

# McMENAMINS HOTEL OREGON

## A WALKING GUIDE TO ART AND HISTORY.

There is a feeling of familiarity here. It's like meeting up with an old friend after many years have passed. The look is not quite how you remember it, but certain features and the general character are recognizable.

The Hotel Oregon is stately in appearance, but not pretentious. It never was intended to be an ornate show piece. "Richardsonian Romanesque" is the term for its architectural style, and efficiency, simple elegance and practicality are its hallmarks.

Like any person who's lived a full life, the Hotel Oregon has enjoyed flush and lean times, brimming with life one moment, then falling into a vacant state the next. At its best, the McMinville landmark was a community hub, like the house where all the neighborhood kids meet. In fact, several children were raised within these walls and the hotel, from cellar to rooftop, was a constant source of their games, hiding places, and mischievous adventures.

The building, too, has grown and matured over the years. When built in 1905, it was just two stories and bore the name, Hotel Elberton. The third and fourth floors were added in 1910, though only the third was finished at the time. The elevator and name change to "Hotel Oregon" came in 1932. Seventeen years later, new proprietors built an apartment on the top floor as their home. During their tenure, the guest register was used with less and less regularity, until 1967, when the rooms and the three upper stories were closed to the public. Businesses on the first floor, though, continued to thrive until the start of McMenamins' renovation in 1998.

Over the years, Hotel Oregon's street level has seen the greatest changes; its personality altering to some degree with every turnover of business occupying one of the store fronts: beauty parlors and a barber shop, bus depot and taxi stand, insurance and real estate offices, restaurants and coffee shops (attracting everyone from college students to cops on their beats), book store, a sizzling dance lounge, wedding shop, photography studio, coin and stamp shop, and wine shop, and numerous others.

With nearly a century of sheltering, feeding, entertaining, and otherwise entwining with thousands of lives, the hotel has accumulated an enormous collection of lore. The marvelous process of gathering the stories, photographs, and mementos continues, but that which have been collected to date, are displayed throughout the building. The walls tell the tales.

What follows is a guide to the artwork, photographs and furnishings of the Hotel Oregon. Artists Kolieha Bush, Lyle Hehn, Jennifer Joyce, Myrna Yoder, Cathie Joy Young, and Scott Young, have created a six-level gallery of evocative images, each of which are based on a memory of the building's past, some association to its location, or to McMenamins. In addition, the renovation of the hotel introduced imaginative new architectural twists and intriguing furnishings which complement the building's heritage and add to its comfortable and festive atmosphere.



There is not space here to mention all of the hotel's interesting and fun features, so this guide just hits the highlights. We encourage you to dive into the undulating current that flows from the organic, lair-like Cellar Bar upward to the pinnacle, the Rooftop Bar. Explore, at your own pace, all the wonderful nooks and voluminous spaces, and observe the themes, details, and patterns that comprise the corporeality of this special place.

## FIRST FLOOR

### EVANS STREET ENTRYWAY AND FRONT DESK AREA

The Hotel Oregon's entry today is nearly identical to its original look when it opened 95 years ago. In the intervening years, various renovations dramatically altered the appearance and feel of this space. Now, though, it has been returned to its original design—almost. The one notable difference is the front desk that once ran perpendicular to the stairway, now stands just to the right of the front doors. For an idea of the hotel entry's initial layout, look at the photo on the wall that parallels the stairway.

- 1) The opulent, central light fixture hanging from the high ceiling of the Evans Street entrance is one of a set of three that originally illuminated the First Church of Christ Scientists in Coos Bay, Oregon. The stylized, art deco fixture, with its grand central shaft and halo of popcorn bulbs, dates to 1924, the year when the Coos Bay church was constructed. Look for the two other matching fixtures in other areas of the hotel.
- 2) From the more ornate Victorian period comes the radiant, voluptuous glass lamp suspended over the front desk area. Complete with a ring of glass fringe, this piece is an 1890s relic of the grandiose Portland Hotel.
- 3) Greeting all guests as they enter the hotel are the formidable, but gracious ladies plainly visible on the back wall beyond the stairway. Created with paint and wood cutting by artist Myrna Yoder, they have that sturdy, grandmotherly look, and you can almost smell the liniment oil. The image that inspired this large scale work is a black-and-white photo that hangs on a nearby wall, along with a collection of related pictures chronicling the White family.
- 4) The White Family Photo Gallery hangs on the wall paralleling the stairway to the second floor. Thomas A. White was the hotel's original proprietor. He, his wife, three children and three grandsons all lived at the hotel. In the far, sepia-toned photo, four generations of the white family are portrayed: (clockwise) Grandmother White; her twin great grandsons, Pierre and Walter; grandson, Harry, and son Thomas. Other photos depict the young twins at various ages; Thomas working on his farm; Harry with the hotel vehicle; and the hotel lobby in 1919, with Thomas White (left) and his sons, Harry (middle) and Walter.

