

New England Travel

Portland Wine Week celebrates women in the industry — and serves up the city’s award-winning dining destinations

By Ellen Bhang
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

If you’re brainstorming where to enjoy great wine this summer, the sommeliers and restaurateurs of Portland, Maine, hope you’ll keep their city top of mind — especially during the third week in June. Portland Wine Week, now in its second year, will showcase the Forest City’s vibrant wine and food scene, June 17-23. Last year’s inaugural festival featured more than 50 events, from tastings and classes to multi-course dinners featuring wines from Austria to the Azores. This year’s fête — which includes a track celebrating women in wine — is shaping up to be even more expansive.

Restaurants, bars, and shops all over town will present a multitude of offerings, from the budget-friendly to the splurge-worthy. Sip a gently priced glass of bubbly alongside freshly shucked oysters at a shellfish market, or learn to craft your own spritzer at a stylish cocktail lounge. In the evening, drop by a restaurant you’ve been wanting to try, and get acquainted with a winemaker over a prix fixe repast. The next morning, hop aboard a sailboat and enjoy a scenic brunch on Casco Bay. Tickets to events are sold a la carte, so it’s a snap to customize your own adventure.

If the notion of Portland as a wine destination surprises you, don’t forget that Bon Appétit magazine named it 2018’s Restaurant City of the Year. (Chicago garnered the title in 2017, and Washington D.C. the year before



WINE WISE PHOTOS

FOR A WEEK, IT’S POUR-TLAND

that.) Many in the city’s hospitality community are still basking in the glow of national media attention.

“We were awestruck,” says sommelier Erica Archer, president of Wine Wise, the presenting sponsor of Portland Wine Week. “I’m from Portland, and I do

business with the people in the article. My phone blew up,” she recalls, referring to the calls and messages she received from colleagues about the honor.

The magazine’s recognition is all the more satisfying given Archer’s own career trajectory. Nearly a

decade has passed since she left the corporate world to start her wine education events company. The somm has had a front row seat to the evolution of Portland’s wine scene. A key feature of that growth is the upsurge of women professionals in the industry.

One of last year’s most popular events was a panel discussion featuring women working in wine. Topics ranged from navigating a traditionally male-dominated industry, to raising capital to fund women-owned businesses. “When I

WINE, Page M7

Portland Wine Week showcases the city’s vibrant wine and food scene with more than 50 events, from tastings and classes to multi-course dinners — even a brunch sail on Casco Bay.



For plein air painters, Monhegan is magical

By Gail Spilsbury
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

In July, plein air painters Pam and David Lussier celebrate their 20th anniversary of workshops on Monhegan Island, situated 12 miles off Maine’s coast in Muscongus Bay. Not only do artists flock to this natural wonder to paint its rocky cliffs, infinite ocean, and windswept skies, but day-trippers also come to the island for its famed promise of spiritual fulfillment.

Both Pam and David grew up in woodsy New England landscapes — Pam in Massachusetts and David in Connecticut — influencing their artistic sensibilities. The couple now resides in southern New Hampshire, surrounded by a thriving plein air art community that also interacts with

Cape Ann’s painters and those of greater New England. Both Monhegan and Cape Ann’s artists come from the region’s longest art-colony traditions. David’s strongest artistic influences were Gloucester’s Charles Movalli and Ogunquit, Maine’s George Carpenter, both of whom were influenced by Emile Gruppé (1896-1978), who established the Gloucester School of Painting in the 1930s. Winslow Homer became a marine painter after discovering Cape Ann in 1869, and to celebrate Homer’s legacy, the Cape Ann Museum is exhibiting 51 of his marine works this summer. “We’re also sponsoring a scholarly symposium to explore the 11 instrumental years of Homer’s life revolving around his key

MONHEGAN, Page M7



Plein air painter David Lussier on Monhegan Island. This summer, he and his wife, Pam, will mark their 20th year of leading workshops on the island.

Portland to celebrate women winemakers

► **WINE**
Continued from Page M6

was putting the group together, it was obvious to me that I was really onto something here,” says Archer.

