

travel

# oregon

FALL & WINTER 2003

## Fall into winter

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# All dressed up

## OREGON'S HISTORIC HOTELS GET DOLLED UP FOR A NEW CENTURY

BY SUSAN G. HAUSER

Suddenly you see her. You are drawn to her, attracted by her ornamentation and fresh makeup. Up close, it's obvious that the lady has a history. But her elegance and strength of character set her apart from every other beauty on the block.

So you walk into the lobby of one of Oregon's grande dame hotels to book a room for the night.

In Astoria, Ashland, Condon and a handful of other Oregon towns, residents have rescued landmark hotels from oblivion — or perhaps obliteration. Once again, these restored grand ladies offer restful invitations to locals and visitors.

### ASHLAND: WONDERFUL BONES

The Ashland Springs Hotel is hard to miss. The nine-story yellow building on Main Street is still the tallest building in this southern Oregon town. And back in 1925 when it was built, the hotel had an even larger claim to fame: It was the tallest building between Portland and San Francisco.

The hotel took its original name — Lithia Springs — from Lithia water, the local mineral water that tourists enjoyed bathing in and drinking. In later years, the hotel's name was changed to the Mark Anthony in a nod to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, which was founded in 1935.

Becky Neuman was new to town when she first explored the hotel in 1990. A transplant from Santa Barbara, Calif., she was looking for a place to celebrate her wedding anniversary. By then, the hotel had fallen on hard times. "I went up the rickety elevator and went into shock," Neuman remembers.

The Mark Anthony closed its doors in November 1997. Eight months later, Becky and her husband, Doug, bought the building. The Neumans were experienced in restoring old houses but new to the hospitality business. They considered the hotel a larger, more challenging project.

Becky Neuman admits she had some doubts. "This is beyond my magic," she recalls thinking on that first visit to the hotel. "But the bones were wonderful. It had this character that wanted to be born again."

The Neumans found inspiration in local history. Around the turn of the 20th century, Ashland was a stop on the nation's

Chautauqua lecture circuit. The old Chautauqua building, where itinerant scholars spoke to large crowds, was where the Shakespeare Festival's Elizabethan Stage now stands.

Since the restored Ashland Springs Hotel opened in December 2000, visitors entering the two-story lobby step back into a place that suggests refinement. Framed naturalists' drawings and pressed leaves line the walls. Rows of books and glass cases full of curiosities sit in the shade of potted palms. With ceiling fans whirring above and a fire burning in the massive fireplace, the surroundings invite conversation about the world and its wonders.

The 70 guestrooms are decorated in elegant European style. But the height of elegance is the Sunday afternoon tea served on the mezzanine. Course after course of mini-sandwiches, scones and Devonshire cream, pastries, fruit and cheese are served on Spode plates, which a guest might follow with a glass of dry sack sherry or a raspberry cordial.

**Ashland Springs Hotel** 212 E. Main St., Ashland. Rates from \$79-\$164. Call 541-488-1700 or 800-325-4000, or visit [www.ashlandsspringshotel.com](http://www.ashlandsspringshotel.com).

**Ashland Springs: nine stories on Main Street, top left; the good bones of a restored bedroom, top right; and a lobby decked out with history.**



## IF YOU GO...

### ASTORIA

**FLAVEL HOUSE MUSEUM** Located just a short walk from the Hotel Elliott, the Queen Anne-style home of Capt. George Flavel offers a glimpse into the life of Astoria's first millionaire. Open daily 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission: \$5, adults; \$4, seniors; \$2, kids 6-17; free for kids 5 and under. 441 8th St., Astoria. Call 503-325-2203, or visit [www.clatsophistoricalsociety.org](http://www.clatsophistoricalsociety.org).

**ASTORIA COLUMN** The view is worth the climb up the — count 'em — 164 steps. Don't miss the mural depicting the town's history that spirals up the outside walls. From Marine Drive, head up Coxcomb Hill by driving south on 16th Street, travel west on Jerome Avenue for one block, and then turn south on 15th Street and continue to Coxcomb Drive. Call 503-861-1031, or visit [www.oldoregon.com](http://www.oldoregon.com).