### PARAGON ROOM

To the left of the entryway, in the hotel's northwest corner, is the Paragon Room, named for the popular lounge that operated from 1945 to 1958, partly in this space and partly where the kitchen is now.

- 1) Around the corner, on the Paragon Room's wall by the kitchen door, are a group of photos illuminating details of the original Paragon Room's life.

a) The Paragon's proprietors from 1956-58, Les and Mattie Hanna, are the couple on the left in the photo of the two seated couples. The Hannas, especially Mattie, loved people and found a real connection with taverns. In fact, Les and Mattie were issued the first post-Prohibition liquor license in Oregon for their bar in Rickreal. Their hard work made the Paragon Room the spot for surf & turf, onion rings and a beer, and great dance music.

b) Another photo provides a glimpse at the "pure lounge" decor of the Paragon: low light, naugahyde booths, and city- and water-scape photo murals.

c) The gentleman sporting the cowboy hat in two photos is Heck Harper, the Roy Rogers of Portland. In the early '50s, Heck went on the air as a singing cowboy, with a kids' cartoon show and an adult musical program. He and his horse, Jody, became fixtures of the Rose Festival Parade. In the mid-1950s, Heck and his western band played some hot dates at the hotel's Paragon Room. There was no room left on the dance floor when Heck played. Heck was a classically trained singer with a voice that easily glided up and down three octaves. At age 79, he could still croon, yodel and pick, and agreed to play at the hotel's grand reopening January 28, 1999. Sadly, he passed away before the event. No doubt, though, Heck's effervescent, kind spirit still pervades the place from cellar to rooftop.

d) Shown at the keyboard is "Earl Curtis, Musician," who wowed audiences here by playing the piano and organ simultaneously.

2) The Kitchen Bar, to the left of the vintage Paragon Room photos, is one of the most fun features of the renovation. The concept was borrowed from a restaurant in (where else) New Orleans. Come in and observe the culinary drama!

a) The magnificent, 19th-century, seven-foot-high, mahogany and leaded glass doors that open into the Kitchen Bar are the genuine article, but have been "off hinge" for 40 years. For decades, the two doors swung into the barroom of Delbert Fisher's Grower's Inn in Stockton, California. Then, in 1958, when the old saloon was razed, Delbert rescued the prize doors and kept them in storage--until now.

b) The mysterious painting of a flying saucer "beaming up" the hotel is Jennifer Joyce's playful nod to McMinnville's notorious UFO sighting of 1950 (more details about that are found in descriptions of art for the 3rd floor).

c) The pinball game depicted in Kolieha Bush's panel makes wonderful allusions to Mattie Hanna and her Paragon Room and to a dilemma faced by the son of the hotel's postwar proprietor. Pinball machines were a prominent feature of the Paragon Room's bar. Mattie Hanna is shown at the top of the game display pouring beer into point-valued pitchers. Kolieha has cleverly integrated the boy's dilemma into the game board. Tommy Nicolai balances on one bumper, his puppy, Suzie, on another, and his accordion on a third. The story behind these icons is that in 1959, the 10-year-old, accordion-playing Tommy brought home Suzie, and pleaded with his parents to let him keep her. His dad struck a deal: the dog for the accordion. As the father saw it, he'd trade one annoyance for another.

d) Illuminating this intimate space with a spiritual glow is the second of the three 1924 art deco light fixtures from the Church of Christ Scientists.

