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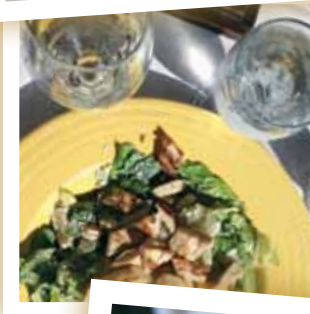
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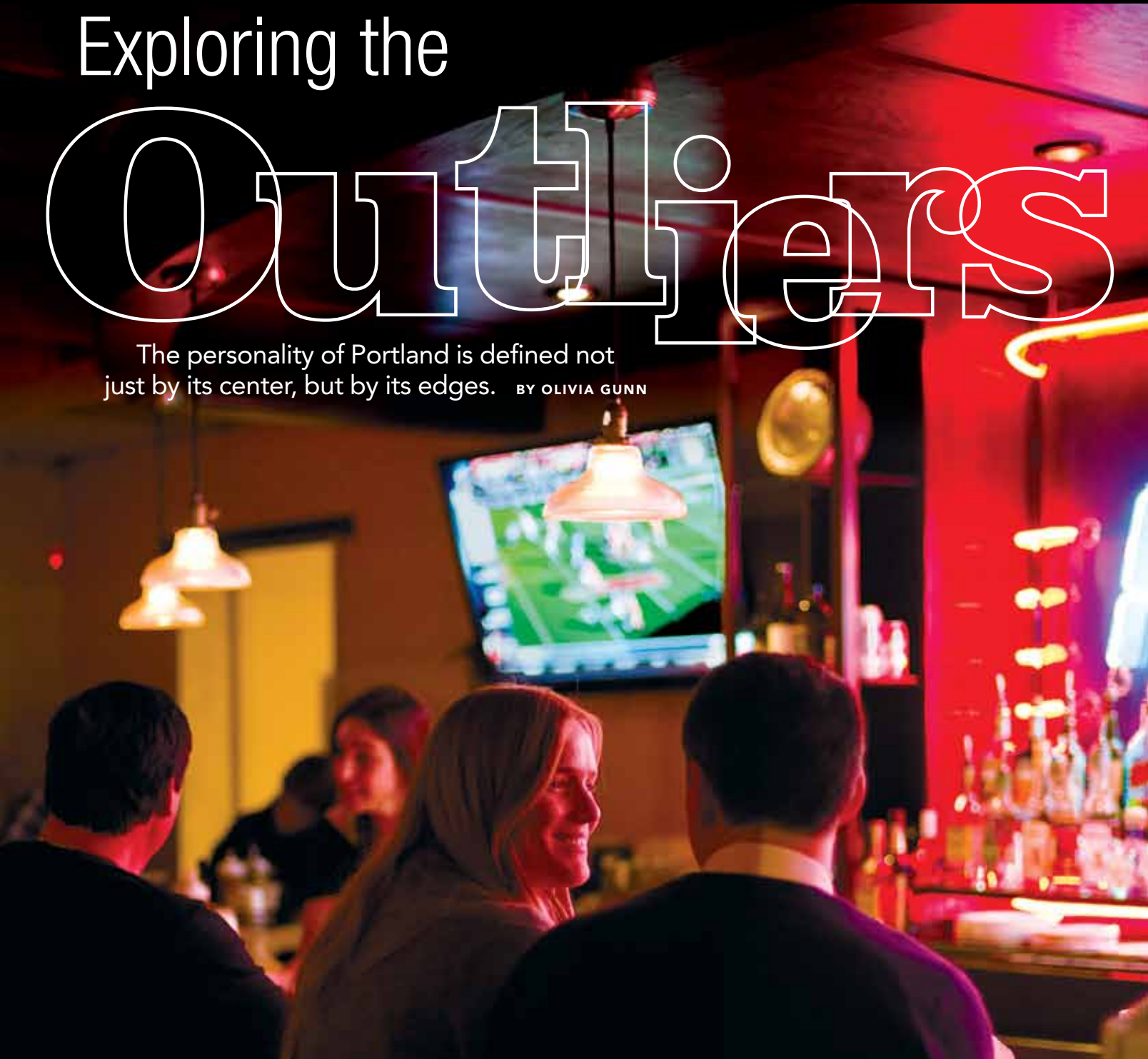
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Exploring the Outliers

The personality of Portland is defined not just by its center, but by its edges. BY OLIVIA GUNN



As with any city, those who live in the midst of it all often disregard surrounding areas as after-dark prospects. We choose the bar that feels like home, the cafe with the biggest brunch, and we all know you're either going to Brian Boru or Bull Feeney's on Saturday night, don't lie. But after a while things can get a little monotonous. Like plain potato chips—they taste really good and you're not stopping anytime soon, but you wouldn't have minded a little French onion dip. Well, lately, I've been craving a new

bag of chips or some of that dip.