Panelists and attendees clamored for more female-focused programming, so this year’s festival includes a Women in Wine Track. Offering a curated selection of seminars, wine dinners, and tours, the track highlights winemakers, sommeliers, chefs, and creatives — all of whom are female.

Tabitha Perry, owner of Crush Distributors, a wholesaler distributing wine in Maine and New Hampshire, isn’t surprised that the panel resonated with people. “There weren’t many women selling wine in 2008,” she says, reflecting on the year she launched her company focused on boutique and small-production wines. “It’s a hospitality town,” she continues. “Young women are eager to learn from those of us who have been working in wine longer.”

That theme of generational continuity is represented by two West Coast winemakers coming to the festival. Carol Shelton, owner and winemaker of a line of wines bearing her name, will be visiting from Santa Rosa, Calif. Shelton began her pioneering career in the late ’70s and is lauded for her sumptuous bottles of zinfandel. Brianne Day, owner and winemaker of



WINE WISE

Day Wines, traveled and worked throughout the wine world before returning to Willamette Valley, Oregon. She started making her own wine less than a decade ago. Fingers crossed that she’ll be pouring “Mamacita,” her

During Portland Wine Week, a sail on Casco Bay can include a pour of red.

fragrant pétillant naturel (“pét-nat”) crafted from vermentino, muscat, and malvasia bianca.

Courtney “Coco” O’Neill, director of operations and wine director at restaurant Central Provisions, is an avid pro-

ponent of the Women in Wine Track. For the week, she has put together a list of wines crafted entirely by female makers. “I’ll be pouring everything from crisp, dry whites, skin-contact orange wines, to beautiful rosés, and summery reds,” she enthuses.

O’Neill is quick to give credit to a Boston-area colleague, Lauren Friel, owner of Rebel Rebel in Somerville. Prior to launching her Bow Market wine bar, Friel created an all-female-made wine list for Dirt Candy in New York, the first of its kind in the country. “I met her a couple of years ago, and I was floored,” says O’Neill admiringly. “There are enough women winemakers to populate a whole list.”

The wine director emphasizes that the female-focused track is meant to be inclusive. Just as every wine list has a point of view — Old World, New World, French — the organizing principle here happens to be women and the delicious wines they make.

“It’s a way to reimagine women’s roles in wine and to create a conversation,” says O’Neill. “It’s truly for everyone.”

Portland Wine Week takes place June 17-23 at venues throughout the city. For tickets and a full schedule of events, visit portlandwineweek.me.

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For plein air painters, Monhegan is paradise

► **MONHEGAN**
Continued from Page M6

visits to Gloucester and Cape Ann,” says Oliver Barker, the museum’s new director.

The local Homer celebration includes the Harvard Art Museums’ “Winslow Homer: Eyewitness” exhibition, opening in late August, and in downtown Gloucester, on Aug. 1, the Charles Fine Art Gallery opens “Contemporary Painters in the Tradition of Winslow Homer” to bring the continuum up to date. Jan Charles, the gallery’s owner and a painter herself, says the gallery has become “a home away from home for plein air painters. They often drop in for a show-and-tell session after a day of local painting.” Both Cape Ann and Monhegan share what Charles describes as “the pure Atlantic air and its unmistakable light” — sheer inspiration.

Monhegan’s art colony is more than 160 years old, with the Lussiers and others continuing its tradition. Last year, the Monhegan Museum of Art and History, located in the lightkeeper’s former house, published a 50-year anniversary book that tells the story of the island’s plein air eras: the 19th-century Hudson River School painters, beginning with Aaron Draper Shattuck; the early 20th-century Ash Can School painters, led by Robert Henri, teacher of Rockwell Kent, George Bellows, and Josephine Nivison (who later married Edward Hopper, who then also painted on Monhegan); the quieter World War periods; and finally the resurgent stream of contemporary artists — realist, impressionist, and abstract — from the later 20th century to the present day.