3) On the north wall, perpendicular to the Kitchen Bar, are two historic photos of the facilities that previously occupied this part of the hotel. A close look will yield the discovery that the north wall's present small, high set windows are visible in the background of both photos.

a) The older of the two scenes depicts the hotel's original dining room. From the time T. A.

White opened the hotel in 1905, until around 1920, when the Elberton Grill was developed in the opposite corner of the hotel, this space served as the popular formal dining area. Here were served the dishes prepared by the hotel cooks, and featuring meats, fruits and vegetables fresh from the Whites' nearby farm.

b) After T. A. White died in 1932, the hotel was remodeled and the old dining room was divided. A beauty shop was established in the northernmost strip of the space in the mid-1930s. When this failed in 1938, sisters Joyce and Iva Widness relocated their hair dressing business, the Beauty Maid Shoppe, into the space. The sisters held this space for the next 40 years.

### MCMENAMINS PUB

Opposite the Paragon Room and fronting on Third Street is the hotel's spacious pub. It is of entirely new construction, although its design closely follows that of the hotel's original restaurant, the Elberton Grill, which operated from about 1920 to 1932, in the east (far) end of the present pub.

1) A black-and-white photo of the Grill, taken in the early 1920s, hangs at the pub's west end, between the plate glass windows looking out to Evans Street. The wonderful photo shows the wainscotting and pillars, booths, and cross-arm light fixtures that inspired the current pub's vintage appearance.

2) On the wall to the right of the photo, in the pub's northwest corner, is a painting with a bonanza of references to the hotel's past. The artist, Lyle Hehn, first became immersed in the local atmosphere when a student at McMinnville's Linfield College. The ferocious feline prominently positioned in the panel is the Linfield mascot. The rocking chair is a remnant of his dorm room, while the little airplane is a nod to Evergreen Aviation, a fixture of McMinnville. Representing Lyle's life after Linfield are the three main figures, the artist's daughters. Surrounding them are numerous characters and symbols associated with the Hotel Oregon, things Lyle learned long after his college days, but which belong—for the most part—in the age before the artist was born.

The calendar on the wall is dated June 1950, the time the world learned of McMinnville's "close encounter" with space aliens (more on this later). The keyboard, top hat, cane, gloves, and musical notes are graphics from a vintage place mat from the Paragon Room, the hotel's lounge from the '40s and '50s. The manager of the Paragon, Mattie Hanna, is depicted on the stairs with green hair. She was of pure Irish heritage and it showed, especially during her rollicking St. Paddy's celebrations at the Paragon. The shimmering twins at the top of the stairway refer to Pierre and Walter White, the twin grandsons of the hotel's original proprietor. They are depicted in costumes they wore for McMinnville's Walnut parade, though it's no coincidence that they have a ghostly aura about them. Lyle couldn't resist a comparison to the theme of twins at an old hotel which Stephen King wrote about in *The Shining*. In the foreground is Sally Nicolai, who, with her husband, Arnold "Nic" Nicolai, ran the hotel in the '40s, '50s and '60s. Other characters include the paternal great grandmother and maternal great grandfather of the ghostly twins, who are perched on the cabinet on the right side of the painting.

3) The 40-foot bar is another striking feature of the pub. The wood used for this amazing bar top was milled from old Douglas fir beams salvaged from area saw mills that were recently demolished. The same source of remilled fir was used to fashion the wainscotting, moldings and other bar tops around the hotel.

The oak and leaded glass cabinets serving as the pub's back bar are a beautiful pair of turn-of-the-century "step back" book cases that migrated from England. The intricate and color-

fully painted wood panels interspersed here (and others that appear in various places around the hotel) are antiques of Indonesian origin. Some include hand-painted texts that, rumor has it, provide the solution for the Y2K crisis (can anyone translate for us?).

### CELLAR BAR

To get to the Cellar Bar, return to the front desk area and proceed through the hallway alongside the stairs, and turn left at the woodcut panel of the stout women. Before taking the elevator down to the basement, you may want to check out an attraction in the Men's Room, just across the hall (for any women interested, just make sure the coast is clear). Inside, you'll find an immense porcelain beauty that is a relic of the hotel's original plumbing. You just don't see urinals this big! It dwarfs the modern one installed next to it.