ELSMERE

Elsmere BBQ and Wood Grill has been on Fil's radar since we moved here. "It's a barbecue joint. And they cook everything on wood. You could get a salad." His descriptions of such divine decadence never persuaded me, but being as his "boys" are visiting, it's decided that we're headed for barbecue.

Elsmere resides on Cottage Road in South Portland in a converted garage/laundromat. We arrive for dinner



DOUGLAS MERRIAM (2)

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and the guys are immediately gaga for the giant neon sign behind the bar that reads "Ray's Auto Radiator and Body Shop." I'll admit, it's a cool touch, but I'm starting to feel like Betty to Elsmere's Veronica. We take a booth and order up a round of beers, brisket, and nachos. While we wait for the food, the guys are sucked into the two-player Mrs. Pac Man arcade game. It's almost as if they're in college again, and listening to three guys relaxed and reminiscing, I admit that Elsmere is the perfect choice and the grilled salmon salad isn't half bad.

RUN OF THE MILL

"You have Downeast Cider on tap? Keep 'em coming, my friend." We've found ourselves at Run of the Mill Brewery in Saco after passing through the historic town on a Sunday cruise. The giant Mill bears a long wooden bar in front with plenty of tables and dining seating throughout. The manager, Rebecca, happens to be behind the bar when we arrive, and after posing for a photo with the taps, offers samples of Downeast Cider to the other patrons.

Two ladies sit beside us and happily accept the ciders. "These would be perfect for a sunny day." I assure them that Downeast is



Winged Victory The Frog & Turtle in Westbrook is renowned for wings, and jamming.



perfect on any day. Farther down the bar, two friends in wide-frame glasses and band t-shirts order the Sample Paddle—a flight of seven 3-ounce brews on tap—and ask for a deck of cards. A minute later, two men in leather jackets and bandanas make their way to the bar and order shots of Patron. We're a real mishmash of folks here, but oddly enough, it just works.

Fil and I finish our ciders and I'm tempted to order a growler for home, but seeing it's still early, I worry the stuff won't make it back to Portland.

We agree that Run of the Mill will now be a regular stop when family and friends are visiting, and we plan our next trip. On Thursdays and Saturdays there's live music, and I can only imagine the giant bar must feel very small those nights.

Leaving with a half of a burger and a happy buzz, I'm ready to explore Saco. If we stay long enough, maybe we can make it back to the Mill in time for happy hour.

THE FROG & TURTLE: WESTBROOK

It's drizzling, but the rain adds some ambiance to our night drive. We scan the FM for the perfect song, but after "Bette Davis Eyes" and a painful attempt to get through some pop-country, we settle for our go-to album, Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*. We can always rely on Rhiannon. What a gal.

The Frog & Turtle isn't packed by any means. There are tables and room at the bar, so we take two stools. The lights are low and cast a warm glow on vintage bar decor: beer posters, neon signs, and, yes, frogs. The bar's



Can't pick just one? Try a flight of beers at Run of the Mill in Saco.

authentic, welcoming, familiar.

It's 50-cent wing night, so we order a dozen of the barbecue and tangy tangerine with a side of poutine and two Brooklyn Lagers. The musicians are setting up to start their 'blues jam session' at 8 p.m.

More locals trickle in, and soon the bar is full, the tables are chatty, and the patchwork band starts the night with "Down Home Girl." A sign-up sheet lies in front of the band for any musician in the crowd to join. It soon becomes clear we're witnessing a weekly tradition as patrons call out one another's names, hug as they pass tables, and jump up to join in on "The Weight." A few babes take note of Fil snapping pictures and are quick to shimmy up in the hope of their 15 minutes. One woman dances her way around the stage all the way to the door and bids us farewell with a quick jiggle.

By the end of our second round, we're wishing we were only a walk away from State Street, but it's time to head home after the first set. We need to leave before the band plays a Stones song or we never will.

