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FEB/MAR 08

**SACRAMENTO'S
ROCK-STAR-IN-WAITING**

Jackie Greene

**ON FAME,
DRUGS
& ROCK
'N' ROLL**

**WHY HE MAY FINALLY
BECOME MUSIC'S
NEXT BIG THING**

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**CHOCOLATE, CHEESE
& SHAKESPEARE:
A ROMANTIC WEEKEND
IN ASHLAND, OREGON**

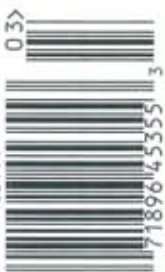
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PLUS!

**BILL CLINTON
HILLARY CLINTON
VIVICA A. FOX
CHARLES BARKLEY**

JOE CARNAHAN FOR MAYOR? SUZIE BURGER RETURNS!

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When my wife and I moved to southern Oregon 20 years ago, we drove an enormous rented van filled with household goods and uncertain hopes. Lumbering up the Sacramento Valley in the searing heat of August seemed at first like a misadventure in moving, but when we crested Siskiyou Summit and began descending toward Ashland, we breathed a sigh of relief. Below us, the Rogue Valley materialized like some real-life Shangri-La, the fictional Himalayan paradise where food grows in abundance, culture and higher learning are nurtured, and people are kind and cheerful. In fact, that pretty much describes what we found in Ashland: a small town with big-city amenities. There's a university here, a renowned Shakespeare festival, sophisticated restaurants and art galleries, and Lithia Park, a 93-acre gem whose woodland paths connect to hiking and mountain-biking trails. To the north, the Rogue Valley unfolds like a vision of Tuscany: a fertile alluvial bottomland of orchards, vineyards and organic farms embraced by softly rolling hills. To my mind, February and March are a perfect time to visit. There's a sense of renewal in the air as the Oregon Shakespeare Festival kicks off its new season. Maple trees in Lithia Park's Japanese garden begin to break bud, even while skiers revel in spring conditions on nearby Mount Ashland. And this is Ashland's "value season," when OSF tickets are discounted, room rates are moderate and the throngs of summer holidaymakers have yet to arrive. In short, it's Paradise Found, just a little over four hours north of Sacramento.

WHERE TO GO

OREGON SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

OSF's 2008 season opens in mid-February under a new artistic director, Bill Rauch, who arrives with fresh vision and a lineup of 11 classical and contemporary plays, none of which promise to be doublets-and-hose dramas. Consider *The Clay Cart*, a colorful romantic comedy written in India around the 1st century B.C. A 2,000-year-old Sanskrit drama at a Shakespeare festival? Absolutely, says Rauch, because the play, which turns on mistaken identities, is very much in the spirit of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*, and it's rich with vibrant costumes, music and choreography. "I think people will eat it up," says the co-founder and longtime artistic director of the acclaimed Cornerstone Theater Company in Los Angeles. Also opening in February are August Wilson's modern classic, *Fences*, and the world premiere of Julie Marie Myatt's *Welcome Home, Jenny Sutter*, in which the title character, a Marine

injured in Iraq, returns to America missing part of a leg.

The open-air Elizabethan Stage theater remains dark until June, when *Othello* and *The Comedy of Errors* open. But despair not, Bard fans: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* kicks off the season on Feb. 15 at the indoor Angus Bowmer Theatre, and *Coriolanus* debuts in late March at the more intimate New Theatre. Don't expect traditional staging in either production. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will take some influence from America of the 1970s," hints Rauch. "Look for some disco energy and lots of dance."

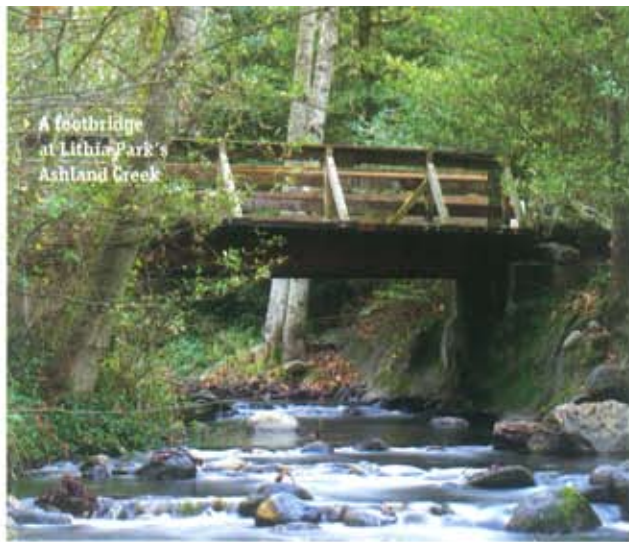
► 15 S. PIONEER STREET, 800-219-8161, OSFASHLAND.COM. VALUE SEASON TICKETS ARE 25% OFF AND RANGE FROM \$20 TO \$53.25. ACTIVE-DUTY MILITARY, RESERVISTS AND VETS GET TWO FREE TICKETS TO WELCOME HOME. JENNY SUTTER.