#### 1) Elevator Door

a) On the face of the first-floor elevator door is an inviting image painted by Jennifer Joyce. Portrayed is an open hand with the Hotel Oregon sign in its palm. At the points of each finger are representations or extensions of the hotel, past and present: a pint of golden, frothy McMenamins ale; a walnut, which alludes to McMinnville's earlier persona as the Walnut City; a sun and moon graphic, which is a symbol of McMenamins; and a glass of red wine, commemorating the hotel's location in Oregon's wine country.

b) Upon reaching the basement, look back at the elevator door of this level. Myrna Yoder has portrayed John the Ghost, the hotel's resident spirit. Stories of his mischievous nature emerged in the 1980s, but John's identity has not yet been determined. Myrna painted him here as a well-dressed man passing into the elevator, which is appropriate, since former proprietors of the hotel's first floor shops cited the elevator as a frequent haunt of John's.

2) The Cellar Bar is an earthy, dimly lit lair in the bowels of the Hotel Oregon. It is characterized by dark-stained wood, walls of brick, a low ceiling of weathered clapboards and a floor of concrete squares. Pale purple light filters down through amethyst glass light wells in the sidewalk above. In the far corner is a private booth built into what originally was a hatchway for delivering wood, coal, and sawdust into the basement.

3) The back bar, a relic from an old Montana saloon, adds an Old West and art deco flavor to the subterranean space. Hanging above it are a wonderful collection of vintage bar lights with ceramic shades, that bathe the bar in orange, cream, off white and green light.

4) In the painting on the short wall perpendicular to the bar, Lyle Hehn plays off the hotel's old fuse boxes that once lined a corner of the basement. Careful observers will see that each box "brings to life" a different component of the building, including one that animates the community of marionettes seen dangling from the ceiling joists. Longtime employees and residents of the hotel have remarked that there were unidentifiable forms of life in the basement, which struck fear in some hearts. Some say it was John the Ghost. Lyle seems to attribute the suspicious noises and fleeting images to the puppets and their instruments waiting on the floor beneath them.

5) The "graffiti" on the wall in the hallway are part of a wine theme that washes through the hotel. The words are those of the legendary wine connoisseur and writer, Michael Broadbent. Here he is describing Burgundy.

Take the stairs back up to the first floor and continue up to the second floor using the steps rising from the lobby.

## STAIRWAY TO SECOND FLOOR

- 1) Lining both sides of the stairwell between the first and second floors are 12 “vignettes” painted by Scott Young. Each is framed within a circle and represents a porthole into the hotel’s past.
  - a) The first “vignette” along the west wall depicts the famous Red Electric “Owl Eyes” train, thus named for its two round, front windows. In 1910, Southern Pacific Railways announced its plans to build an electric commuter line from Portland that would pass through the Yamhill Valley. The news set off a flurry of speculative building. In this sense, the Hotel Oregon, which began as just a two-story structure, owes its third and fourth floors to the Red Electric.
  - b) Ti Soyto was a Japanese man who cooked for the White family’s hotel in the ‘20s. Pierre White remembers Mr. Soyto’s great culinary skills and that he became a friend of the family. He taught Pierre and the other White children some Japanese phrases. Soyto lived at the hotel for the time he was employed by the Whites, a living arrangement that was uncommon for this area and time. Pierre remembered that “sun down” laws then in effect generally prevented minorities from residing in town.
  - c) He’s drawn a bead on you, look out! The striped shirt and shorts seem innocent enough, but there’s something about that smile and the glint in his eyes. The little boy with the hose is Tom Nicolai, vintage 1955. From the time he was born in 1949, until age 12, he lived with his family in an apartment on the hotel’s fourth floor. Tom was a imaginative and mischievous kid and was forever getting into things he shouldn’t have, ranging from the food and water supplies stored in the section of the hotel’s basement designated as a fallout shelter, to the luggage his parents kept as collateral from hotel guests unable to pay their bills.
  - d) The image of the growling polar bear with raking claws came from a 1920 advertisement for the Elberton Grill, the hotel’s popular restaurant of the ‘20s and early ‘30s. “As Hungry as a bear,” read the ad copy. “Any keen-edged appetite can be appeased at our Grill.” A “warning” yellow background seems to intensify the beast’s ferocious hunger.
  - e) The next-to-last circle on the west wall depicts the car that transported freight and passengers between the hotel and the Red Electric train depot, which was just a few blocks east of the hotel. The driver shown is Harry White, son of the hotel proprietor. Pierre White, Harry’s son, also remembers that one of his childhood chores was to pull by hand a baggage cart between the train station and hotel. Red Electric’s service ceased in 1929 with the rise of automobile and bus traffic.
  - f) Earl Curtis is commemorated in the final circle on this side of the stairwell. Earl was the musician, mentioned earlier, who performed at the hotel’s Paragon Room lounge in the mid-’50s. Earl’s big draw was that he played piano and organ simultaneously. One keyboard was set up on the Paragon’s little stage opposite the second keyboard. In the middle was the wide-eyed, little figure of Earl. The backdrop of a burgundy colored curtain lends a rich texture to the painting’s composition that, from all reports, was not evident in the performer’s shows.
  - g) Lining the east wall of the stairwell are six more painted vignettes. The first from the bottom has Richard Nixon getting a hair cut in the hotel’s barber shop. This scene is a whimsical abstraction from local lore. From the time the hotel was built in 1905, until the mid-1930s, barber George Bradley maintained a shop on the main floor of the hotel. It wasn’t until 1960 that presidential candidate, Richard Nixon, came to town to stump at the armory. Tom Nicolai remembers that for that occasion his dad, who was the Hotel Oregon’s manager at the time, gave Tom a special detail. “Dad hired me to run to the Western Union guy,” Tom recalled. “Someone handed me a

