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To the Nines

Sometimes it's fun to dress for excess.

BY KAREN HOFREITER

Surviving a long New England winter can be hard, especially after the dazzle of holiday lights and soft cover of pristine fresh-fallen snow give way to dark, dreary March evenings and slush-squishy sidewalks. When you need to infuse a little sparkle into your monochrome early-spring days and nights, swap the flannel and Bean boots for something a bit more couture and head into the city for an evening of glamour, Maine-style.


At **Crooners & Cocktails** (90 Exchange St., Portland, 536-0469,

tails.com), they roll out the red carpet—literally. As you waltz to the door, the gray March evening morphs into dusky red walls and a retro interior that at once recalls the elegance and restrained raucousness of a *Mad Men*-era haunt. Frank Sinatra is the patron saint to whom homage is paid with (soon-to-be regular) live jazz and healthy pours of Jack. There are no anachronisms at this throw-back supperclub, especially when it comes to the menu of exclusively classic cocktails—no fussy nouveau concoctions allowed. “Our ‘signature drink’ would have to be the Old-Fashioned,” says co-owner

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PORTLAND AFTER DARK




Dressing up Sunday morning:
The Top of the East now serves a
stunning brunch with a view.

Out&About

Chris Harris. “When it comes to cocktails, it seems everyone is trying to reinvent the wheel. Our approach is to do them straight up and perfectly classic.” And what does one wear to an establishment “straight out of the original *Ocean’s 11*”? Well, one *could* wear jeans, but why would you want to? Says Harris. “There’s no official dress code, but fedoras and heels will never be out of style here.”

UPTOWN DOWNTON FLAIR

If your idea of exquisite and polished evokes the charms of the Victorian era, the elaborate soirees held by the **Gaslight League** (gaslightleague.com; victoriamansion.org; 772-4841) will have you swooning. From a Shakespearean mid-summer night fete to glittery masked Mardi Gras balls to black-tie New Year’s Eve galas (the most recent theme was “Elegant Espionage”), ladies in floor-length gowns and high-swept hair and men in crisp tuxes sip champagne and mingle against the backdrop of the opulent **Victoria Mansion**. “There’s live music—for New Year’s it was Gershwin piano classics—we just booked the State Street Traditional Jazz Band for Mardi



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Gras.” The cocktails are typically appropriate for the theme and historic period,” says Sam Heck, director of development and member of the League’s steering committee. While you must be a member to attend the multiple events held throughout the year, anyone can join, and membership dues go toward supporting the Victoria Mansion.

HIGH NOTES & TASTING NOTES

Women will find that girls’ night out has been given a new meaning by the Portland Spirits Society (portlandspiritsociety.com), and it has nothing to do with pastel-colored drinks. Sophisticated events like a bourbon

that having ladies-only events does just that,” says founder Kate McCarty. “Our tagline is ‘Drink like a Lady.’”

Men and women are welcome at the **Symphony + Spirits** event series (portlandsymphony.org). The evenings begin with a Portland Symphony Orchestra concert at Merrill Auditorium followed by cocktails at one of Portland’s premier restaurants and bars.

The ultimate PSO not-to-be-missed event is the **Annual Wine Dinner & Auction** (April 6, **Harraseeket Inn**, Freeport; tickets/information 773-6128), an evening of award-winning food and wine by some of Maine’s best chefs. This year, Harraseeket chef Troy Mains will be joined by colleagues from Fore Street, Evo, Union, and the Honey Paw, and the wine will be from Spain.

Of course, any PSO evening is one to don the wingtips and pearls, especially when followed afterward by a chai chocolate tart and cordial across the street at **Union restaurant** in the **Press Hotel** (390 Congress Street, Portland; 808-8700; unionportland.com).

And perhaps you’ll need something fabulous—and preferably new—to wear. Enter **Tavecchia** (52 Exchange Street, Portland, 772-1699, tavecchiaboutique.com), a women’s boutique offering party garments and accessories for everything fancy from weddings to proms to for-the-heck-of-it. ■

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—Chris Harris



and chocolate truffle tasting held at classy venues like **Grace** (recently named one of America’s Ten Most Beautiful Restaurants by TABÉlog) are opportunities for learning about and enjoying spirits with like-minded women (and a reason to get reacquainted with the dark, fancy depths of your closet). But why no men? “I’m interested in providing a safe and approachable space for women to learn more about alcohol, and I find

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: TAYLOR CORSON; CORTNEY VAMVAKIAS (3); DIANE HUDSON

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