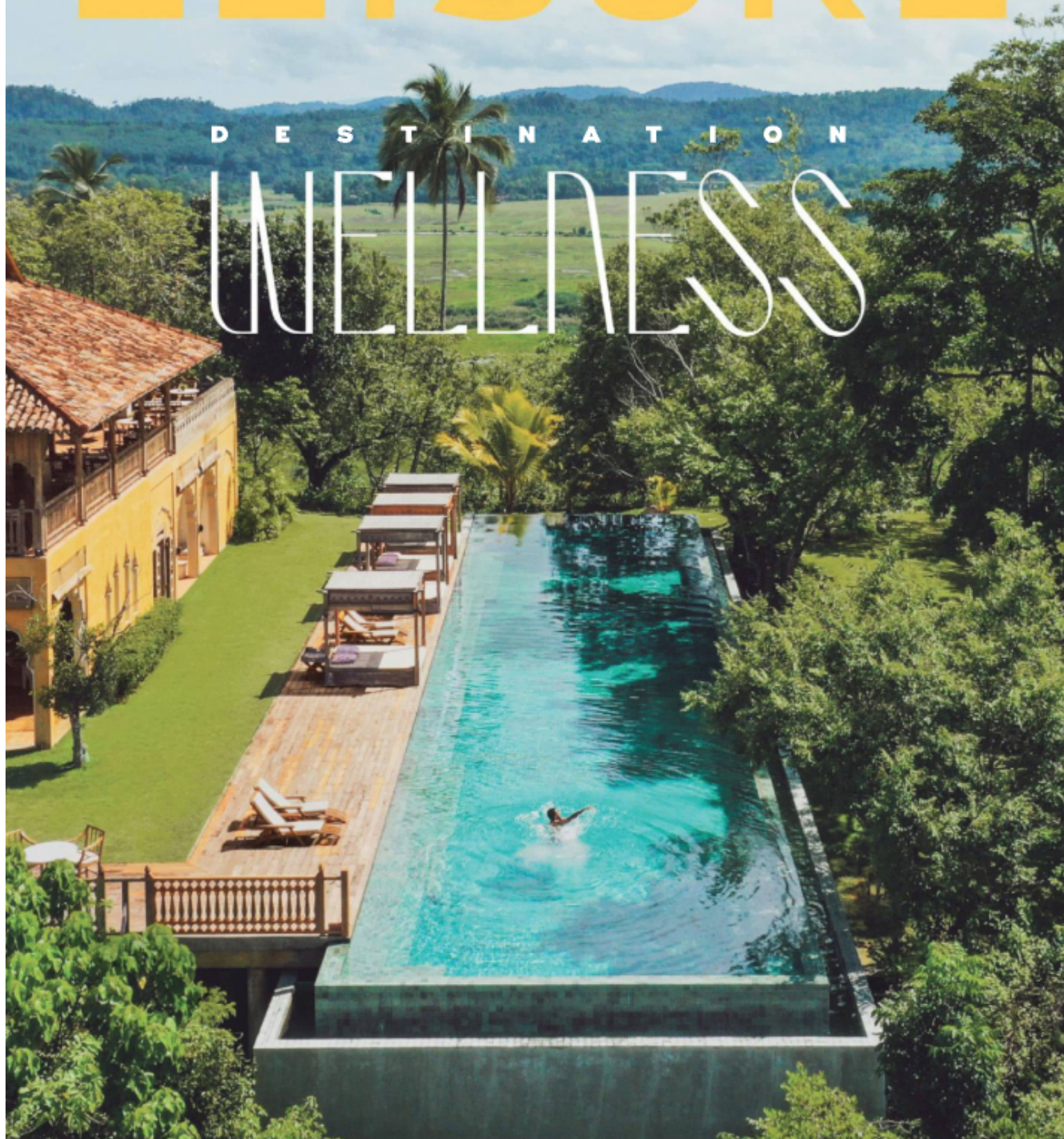


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WELLNESS



Silver Linings

The woes of Portland created fresh opportunities for Black-owned start-ups. By Tony Perrottet

THE BACKSTORY OF Kann, a wood-fired Haitian restaurant, is not your typical rise-from-the-ashes tale. Gregory Gourdet, a chef whose parents immigrated from Haiti to Queens, New York, in the 1960s, started out with a two-day pop-up in the summer of 2020, when Portland was locked down from COVID and embroiled in Black Lives Matter protests.