telegram. I'd run it from the armory down to the [Western Union office at the] hotel." So, only in the virtual reality created by Scott Young did Nixon come to the hotel for a new coiffure, but it makes for a great image.

**h)** Traveling salesmen were the life blood of the hotel's business, particularly in the early days. In fact, the building on Evans Street just north of the hotel served as a "sample room," for the hotel. As this scene shows, salesmen arrived with cases in hand, all filled with their wares. They booked rooms for a night or two and reserved space at the sample room to display their marketable goods to any interested merchants.

**i & j)** In the mid-'50s, Arnold Nicolai, oldest son of the hotel's proprietor, developed a fascination for HAM radios. He set up his own receiver and transmitter in a room off his family's fourth floor apartment and set sail on the worldwide air waves of adventure. A 38-foot crank-up radio antenna, shown here on the Hotel Oregon's roof, was one of the tallest structures around and allowed Arnold a joyous multitude of clear transmissions. The adjoining painting of a boy huddled over the radio, headphones on and microphone in hand, was virtually a daily sight at the hotel for several years.

**k)** The next porthole portrays the younger Nicolai boy, Tom. He is dressed smartly for his job of peddling gum and candy bars on the Greyhound buses while they paused outside the depot, located in the hotel's lobby. Tom explained recently that his earnings from this venture were lessened by the fact that his dad took a cut.

**l)** Poised at the top of the stairwell is Heck Harper, the singing television cowboy, who won over the hearts of thousands of kids and adults across the Northwest, and who performed with his hot, western band at the Paragon Room.

## SECOND FLOOR

From the top of the stairs, walk clockwise around the hallway:

**1)** The woodcut panel just off the stairs leading to the first floor is Myrna Yoder's "Ode to the Nicolais." This textured, black-and-white piece portrays Nic and Sally Nicolai and their youngest son, Tom, and emphasizes their wonderful patterns of clothes. The Nicolais ran the hotel from 1945 until it closed in 1967. They also established the bus depot and snack counter in the hotel lobby, which operated from the mid-'50s to 1975.

**2)** Opposite the Nicolais portrait is a graceful, round-arched balcony that overlooks Third Street. The Nicolai brothers, who grew up in the hotel in the '50s, described this enclosed alcove as "a great place to watch parades [like that of McMinnville's venerable tradition] Turkey-rama Days . . . and shoot peas at people." On one occasion, too, Tom was dangled over the balcony by his ankles—at least that's his version of the story. His brother, Arnold, had spotted a cigarette burn in the cloth awning that stretched out beneath the balcony and knew that his younger brother sneaked cigarettes from his parents to smoke on the balcony. "I remember being held out and shown that," Tom recently reminisced. "I don't think [Arnold] stuck me as far out maybe as I said he did, but it seemed like it."

