

A garden centre's worth of trees and bushes has transformed the street outside old town brewing into a green escape

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In most instances when you run up against one of those white- and safety-orange-striped "Road Closed" barricades, heavy equipment is on the other side ripping into the pavement, frustrating drivers now in need of another route along with neighbors who must put up with the sustained din of construction.

At Old Town Brewing's Northeast Portland location, these blockades actually seal off a tranquil urban thicket right in the middle of the street.

This past summer saw every bar, brewery and restaurant in town expand into lanes of traffic if they had the means and ability. While many of these makeshift pandemic patios are nothing much to look at, Old Town's is different: It immerses you in nature.

"I think one of the things that made such a drastic improvement were all of the trees," says owner Adam Milne. "It made Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard look like a park. It's beautiful."

The temporary woodland—just off the major thoroughfare on Northeast Sumner Street—took more to create than just a run to the closest big-box store's garden department. The trees are actually loaners from the city of Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services as part of its effort to partner with the Portland Bureau of Transportation's Healthy Business program. And the agency didn't just pick whatever extra available shrubs happened to be in storage, either—

careful planning went into the selection of each flower and frond for Old Town and the newly launched Dream Street Plaza it's a part of.

"They sent out an arborist who walked through the place to develop a 'tree site plan' to help support the goals of the plaza," says PBOT spokesperson Hannah Schafer.

The plaza, which had its grand opening Oct. 2, is the result of a \$25,000 National Association of City Transportation Officials grant that PBOT won to aid with pandemic response and recovery. Through Nov. 1, 15 vendors will be posted along Sumner. Spearheaded by the Soul District Business Association, Old Town's side-street picnic table seating was also born of that group's suggestion.

Right now, there's no better place than the little forest sprouting from cement to enjoy a pizza and a Pillowfist, Old Town's take on a New England IPA that is appropriately soft in mouthfeel and cloudy in appearance. While the temperature still allows, the oversized garage door at the front entrance will be rolled up, providing more airflow for anyone dining indoors.

But you owe it to yourself to find some solace among the trees—some squat and bushy, others taller than the red umbrellas shading the patch with blooming flowers in a complementary shade of crimson.

When not looking up at the flora, you'll notice the landscaping and shaping extends to the ground. On one half of the road is a mural that looks like a postmodern game of hopscotch; the brightly colored squares and rectangles were designed by the owner of the neighboring boutique. Then, next to the curb is a wide strip of green artificial lawn, a purchase inspired by an internet search for design ideas last spring.

Milne plans to pitch large tents over the tables this fall, prolonging the patio's life. For now, though, he's enjoying the distanced gathering that's fostered in between the branches, even when Old Town is closed.

"Even though we're not open typically for lunch, we get people in the neighborhood that are working—they'll come down and sit and meet," Milne says. "I think the way the space has come together, it just makes people want to meet with colleagues and neighbors and friends."

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