SPRING POINT TAVERN:

It's among the ranks of all our dive-bar greats—Ruski's, Sangillo's, Mama's, and Amigo's—yet Spring Point Tavern (SPT) stands alone.

It stands alone in time, in manner...in South Portland.

"We met on Tinder, and he's in the band," says a girlfriend. How often do I hear this? It seems nowadays all of my friends are meeting the night's Prince Charming on Tinder, and these 'meetings' lead down many dive-bar rabbit holes.

Five of us pile into the Subaru and are off on another Tinder adventure. Why so many along for a first date? Because your friends are never quite sure whether the guy is a wacko, a fraud, or even a man for that matter.

The bar is a small bunker on Pickett



Out&About

New in town: **The Bearded Lady's Jewel Box** is now open on Congress Street.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: FILIPP KOTSISHEVSKIY (4); STEPHAN BAILEY



PORTLAND AFTER DARK

Street very close to SMCC, though it's not likely you'll see many students there—always a plus in my eyes. SPT is more welcoming than most such joints, and it seems there's always something going on, from the Superhero Lady Arm Wrestlers to screenings of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Tonight it's reggae, and the SPT vets are grooving.

After the first beer, half of our crew decides to ditch the spot and head back into the Old Port, but I've promised to stay, and stay I do. I sit at the bar alongside my good friend as she tries for eye contact with her mystery man. "Does this look like that guy?" She shows me a picture. I can't tell. Half of his face is covered with a Red Sox cap. "Sure does."

By 11 p.m. I might as well be drinking alone, as a somewhat possessive woman has dominated the conversation. I've got a bull's eye on my back and must fend off the preying males. ("I'm not from here." "Sorry, I don't speak English." "I've got bird flu.") I eventually make the choice to leave. "Let's go, our ride is here."

"Oh, there you are. I thought you were in the bathroom this whole time."

We're both anxious to leave, but it's nothing SPT has done wrong. In fact, it did everything a dive bar should, namely keep this girl off Tinder.

RICETTA'S

It's almost 8 p.m., and neither one of us is about to volunteer as cook. After two weekends of holiday hosting, I'm ditching the June Cleaver guise, tweaking our "Mediterranean diet" and going straight for beer and pizza. We've tried just about every place from Otto and Pat's to Slab and Bonobo, and though each has its very own charms, tonight we're flying low. We don't need to run into anybody who knows somebody who might know one of us and have any inclination to chat. This is Portland. You know how it is.

We google "pizza outside of Portland" and arrive at Ricetta's.



Out&About

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It's not exactly what we had in mind, bearing a closer resemblance to the Colosseum than the four-tables-and-a-bar joints we're used to, but considering the Olive Garden could have been one of our options earlier, Ricetta's is a step up.

We choose a table close to the bar and away from the families, though their jolly laughter does brighten our moods. It's a quick decision for two Downeast Ciders, an anchovy Caesar salad to share, and the 14-inch Buffalo Pizza. "Best one in town," the bartender assures us. "My future son-in-law is a buffalo connoisseur. He's had everything buffalo everywhere and still says ours is the best."

The food arrives, and we start in on the main attraction. My first bite is glorious and I won't blame mere hunger. This is the first specialty pizza I've eaten that isn't a soggy glob of cheese and fancy toppings. It's served on thin, crispy crust with gorgonzola cheese. Oh, my *gahhh!* It's good, folks.

We head back home with the leftovers in time for our Sunday night movie and a fight over the last piece.

SAMUEL'S

It's 11:30 and there's still time to make it to Samuel's for the Sweet Thai Chili wings. We arrive to find Bill and the others sitting at two tables. It's their weekly night out after the night shift at WGME. The news tonight? A hilarious mishap with a news truck and a skunk. Unfortunately, the skunk was not the victim.

The bar is louder than most nights, but that's expected for Samuel's Wednesday wing night. It's a cozy dive at the edge of town and the perfect stop before the drive home. It's never packed like the Old Port bars, but you're never drinking alone. There's usually someone happy to strike up a conversation on sports, the weather, or the meaning of life, you know?

With classic rock and country hits playing in the background, we share our events of the week and compare battle scars. It's our favorite mid-week treat. You can never go wrong with friends, wings, and beers. At last call, we decide it's time to leave. You never want to overstay your welcome at a bar like Samuel's. Better to be short, sweet, and to the point. Just like those Sweet Thai Chili wings! ■

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