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## In Portland's Munjoy Hill, Do as the Mainers Do

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By [Christina Talcott](#)  
 Washington Post Staff Writer  
 Sunday, March 29, 2009; Page F06

A onetime tent city and longtime blue-collar enclave, Portland's Munjoy Hill neighborhood has become a hot spot in Maine's biggest city. Taking up the eastern portion of the peninsula, the area has shops, restaurants, galleries and a theater, but it doesn't have the bustle of Old Port, the sumptuous mansions of the West End or the museums of downtown's Arts District. Translation: It's just you and the locals in a vibrant, eclectic neighborhood. And while there's snow still on the ground there, Munjoy Hill's density of sights, shops and dining spots offers plenty of opportunities to pop in someplace warm.

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Stroll through Colucci's Market and the Portland Observatory. (Corey Templeton)

The first permanent European settlement in Portland was in the 1630s on Munjoy Hill. Almost since its founding, Portland had to fight to survive; it was burned down four times and only once by accident. On July 4, 1866, some kid (or so it's said) set off fireworks in a boathouse, sparking what was the biggest fire in U.S. history until Chicago ignited five years later. Roughly 10,000 people in the city lost their homes, though only two people died. The flames burned out before they ruined Munjoy Hill, and it was there, overlooking Casco Bay to the east and the charred city to the west, that thousands of homeless Portlanders lived in tents until they could rebuild.

The neighborhood, which officially starts east of the



Hill residents a reason to stay on the Hill to eat: divine gnocchi with spinach, bacon and eggs (\$8) at brunch, and goat cheese salad (\$8) and lamb shepherd's pie (\$15) at lunch and dinner. Check out its Maine beers on tap; the bar stays open nightly till 11.

Foodies love Portland for its top-notch restaurants, including Fore Street, Evangeline, 555 and Hugo's. But more budget-minded diners do just fine in Portland, too. Case in point: Hugo's chef, Rob Evans, opened the casual *Duckfat* (43 Middle St., 207-774-8080, <http://www.duckfat.com>) in 2005.

What's with the name? The crispy Belgian-style fries are cooked in 25 percent duck fat. They come served in a white paper cone or, for pure decadence, in a bowl, dripping with gravy and cheese curds: the Quebecois favorite, poutine. Add beignets for breakfast and milkshakes for dessert, and Duckfat's soups, salads and sandwiches look practically abstemious.

At lunchtime, grab an Italian (a salami and provolone sub with peppers, pickles, onions, olives and oil) and browse the unexpected culinary delights at *Colucci's Hilltop Market* (135 Congress St., 207-774-2279): cookie sheets of just-baked raspberry crullers, deli cases of charcuterie, plus beer, wine and snacks.

Get your tea and entertainment, too, at *Homegrown Herb & Tea* (195 Congress St., 207-774-3484, <http://www.homegrownherbandtea.com>). Although some tea shops are Zen-calm, this one packs a little excitement every time owner Sarah Richards scales the counter to reach for an herb stored at the top of the apothecary-style set of drawers lining one wall of the narrow shop. Richards mixes each infusion by hand, sometimes grinding herbs in a mortar, sometimes dropping whole spices (star anise, cinnamon sticks) into a teapot or to-go cup of such brews as Hair of the Khan (for hangovers) and Aphrodi-Tea. Homegrown also sells locally thrown pottery, handmade journals and about 150 kinds of bulk herbs.

The shops in Munjoy Hill are surprisingly varied. A few blocks on Congress Street house such stores as thrift shops with high-chairs on the sidewalk and establishments offering high-end housewares. Munjoy Hill has become a design mecca of sorts; textile designer *Angela Adams* (273 Congress St., 207-774-3523, <http://www.angelaadams.com>) has her studio and showroom there. The Maine native's brightly colored, graphic-print wool rugs are sold at Neiman Marcus and Design Within Reach, but the shop on Congress Street is her only stand-alone store. It has her latest designs plus popular classics: cotton and wool rugs (\$54-\$1,950), paper goods, glassware and handbags in the front room, her collection of retro-modern furniture in the back. Adams's Maine-inspired designs include a green-and-blue pattern called, fittingly, Munjoy.

Still locally focused but no less whimsical, the housewares, accessories, handbags and furniture at *Eli Phant* (253 Congress St., 207-253-8000, <http://www.eli-phant.com>) are made by more than 40 artists, crafters, designers and producers, many of whom hail from Maine. The cheery storefront, which opened last May, has displays of silk-screened pillows, prints and textiles ("rock-paper-scissors"-design throw pillow, \$40); quirky pieces (felt wine rack, \$40); and eco/ironic items such as cereal-box-cover notebooks (\$6) and key chains cut from old street signs (\$10).

On the east end of Munjoy Hill, a long, grassy slope leads down to Casco Bay. On the *Eastern Promenade* (a.k.a. the Prom), locals romp with dogs and kids, while bikers, joggers and amblers follow the trail that hugs the shoreline on the East End of Portland and passes the Maine Narrow Gauge Railroad Co. & Museum and a collection of decommissioned rail cars. The trail is part of a citywide network that connects the city to nature preserves and neighborhoods outside downtown Portland (Portland Trails, 207-775-2411, <http://www.trails.org>), and it ends at the Maine State Pier, in Old Port.

Visit the museums, stop in the fish markets and commune with the crowds in bustling Old Port, but don't be surprised if you feel pulled back to Munjoy Hill . . . and not just for the milkshakes.

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