to Oscar nominees.

After a good rom-com, there's nothing better than taking a stroll through the Old Port, where the streets are fairly clear of the party crowd you can't avoid on a Saturday night. The stars are out, the cobblestones give you the perfect excuse to walk arm-in-arm, and Gorgeous Gelato is only minutes away. We share the pistachio every time and take two espressos for the chilly walk home.

Movie night; it's sweet, it's simple, it's classic. Just like Bogie and Bacall. ■



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