### ASHLAND

**OREGON SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL** The Bard and more: The famed festival now offers 31 plays in repertory from February to November. Tickets: \$21.75-\$47.25 through June 8; \$29-\$63 in summer, with a 25% discount for ages 6 to 17. To order tickets, call 541-482-4331, or visit [www.osfashland.org](http://www.osfashland.org).

**LITHIA PARK** Established in 1908, this 93-acre city park includes a Japanese garden, tennis courts, playground and duck ponds. Visitors attending Ashland's Chautauqua lectures often camped here. For information, visit [www.ashlandchamber.com](http://www.ashlandchamber.com).

### CONDON

A paradise for fishers and hunters of deer, elk and fossils. It's also the unlikely location of the only Powell's Books store outside of Portland and Chicago — three bookshelves in a corner of the town's variety store. Country Flowers, 201 S. Main St., Condon. Call 541-384-4120.

## OREGON'S OTHER GRANDE DAMES

**GEISER GRAND** This 30-room three-story hotel was built in 1889 and handsomely restored in 1997, complete with a stained-glass ceiling. 996 Main St., Baker City. Call 541-523-1889 or 888-434-7374, or visit [www.geisergrand.com](http://www.geisergrand.com).

**HISTORIC UNION HOTEL** The three-story hotel was built in 1921, and a room-by-room restoration began in 1995. The 15 rooms have individual themes. 326 N. Main St., Union. Call 541-562-6135 or 888-441-8928, or visit [www.theunionhotel.com](http://www.theunionhotel.com).

**SHANIKO HOTEL** The two-story brick hotel was built in 1901, restored in 1985, and then, in 2001, refurbished into a bed-and-breakfast. Shaniko is considered a ghost town, although real people answer the phone. Call 541-489-3441 or 800-483-3441, or visit [www.shaniko.com](http://www.shaniko.com). ■

## ASTORIA: WONDERFUL BEDS

Despite the peeling paint, the "Wonderful Beds" sign on the north wall of the old Hotel Elliott in this historic sea town was a wonderful boast, a reminder of the last time Astoria's downtown underwent a revival.

Like other locals, developer Chester Trabucco had passed the distinctive sign for years. The old hotel had fallen into disrepair and was used for low-income housing. The building was an eyesore. The peeling paint detracted from the beauty of one of Trabucco's community projects, the newly restored 1925 Liberty Theater located just across the street.

Trabucco got fired up. He marched into the hotel and asked the owner to freshen up the paint. The owner had a better idea: Buy the building, he told Trabucco. Then you can paint whatever you want.

Done and done. In 2000, Trabucco's company, No. Ten Sixth Street Ltd., bought the building, relocated its current residents and began digging into history.

The Hotel Elliott opened in 1924 during a flurry of rebuilding. Trabucco learned, two years after the town's commercial district had been destroyed by fire. The hotel, built in Craftsman style, was named after John Elliott, the Portland hotelier who operated it for the first 10 years.