In 1908, Rockwell Kent built a house on Monhegan’s magnificent southern promontory above Lobster Cove, which Jamie Wyeth now owns

and paints from during the fall. Over the decades, many women artists have painted the island’s enchantment, the most famous being Alice Kent Stoddard, Mary King Longfellow, and Maud Briggs Knowlton, whose work is on exhibit at the museum this summer. Eminent sculptor Louise Nevelson also worked on Monhegan, perhaps discovering there that her passion lay with sculpting rather than painting, for in later life she said that it was a driftwood shack on Manana Island, which faces Monhegan’s harbor, that inspired her famous “found-wood” assemblages. She also said that the shack was more exciting than the art she had seen at the Louvre.

Many of Monhegan’s early-20th-century artists returned every summer to paint, and some owned cottages. A few lived there year round, such as S.P. Rolt Triscott, Jay Hall Connaway, Andrew Winter, and Teco Slagboom. But today, most of the island’s artists come for just a few days of long-anticipated painting within in the island’s magical realm. Ed Deci, director of the Monhegan museum, says, “The critical factor is the price of either renting or purchasing housing. It’s now more difficult for artists — or many people — to return regularly.”

For David Lussier, an annual visit to Monhegan “feels like a personal home to all the greats who have ever painted there. And so many of the people we’ve met on Monhegan have become friends, collectors, and fans.” For Pam, painting outdoors in communion with nature gives her a sense of total freedom. “I feel like a child finally let out to play after the rain,” she says. “I love being able to set up where I want, paint my view seeing the true, living color, hearing the sounds, feeling the wind. I don’t even mind that the light is changing. That gives me more op-



Clockwise from top left: David Lussier teaching a painting class, Pam Lussier’s “On Swim Beach,” and David’s “Uncle Henry’s.”

tions. The choices are endless, yet also definitive when I make them with my marks in my voice.” A decade ago, Pam was diagnosed with a deadly cancer that ultimately caused kidney failure. While waiting six years for a transplant, she insisted on continuing to go to Monhegan. “It was truly part of what inspired me to beat my illness,” she says. “There we were, doing home hemodialysis on an island that didn’t even have a drug store, let alone medical back up. But it was the island — its breathtaking power, the joy of painting its nature — that helped me heal.”

The Lussiers’ annual workshop should inspire all of us to take up a brush and paint Monhegan’s wild and rustic landscapes, from rocky cliffs and crashing surf, to quaint village, wooded trails, and hilltop views. According to David, the workshop “balances demos, lectures, and personal instruction with community enjoyment and lots of laughter.” He says that Monhegan has a way of taking away stress, “of separating us from our normal, fast-paced life.” Both he and Pam sing, and David plays the guitar. “We always bring music to the evening fun at some point during the workshop. Sometimes we have a sing-along, and other times students share their music, poetry, or stand-up comedy. The island has a way of opening up creative channels and getting people to let down their guard.” Perhaps it’s the island’s down-to-earth lifestyle that works like a

charm — dirt roads and paths, no outside vehicles, removal from the mainland’s “real life,” and pristine nature in every direction.

It’s inspiring just to know that plein air painting thrives on Monhegan Island and throughout New England. It’s a long and passion-filled tradition, a love for nature in every season and in every passing moment of weather and light over a landscape. When asked which New England painters stand out the most, David shakes his head — the talent’s too huge to pick from. He suggests some criteria that might define top grades in the field: painters who have made their mark in the plein air genre and also have a long history of painting New England. These artists, he says, “form the bedrock of what we might attempt to call a New England style. They’re either on the plein air event circuit, or they’ve been a steady part of reinventing the traditions of plein air painting in New England.”

The future of Monhegan’s outdoor, nature-loving painters, as well as its devoted regulars and curious day-trippers, is as timeless as the island’s spell-binding scenery. Not much has changed at this fishing outpost over the centuries, or not since John Smith first wrote about it in 1614. Because of its relative isolation and land protection, intrusions to its quiet harmony, its ravaging storms, and its spiritual beauty are unlikely to occur. As the longtime island painter Eunice Agar once wrote, “The utter wildness and isolation — cascades of rocks, massive cliffs rising 140 feet from the sea, and screaming gulls — transport twentieth-century man to the origins of earth.”

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