The third of the three art deco-style fixtures from the Coos Bay church casts an interesting light in this space.

**3)** The collage hanging in the southwest corner was created by Cathie Joy Young. A simple drawing of a bed and slippers overlays years of advertisements for the hotel and its restaurant,

as if to say, 'what appears simple—laying out a clean, comfortable bed night after night—actually requires years of experience.' As a nice, finishing touch, Cathie positioned the drawing of a women's head, which figures prominently in an ad for the Mullikin Beauty Shop (a business that once operated on the hotel's first floor), so it appears to rest on the pillow of the simply drawn bed.

4) Around the corner, and down to the center of the west hallway is another Cathie Joy Young panel. This piece has a wonderful texture and is predominated by a backdrop of jarred preserves. In the hotel's early days, fresh produce--fruits and vegetables--were brought in from the proprietor's nearby farm. A canning room was set up in the hotel's basement, where the produce was "put up" and stored. For the foreground, Cathie folds in two characters prominent in the annals of the Paragon Room. Earl Curtis, a musician who played the hotel lounge in the 1950s, is shown tickling the ivories. A contemporary of Earl's was Wayne, the singing chef, portrayed here belting out a tune in his kitchen garb. Wayne was a down-on-his-luck entertainer who took a job as a cook at the Paragon Room in the mid-'50s. He became known for stepping out from behind the stove to do a couple numbers in the dining room.



5) Heck Harper, the local singing cowboy legend, is the eye-catcher in this panel by Lyle Hehn. The silvery figures of Heck and his famous horse, Jody, are shown leaping out of a celestial, star-filled cupboard. Beneath them, are two, formally dressed couples who are toasting with flutes of champagne. That the room is upside down seems of no consequence to any of the people shown.

6) Making the turn to the east corridor, pause at the elevator. On its door, Jennifer Joyce painted the gracious, inviting figure of T. A. White, first proprietor of the hotel.

7) Mattie's Room is the breathtaking meeting space created as part of the recent renovation. Originally, this space was filled with several guest rooms, but interior walls were removed to fashion an open, festive area. It is named for Mattie Hanna, the charismatic force behind the Paragon Room, which operated down on the hotel's first floor. Furnishings of note in Mattie's Room include dramatic, brass "torch-like" wall sconces that originally accented the grand, old Portland Hotel in Portland. Also, in the room's northwest corner is a compact, but ornate arts & crafts-style antique back bar.

a) Five murals add a palpable energy to Mattie's Room. The graceful, languid, seemingly floating figures of two, vintage dance couples were painted with deep, rich colors by Myrna Yoder. In the early days of the hotel's life, local law prohibited dancing within the city limits, but as the century progressed and mores loosened, the hotel hosted dances of all styles, particularly when the Paragon Room opened in the mid-'40s.

b) Lyle Hehn painted this dashing and somewhat tussled visage of Thomas A. White, the hotel's original proprietor. In the portrait, White is moustached and about 30 years old. Ten years later, when he opened the hotel, he was clean shaven a little thinner on top and a little fuller every where else. The soft, dark eyes, though were unchanged.

c) This complex scene, painted by Jennifer Joyce, blends several different pieces of hotel lore. Central to the composition is a brick edifice, representing the hotel, and a tree, like the kind that

rise alongside the building now. The tree could also be an allusion to the family tree of folks who have lived and worked at the hotel since 1905. Characters depicted around the tree include Mrs. White, wife of the hotel's original proprietor. In her arms, she holds Pierre, one of her twin sons. Beneath them is portrayed Tom Nicolai, who like Pierre, grew up living and working in the hotel. On the opposite side of the mural is Lois Deever. Lois held the demanding job of running the hotel's front desk in the 1940s. She is painted here in the act of trying to escape the chaos of her job—something she undoubtedly did many times in her mind's eye. From all accounts, though, Lois (and her successor, Melissa Sommers, as well) kept things running smoothly.