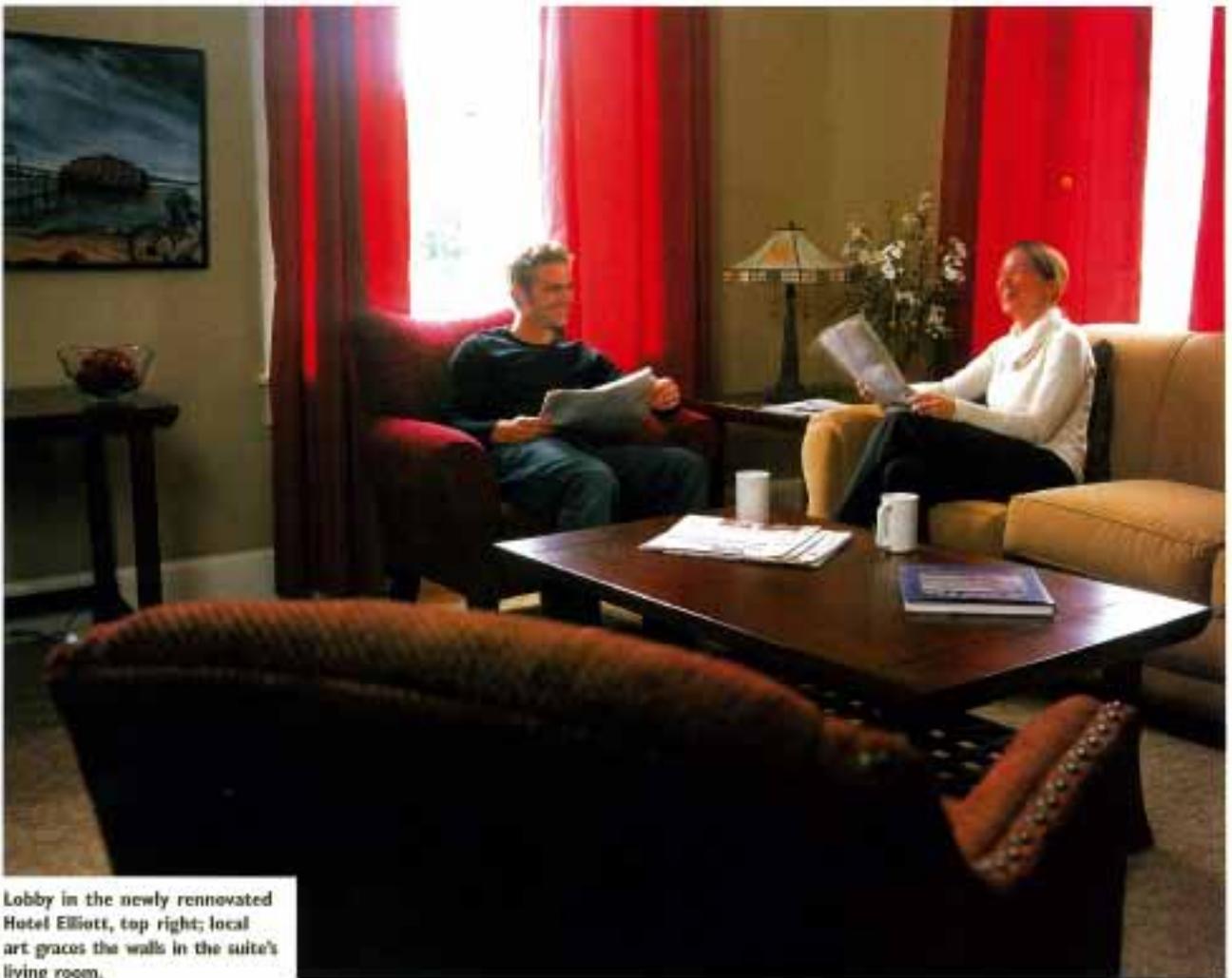
Trabucco takes obvious pride in the details of the 2½-year, \$4 million restoration. The developer hired local artists and craftsmen for the wood, stone and tile work. Even the reading lamps on bedside tables are works of art, handblown glass that appears gold but turns iridescent red when illuminated, locally made by Gearhart artist John Cook.

Bathrooms are outfitted with top-of-the-line fixtures, including jetted tubs and heated limestone floors. Closets are lined with cedar. But reminders of the hotel's roots are close at hand — each room has its original door and transom.