LITHIA PARK

Stroll from Ashland's historic downtown Plaza into Lithia Park and look up to the left. Those ivy-covered concrete walls below

Ashland's charming downtown Plaza





A footbridge at Lithia Park's Ashland Creek

the Elizabethan Stage were originally the foundation of a domed Chautauqua amphitheater, built in 1893 after an association of civic-minded residents bought eight acres on Ashland Creek and vowed to “awaken the sentiments and intellect of the people.” The amphitheater was abandoned in the 1920s, but in 1935, with a grant of \$400 from the city, Angus Bowmer, a local college teacher, built a stage on the grounds and presented *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night*. Here, footpaths meander through stands of soaring native firs, pines and cedars, and scores of introduced tree species. The park is dense with rhododendrons, azaleas and perennials that bloom through the spring and summer. Cross over the tumbling waters of Ashland Creek on a footbridge by the big pink bandshell and head for the Sycamore Grove. Together with the adjacent Japanese-style garden, it's one of the park's most alluring features.

▶ PARK MAPS AND GUIDEBOOKS AVAILABLE AT THE ASHLAND PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT, 340 S. PIONEER STREET, 541-468-5340. HIKERS AND BIKERS WHO WANT TO CHALLENGE THEMSELVES ON MOUNTAIN TRAILS ABOVE THE PARK SHOULD PICK UP A PUBLIC TRAILS MAP

GALLERY HOPPING

Ashland's version of Sacramento's Second Saturday Art Walk takes place on the first Friday of each month (Feb. 1 and March 7 this year), when most of the town's galleries stay open after hours, from 5–8 p.m. A daytime tour won't disappoint, but First Fridays are a happening time to attend openings, rub elbows with artists, and nosh on locally made chocolates, cheese and other tidbits. With nearly 30 galleries scattered around town, it's hard to choose. But head for A Street in the revitalized Railroad District and check out the new Fourth Corner Fine Quilt Gallery, housed in the magnificently restored VFW Hall at 552 A Street. Next door, at the Illahe Design Studio and Gallery, owner and master tile maker Susan Springer features local and regional ceramic artists. Her stunning Arts and Crafts fireplace surround, called *Autumn Grove*, evokes scenes in Lithia Park. Across the street, the sleek Davis and Cline Gallery sells, among other work, luminous blown-glass sculptures by world-renowned glass artist Dale Chihuly. Downtown, along East Main Street and in the Plaza, must-stops include the Hanson Howard Gallery, Out of the Blue, and American Trails, which is a treasure house of Native American crafts and whimsically painted Oaxacan figurines called *animalistas*.

▶ PICK UP A FREE GUIDE AND MAP AT ANY GALLERY, OR GO TO ASHLANDGALLERIES.COM. FOUR CORNER QUILT GALLERY REOPENS FEB. 29 AFTER ITS WITCH BREAK.

REGIONAL CHEESE AND CHOCOLATE TASTING

The French term *terroir* refers to the unique influence of soil and microclimate on a particular vineyard's wines. There's no precise English translation, but “sense of place” comes close. Rogue Valley *terroir* comes in bottled form, but you can also taste it in the Rogue Creamery's world-champion blue cheeses and artful berry-filled chocolates from Lillie Belle Farms. Their adjacent tasting rooms in Central Point, 30 minutes north of Ashland off I-5, are two of the most popular stops on a gastronomical tour of the valley's many wineries and artisan food producers. The creamery's flagship cheese, Rogue River Blue, won top honors as the world's best blue cheese at the 2004 World Cheese Awards in London, and last year, its Crater Lake Blue brought home the gold medal from the U.S. Cheese Championships. There's an aura of history and pride in the 73-year-old creamery's shop, which also stocks local wines and a variety of cured meats, honeys and pastas from Italy. Next door, chocolatier Jeff Shepherd opened a retail shop last winter after humble beginnings that found him selling bon bons from the back of a 15-year-old Jeep at local farmers markets. Martha Stewart once ordered 500 pounds of his lavender-infused caramels. Taste Shepherd's savory-sweet Smokey Blue truffles for a palate-pleasing surprise. His fanciful chocolate sculptures and miniature paintings will be on display at both the Oregon Chocolate Festival on March 7-9 at the Ashland Springs Hotel, and the Oregon Cheese Festival, a giant al fresco wine, cheese, and chocolate tasting staged under a big-top tent at the creamery on Saturday, March 15 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