**d)** Jennifer Joyce painted this tranquil scene of two celestial bodies cradling the stars dotting the night skies.

**e)** The room's final mural is Myrna Yoder's dreamy depiction of Wayne the Singing Chef. As described above, Wayne possessed a trained voice which he occasionally shared with customers on nights he worked in the Paragon Room's kitchen. Myrna portrays Wayne here, sheet music in hand, levitating on the lush sounds that he creates. That he bears a striking resemblance to former Portland mayor and Oregon governor, Neil Goldschmidt, is purely coincidental—right Myrna?

### STAIRWAY TO THIRD FLOOR

Cathie Joy Young's art work in this stairwell was inspired by nuts and the Whites. Pierre White, grandson of the hotel's original proprietor, recounted that throughout his childhood in the 1920s, walnuts were McMinnville's most celebrated export. In fact, for many years, McMinnville billed itself as the Walnut City. White recalled dressing in costume to participate in the city's annual Walnut Parade. Simply put, walnuts were a big deal!

On the west side of the stairwell, Cathie framed portraits of the White family members in walnut half shells and entwined in leaves and whole walnuts. Cathie used the wall on the landing as a canvas for the culmination of this theme. She painted Pierre White and his twin brother as infants nestled in a walnut tree. At the base of the tree is a busy squirrel, cracking open fallen nuts with a hammer. The baby twins and the squirrel all are crowned with walnut shells. On the east side of the stairwell, the twins are shown at an older, mischievous age, when they used to sneak out their second-story corner room in the hotel by climbing down a rope tied to the fire escape.

### THIRD FLOOR

Walking clockwise from the top of the staircase:

**1)** Rooftop View. Look at this colorful landscape painted by Jennifer Joyce. Study the lines of the rooftops, noting the position of the upwardly jutting Buchanan grain elevator and the mountainous backdrop. Then, zip up to the Rooftop Bar and gaze out in a northeasterly direction. The scenery should look pretty familiar.

**2)** River Boat Scene. In the mid-19th century, river boats championed the transport business of the Yamhill Valley. This scene, painted by Scott Young, depicts the landing at the nearby town of Dayton, a typical water's edge port of the period. The Yamhill River was not navigable to McMinnville until after 1900, when a system of locks were completed at nearby Lafayette. Ironically, by this time, water transport had been all but supplanted by the railroads. Scott's choice of autumnal shades of brown and gold seem to indicate the passing of the river boat age.

3) Around the corner into the west hallway hangs Jennifer Joyce's "Chagall." Done in the fluid style of the Russian-born artist, Marc Chagall, this panel portrays crew members of Pacific Crest Construction, the folks responsible for the amazing transformation of the dilapidated hotel. The characters float with power tools, blue prints, and building materials in hand, while their masterpiece, the renovated Hotel Oregon, rises in the background.

4) Kolieha Bush painted the imaginative view of the Rooftop Bar that hangs in the middle of the west corridor. In this panel, Kolieha uses soothing tones of greens and blues, complemented by orange and beige highlights. Enormous, lush and curling ferns, and twining, woody roots envelope the hutch, while blue herons and rock cairns strike more rigid poses. The gentlemen at the piano is Earl Curtis, the Paragon Room musician, who appears in several other paintings around the hotel. One can almost hear the tinny tones emanating from his old upright.

5) For decades, an Hotel Oregon fixture was The Beauty Maid Shoppe, which Cathie Joy Young brings to life in this panel. Two Norwegian sisters, Joyce and Iva Widness, "twisted hair" in the northwest corner of the hotel's first floor from 1938 to 1977. Cathie paints the scene with '50s-ish pastel colors and a frame of fun polka dots, the kind that likely were found on many a beautician's hair caps of that time. Iva Widness is shown working her craft here.

6) Joyce (Widness) Fink recalled that the best part of her four decades at the hotel was talking with her customers, and without a doubt, the Beauty Maid Shoppe was among the best sources for news in town. In the spring of 1950, discussion in the Beauty Maid centered on the celestial. For it was on May 11 that a local couple, Paul and Evelyn Trent, made contact with aliens from another planet—and photographed the encounter. Today, "The McMinnville Case" is cited as "one of the ten most compelling UFO cases in history," and is held by experts of the field to be among the most authentic, reputable instances.