His Caribbean-meets-Pacific Northwest cuisine immediately found a following. Four months later, **Kann** (entrées \$21–\$60) traded its digs at a grilled-chicken restaurant for the Redd, a “food campus” in Portland’s

Central Eastside, where patrons dined on dishes like butterfish cindo with watermelon shaved ice. Soon after, Gourdet landed an elegant permanent home on Southeast Ash Street. A stream of accolades have since rolled in, including best new restaurant awards from both the James Beard Foundation and *Esquire*.

Kann’s ascent stands out as a bright spot in a city that has recently gone through some dark patches. Four years ago, this quirky and progressive town, famously satirized by the TV show *Portlandia*, was designated an “anarchist jurisdiction” by the Trump Administration after three months of protests. When the dust settled, the city found itself mired in another crisis: a fentanyl epidemic that led Oregon leaders to declare a state of emergency. Retailers like REI shuttered stores, camps for the unhoused sprung up, and real estate values sank.

But an unexpected silver lining has emerged. Restaurants, bookshops, and other stores owned by people of color have begun thriving, helped by public support, more affordable rents, and patronage from city and nonprofit agencies. It is a remarkable shift for a city with a complex racial history. As recently as 2016, Portland was dubbed the “whitest city in America” by the



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Michelle Harris and Charles Hannah of Third Eye Books; Barnes & Morgan, a tea house and boutique; cyclists along the Eastbank Esplanade; Amir Morgan of Barnes & Morgan; the Portland skyline.



Atlantic. Now that image is finally changing, as entrepreneurs like Gourdet help lead Portland's revitalization.

"There was definitely a boom in the support of Black businesses after the BLM protests," Gourdet said during a dinner service last summer, as he dashed back and forth in the open kitchen, throwing chunks of marinated meat, fish, and vegetables onto orange flames. "BLM brought attention to the injustices Black folks face in this country, the inequities that have plagued us for centuries, and still plague us today."

This break in the clouds can be seen all over Portland. "There has been a lot of support for BIPOC entrepreneurs throughout the city since BLM," said Shawn Uhlman, a spokesman for Prosper Portland, a city agency that promotes small businesses. He added that, based on anecdotes, there appeared to be a huge increase in Black-, Latino- and Asian-owned ventures.

PORTLAND'S RECOVERY is still a work in progress, as I discovered on my morning stroll from **Hotel Grand Stark** (*doubles from \$145*), an artily refurbished 1908 property in the Central Eastside district, a formerly industrial area across the Willamette River from downtown. The light-filled lobby has a charming retro quality, with wood floors, arches, and works by local artists. Stepping out onto busy Southeast Grand Avenue, I saw old factories and a car wash, alongside trendy bars and restaurants, a vintage furniture store, Victorian houses, and a microbrewery.

I rode a Biketown, the city's bike-share franchise, across the river to downtown, where most of the 2020 protests took place. The area still had a slightly forlorn air, with stores boarded up and a few tent villages. But there were success stories, too. At the height of the protests, **Abbey Creek Vineyard**, Oregon's first Black-owned winery, opened a hip-hop-themed



FROM TOP
The dining room at
Kana; Kana's chef,
Gregory Gourdet.



tasting room on Southwest Morrison Street called Crick PDX that sought to make wine more accessible.

"For six months, we were the only tenant," said founder Bertony Faustin, the son of Haitian immigrants, as he poured me a glass of Shining, a sparkling Pinot Gris. "Everything else around us was boarded up." As hip-hop classics played, I worked my way through a "five-track playlist" of wines and nibbled on Caribbean-inspired snacks like fried plantains.