▶ ROGUE CREAMERY: 30 N. FRONT ST., CENTRAL POINT, 541-665-8555, ROGUECREAMERY.COM. OPEN 9 AM-5 PM MON-FRI, 9 AM-6 PM SAT, 11 AM-5 PM SUN

▶ LILLIE BELLE FARMS HANDMADE CHOCOLATES: 210 N. FRONT ST., CENTRAL POINT, 541-664-2815, LILLIEBELLEFARMS.COM. OPEN 9 AM-5 PM MON-FRI, 9 AM-6 PM SAT, 10 AM-5 PM SUN



▶ Chocolatier Jeff Shepherd goes to pieces.

WHERE TO EAT

NEW SAMMY'S COWBOY BISTRO

This diminutive, out-of-the-way bistro a mile north of Ashland is the standard-setter for fine dining in southern Oregon—and far beyond.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* once wrote that “many Bay Area patrons consider it one of the top restaurants in the country.” In 1989, Vernon Rollins, the restaurant’s sommelier, and his wife Charlene, a gifted chef who started out at no less than Chez Panisse, opened New Sammy’s in what had originally been a gas station. (The restaurant’s name came after their then-new son, Sammy, now 21, announced precociously that he wanted cowboys to come eat there.) With its cowboy-themed wallpaper, vast wine selection, and Charlene’s deeply-flavorful cuisine, the unassuming roadhouse soon became a culinary destination for serious foodies. For years it operated with a mere six tables, space for 21 at a seating, and a weeks-long reservations list.

So it’s good news that last year the Rollinses added a wing that doubles the restaurant’s capacity. The warmly inviting space of barnwood timbers, art-glass chandeliers and hammered copper tabletops is both dining room and wine bar, and the extra room has allowed the couple to inaugurate lunch service. Still, it’s almost inconceivable that a 42-seat bistro could offer more than 3,000 different wines and house some 18,000 bottles. But it does. After dining there in 2006, *London Times*’ wine critic Jane MacQuitty wrote to the Rollinses to thank them for “a glorious meal” and “fantastic wine selection.”



The wine bar (where I apprentice under Vernon when I’m not writing) has an abbreviated wine list, although you can still order from the “Bible,” as locals call the phone-book-size master list. At lunch, sample the Picnic Platter of Tidbits—assorted pâtés, salamis, cheeses and other delectables—or order the substantial bison burger served on “cowboy buns” fresh from Sammy’s

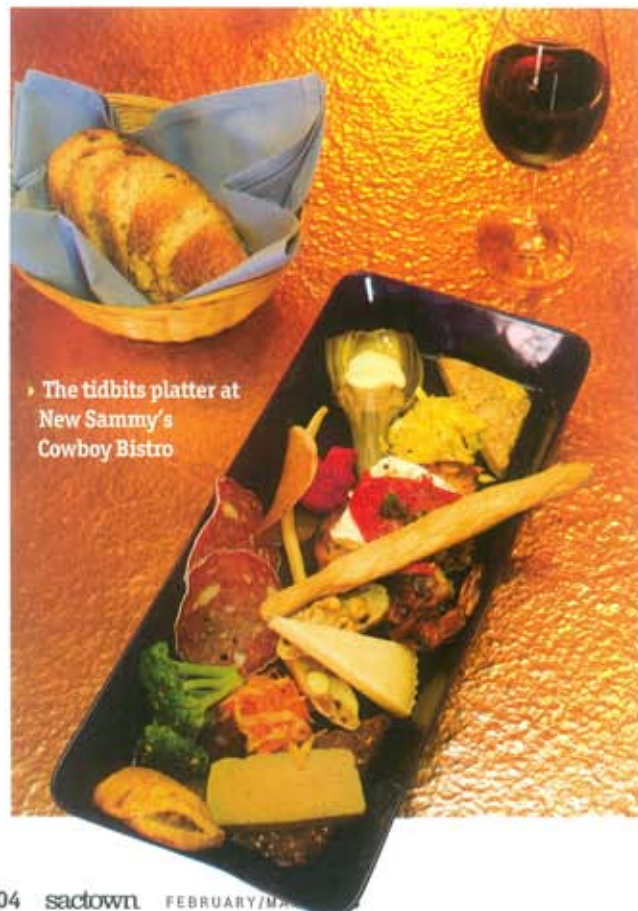
bakery. Save room for a towering slice of chocolate layer cake with homemade kirsch ice cream. Dinner entrées vary seasonally, but Charlene’s *choucroute garnie* of braised sauerkraut and suckling pig is a late-winter favorite