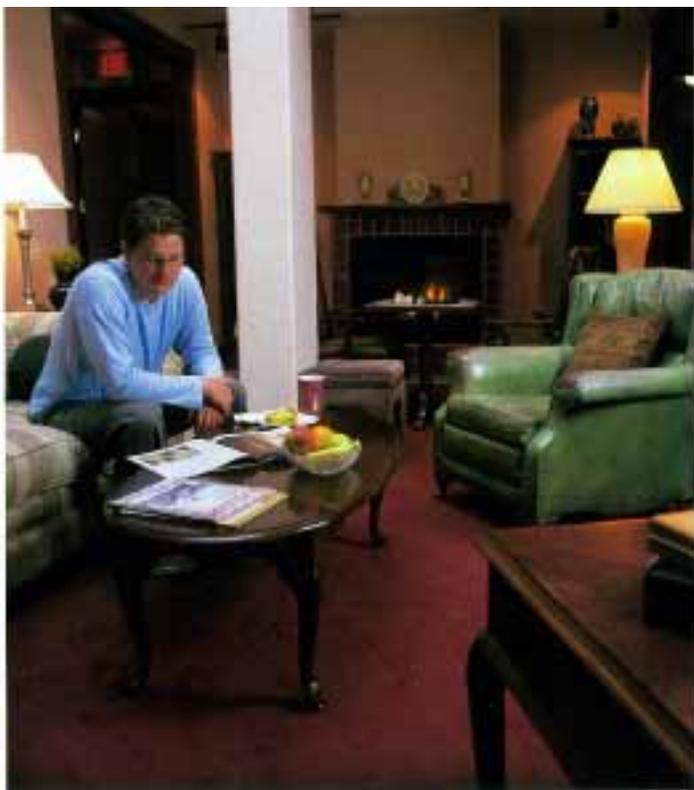
The beds? They're dressed with goose-down pillows, 440-count Egyptian cotton sheets, and custom-made burgundy duvet covers. And so the Hotel Elliott's freshly painted "Wonderful Beds" sign once again truthfully broadcasts its invitation to weary travelers.

**Hotel Elliott** 357 12th St., Astoria. Rates \$105-\$650. Call 503-325-222 or 877-378-1924, or visit [www.hotelelliott.com](http://www.hotelelliott.com).





Lobby in the newly renovated Hotel Elliott, top right; local art graces the walls in the suite's living room.



THIS PAGE: KAREN WALKER

### CONDON: WONDERFUL FOOD

In this tiny town of 850 people in the heart of wheat country, the Hotel Condon has become the place to celebrate special occasions in north central Oregon. Folks come from miles around to dine at the restaurant and spend the night.

Built in 1920, the hotel fell on hard times after World War II, changing hands 17 times. For a time, the run-down building was used as an arcade, a pizza joint and a bar, until it was finally closed in the early 1990s.

The building sat there, lonely and vacant, until Condon attorney Marion Weatherford made it his mission to save the landmark. By 1999, residents and friends had raised more than \$600,000, enough to launch a facelift.

The hotel's grand reopening was celebrated in November 2001, at the completion of the \$1.4 million restoration, which took the skills of 30 local craftsmen.

A blue Art Deco-style neon sign beckons from the three-story brick masonry building located on Condon's Main Street. High windows bathe the lobby with natural light, showing off a front desk built from salvaged Douglas fir, and the original banister, which still leads up the stairs to the guest rooms on the top two floors.

Guest rooms — four suites and 18 with private baths — encircle an atrium and second-floor lounge. The rooms, with custom-made pil-

lowtop mattresses, are furnished simply.

In contrast, the restaurant is lavishly decorated, with a juniper-burning fireplace, stained-glass windows, antique chandeliers and white linen covered tables. The chef, Monty Colby, prepares what he calls "high desert cuisine" to the acclaim of the long-distance diners.

On one stormy evening, four women came in out of the rain, shook off their umbrellas and sat down to start off their evening with a glass of wine. They had driven from Heppner, they announced. The reputation of the chef had spread to their hometown, and after a 40-mile drive, they were ready for a great meal.

The next morning, a mother and her 9-year-old daughter, a budding paleontologist, enjoyed a continental breakfast next to the fireplace in the atrium lounge. They had driven from Hermiston, about 80 miles away. For the daughter's sake, they would visit the nearby John Day Fossil Beds. But first, as an extra special treat for both mother and daughter, they would stay at the nicest place for miles and miles, the Hotel Condon.

**Hotel Condon** 202 South Main St., Condon. Rates \$60-\$95. Call 541-384-4624 or 800-201-6705, or visit [www.hotelcondon.com](http://www.hotelcondon.com). ■

## call or click

For information contact:

Astoria/Warrenton Area  
Chamber of Commerce  
800-875-6807  
[www.aldoregon.com](http://www.aldoregon.com)

Ashland Chamber of Commerce  
541-482-3486  
[www.ashlandchamber.com](http://www.ashlandchamber.com)

Condon Chamber of Commerce  
541-384-7777  
[www.condon-oregon.com](http://www.condon-oregon.com)

For more information, turn to  
"Planning Your Trip," page 75.