That tasting room has since closed, but its pioneering spirit continues at the OG Crick, Abbey Creek's headquarters in North Plains, a small city just to the northwest. "Operating downtown was an opportunity I never thought I'd have," Faustin said. "It gave me inspiration to think bigger." He is now looking to open a permanent tasting room near the gleaming **Ritz-Carlton, Portland** (*doubles from \$473*), which opened last year.

"A lot of positive things have happened in Portland to weigh against the gloom and doom," Faustin said. "The past few years have actually been the best time ever to be an entrepreneur here."

PORTLAND, A LITERATURE-LOVING city, has about 30 bookstores, including Powell's City of Books, billed as the world's largest independent bookstore. But until five years ago, none of the city's bookstores was Black-owned.





ABOVE Winemaker Bertony Faust at Abbey Creek Vineyard's tasting room.
RIGHT The lobby of Hotel Grand Stark.



That changed in 2019 when Charles Hannah and his wife, Michelle Lewis, opened **Third Eye Books, Accessories & Gifts** in the back room of their house in Southeast Portland. They specialized in Black authors.

A few months later, they began selling books in a freshly painted room at a community center, but foot traffic vanished during the pandemic. They created an online store, but had "zero sales," Hannah said. Everything changed when the protests began. "People wanted to be knowledgeable about what was going on in their communities," he said. "Overnight we went from selling two copies of *How to Be an Antiracist* to sixty a month."

A \$25,000 Kickstarter campaign in 2021 allowed Third Eye to open a store in the lively neighborhood of Richmond, which attracted some 20,000 visitors in its first few months. "The community embraced us," Hannah said. Oprah featured the store in her magazine, and big-name writers like Jacqueline Woodson held readings. "Now we have 15,000 followers on Instagram, and people come here from all over the world."

A young reader at Third Eye Books.



The bookstore's popularity has allowed Lewis, who is a longtime practitioner in the field of Afrocentric mental health, to fulfill a dream. A year ago, she opened **Third Eye Wholistic Wellness** in a modest house adjacent to the bookstore, with an entryway lined with candles, incense, and tarot cards depicting people of color. She offers sound baths, sleep therapy, and Reiki.

"Third Eye Books offers nourishment for the mind," Lewis said. "This offers nourishment for the body and soul."

THE CITY'S ECONOMIC downturn has also allowed underrepresented entrepreneurs to experiment with less conventional shops. Amir Barnes, a Black fashion designer who previously worked at Nike, had long wanted to start his own label and boutique. "The 2020 crisis opened me up to possibilities," he said. Members of the community, he said, helped him find a space with good rent.

In 2023, he unveiled **Barnes & Morgan**, a loftlike space with exposed-brick walls in Old Town, which emptied out in 2020. The store, which also goes by "Tea and Threads," sells vests, smocks, hats, and bags designed by Barnes, as well as a branded collection of loose teas. For Barnes, who grew up Muslim in North Carolina, a teahouse is a place of connection. "So Tea and Threads is really a community center, a gathering point for fashion, art, music, and education," he said.

The store may be novel, but Barnes likes to point out that his is not the first in Old Town started by a Black Portlander. "When Oregon became a state in 1859, the first Black-owned business was a men's furnishings and mercantile shop owned by Abner Hunt Francis, his wife, and his brother," he said. And when a railway station opened nearby in 1896, it brought Black people who worked on the trains. "Old Town became a thriving African-American community. It was also inclusive, with Japanese, Chinese, and Jewish communities."

Barnes wanted to re-create that social mix. Last year he partnered with Kann to give reservations to the first 300 shoppers on a summer Saturday. "More than a thousand people came out," Barnes said. "The line went for blocks. Visitors saw firsthand that Old Town was not terrible. The community realized that we're stronger together." 🌍