► 2210 S. PACIFIC HIGHWAY, TALENT (1 MILE NORTH OF ASHLAND) 541-535-2779. OPEN FOR LUNCH 11:00 AM TO 2 PM, WED-SUN (\$15 PRX. FIXE). OPEN FOR DINNER 5-9 PM FRI AND SAT THROUGH VALENTINE’S DAY; WED-SUN THEREAFTER (\$52 PRX. FIXE OR VARY A LA CARTE)

AMUSE

At Amuse, a smart-looking white-tablecloth restaurant in central Ashland, chef Erik Brown and his wife Jamie North specialize in Pacific Northwest cuisine with a French accent. Before opening the eatery in 2000, the couple cooked in the Napa Valley—Brown at Tra Vigne and Domaine Chandon, and North at Terra and The French Laundry, where she was a pastry chef. Choosing from the menu always presents a conundrum, but two can’t-miss solutions are the signature wood-grilled ribeye steak with braised spinach and angel hair pomme frites, and the crispy, roasted game hen with black truffle butter, fingerling potatoes and kale in tarragon jus. Pair either with an Oregon pinot noir, and polish the meal off with a slab of North’s astonishing warm chocolate truffle cake and homemade coffee ice cream.

► 15 N. FIRST STREET 541-488-9000 AMUSERESTAURANT.COM. OPEN FOR DINNER ONLY, 5:30-9 PM WED-SUN. ENTRÉES \$19-\$32



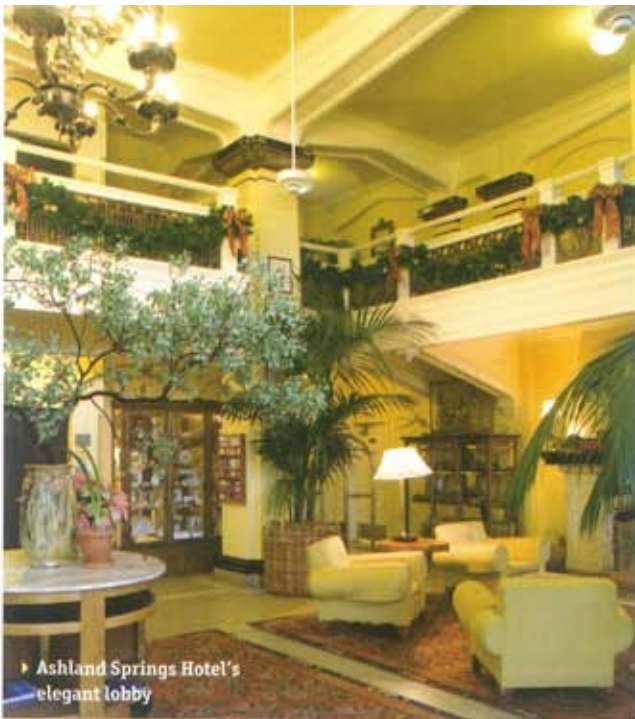
► The tidbits platter at New Sammy’s Cowboy Bistro

STANDING STONE BREWING COMPANY

The Amarotico family undertook a half-million-dollar makeover when they converted a former auto garage into a high-tech microbrewery and restaurant located a block from the OSF complex. Behind the original concrete façade, they created a cozy bar tucked beneath an industrial-looking mezzanine that’s supported by girders and crowded with gleaming stainless-steel brewing kettles and copper plumbing. The open kitchen sports a wood-fired oven, and the cavernous dining room opens onto a shaded patio overlooking the Plaza and surrounding hills. The menu is extensive, and the bar serves wine, mixed drinks and seven handcrafted ales made in small batches to ensure freshness. Order a sampler of all seven served on a stainless



Standing Stone’s sampler of its seven handcrafted ales



▶ Ashland Springs Hotel's elegant lobby

platter, and pair it with a crispy pizza adorned with artichoke hearts, pesto, Rogue Creamery Oregonzola, spiced walnuts and grapes; or go for the blackened Alaska salmon filet on house-made focaccia with a side of garlic fries.

▶ 101 OAK STREET, 541-482-2448, STANDINGSTONEBREWING.COM. OPEN DAILY FROM 11:30 AM TO MIDNIGHT, WITH PLENTY OF SPACE FOR LARGE PARTIES. FRI. BEER SAMPLER IS \$7, PIZZAS \$7-\$11, SALMON SANDWICH \$10.75, FULL DINNERS FROM 5-9 PM AND ENTRÉES ARE \$10.50-\$18.

WHERE TO SLEEP

ASHLAND CREEK INN

In what used to be a derelict grain mill steps away from the Plaza, owner Graham Sheldon has created Ashland's finest bed and breakfast. Each of its 10 suites overlooks Ashland Creek from private balconies, and they're furnished with antiques and artworks Sheldon bought on globe-trotting shopping sprees. For the lavish Marrakech suite, he plunged into the Moroccan city's old quarter, the *médina*, "bartered and bickered," and emerged with a container-load of flat-woven carpets, a pair of 10-foot palace doors, stained-glass windows and architectural pieces including an ornately carved archway that's now mounted on a wall in the four-room suite. The sunny yellow Devon suite has English country pine furniture; the Japanese-themed Matsu has antique tansu chests; the Copenhagen is done up in Danish modern. All suites have full kitchenettes, four have fireplaces, and several first-floor decks are inset with a large koi pond. Breakfasts are elaborate, healthful and delicious.

▶ 70 WATER STREET, 541-482-3315, ASHLANDCREEKINN.COM. ROOMS \$120-\$250 PER NIGHT.

ASHLAND SPRINGS HOTEL

Locals used to call the former Mark Antony Hotel the "Mark Agony." There was talk of converting the dilapidated old building—once the pride of Ashland—into low-income housing. But new owners gave it a \$12 million overhaul, reconfiguring its 93 cramped rooms into 70 and restoring the grand, two-story lobby to its former splendor, and reopened it in 2000. The second-level swimming pool became a covered terrace with an

English garden that now abuts a palm-filled conservatory. After reopening, the nine-story, circa 1925 structure—originally touted as the tallest building between San Francisco and Portland—was written up in *Architectural Digest* as having been "transformed into an eccentric mix of idyllic small-town living, European taste and the great outdoors." Guest rooms are luxuriously appointed: French duvets and pressed linens on the beds, lavender sachets on pillows, and hand-painted lampshades and armoires. Continental breakfasts are served on the mezzanine above the light-flooded lobby that's decorated with curio cabinets containing collections of shells, birds' eggs and other oddments that might have come from a Victorian natural history museum. Executive chef Damon Jones at the hotel restaurant, Lark's, is a self-confessed Alabama "scratch cook" whose home-style, farm-to-table menu—from meatloaf to fried chicken—is, he says, inspired by "what my grandmother used to make."

▶ 212 E. MAIN STREET, 888-795-4545, ASHLANDSPRINGSHOTEL.COM. ROOMS \$139-\$209 PER NIGHT. SPECIAL PACKAGES AND DISCOUNTS AVAILABLE FOR THE FOURTH ANNUAL OREGON CHOCOLATE FESTIVAL, MARCH 7-9, FEATURING CHOCOLATES, CHEESES, WINES AND BEERS FROM ACROSS THE STATE.

THE PEERLESS HOTEL AND RESTAURANT

The Peerless was a boarding house for railroad workers around 1915 before the brick structure was gutted and the original 14 small rooms and one shared bathroom became six bedrooms, each with its own bathroom. The bed linens are by Frette, the décor is Victoriana, and the antique furnishings were picked up at auctions from New Orleans to Hawaii. Suite 3 has an 1818 bedstead and his-and-hers claw foot tubs in the bathroom. The prime spot, suite 7, at the rear of the hotel, has a four-poster bed, double Jacuzzi, and windows overlooking the valley and the mountain. A lovely garden with outdoor dining tables separates the hotel from the restaurant. Owner Crissy Barnett and chef Mark Carter believe that dining should be casual, elegant, approachable and fun. Start with deep-water oysters on the half shell followed by the beautifully presented, succulent rack of lamb. The wine list is heavy on Oregon pinots, and the seasoned waiters know how to pair food and wine. The hotel is quiet and close to the A Street gallery scene, and the restaurant is a hot stop during First Friday Art Walks.

▶ 243 AND 265 FOURTH STREET, 541-488-1082, PEERLESSRESTAURANT.COM. ROOMS \$116-\$215 PER NIGHT. THE RESTAURANT (541-488-6067) IS ONLY OPEN FOR DINNER 5:30-9 PM TUES-SAT. ENTRÉES RANGE FROM \$15 FOR THE PEERLESS BURGER TO \$45 FOR THE PEERLESS'S VERSION OF SURF AND TURF: FILET MIGNON WITH PEPPER-CRUSTED AHI. ♦



▶ The bedroom inside Ashland Creek Inn's Marrakech suite