The photographs, published in the McMinnville paper on June 8, 1950, showed a round, metal saucer hovering in the sky above the Trents' farm. Mrs. Trent said she was in her yard around 8:00 PM feeding rabbits, when she saw the "silvery disc." She hollered at her husband to grab the camera and come outside. He managed to click off two frames before the flying saucer "flew off at high speed, blasting the area with a powerful wind."

Cathie Joy Young captured this moment in her dramatic portrayal of the May 1950 encounter: slicing through a foreboding, orange sky, a flying saucer beams up a rabbit while Mrs. Trent and other rabbits look on in disbelief.

7) A plant-filled, open-air oasis is nestled between guest rooms off the east corridor. This two-story atrium provides a beautiful view of the night skies, and is only accessible through the lodging rooms surrounding it.

8) Myrna Yoder created a most peaceful, serene mood with this mixed-media piece depicting a hotel guest enjoying a bath in one of the rooms. Myrna combines muted colors and different patterns cut into this wood panel. Rings of bath water, diamonds of floor tile, squares of the wall design, and supple curves of the porcelain corner sink and tub back, all make for a wonderful, compositional study of patterns.

## FOURTH FLOOR

Walking clockwise from the top of the stairway:

1) Photos of the Nicolai family and past views of their fourth-floor home hang on the wall next to the stairs. From 1949 on into the '60s, Arnold "Nic" Nicolai, his wife, Sally, and sons, Ar-

nold, Jr., and Tom, lived in a four-room apartment built for them in the southwest corner of the otherwise undeveloped fourth floor. During this time, the Nicolais managed the hotel as well as the bus depot and snack counter located in the lobby. Photos here include the color shot of Sally waving at the doorway to the fourth floor apartment. Visible in the background is a glimpse of the unfinished condition of the remainder of the fourth floor. Another color shot shows son Tom with his puppy, Suzie, playing in a pen set up for the dog outside the apartment. Other shots of Tom show him standing on an ice cream cooler in the lobby and in front of a bus paused at the hotel depot. Three other color photos capture the essence of the hotel prior to its most recent renovation.

2) Drywallers in Silhouette. This Jennifer Joyce work dramatically portrays the construction crew at work during the hotel's recent renovation, hinting by the dark lighting, at the long hours put in by the crew.

3) The Float and Farmer White. "Yamhill Against the World", proclaims the float that parades over Lyle Hehn's grim agrarian scene. Lyle creates an evocative image in this piece with the juxtaposition of two historical images, one from a photo of a World War I-era parade passing by the Hotel Oregon, the other from a shot of hotel proprietor, Tom White, toiling on his farm outside of McMinnville. Celebrants on the float appear vibrant, colorful, and happy, as they enthusiastically toss out handfuls of candy, while sailing upon a sky painted like ribbons of orange and blue. Conversely, the farmer is set in a bleak scene, depicted in dark, subdued tones. The trees appear dead and the soil he tills resembles a lava flow.

4) Michael Broadbent's descriptive prose about Château D'Yquem mark the walls along the north corridor.

5) At the far end of the north corridor hang's Myrna's Widow's Walk. The dark-haired beauty in this Myrna Yoder panel is actually standing outside the Rooftop Bar. She is depicted with hair flowing and an expression of longing or perhaps concern. It's not hard to imagine the scene in a different context, where the woman is pacing along a widow's walk outside the cupola atop her home (or perhaps a lighthouse) by the sea. She scans the horizon in hopes of spotting the ship that carries her husband home to her. The true identity of the woman is Kolieha Cotter, an artist who also contributed to the hotel's incredible array of artwork.

## ROOFTOP BAR

Remember in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory when the elevator went rocketing up the shaft, burst out the roof and soared into the stratosphere? You'll experience much the same sensation after pressing "P" (for "pulsar"?) in the Hotel Oregon's elevator. When the doors open you'll feel like you're either in a cloud bank or on a mountain crest. In 1910, when the hotel was raised to four stories, the fourth floor became the highest public space in Yamhill County. Today, this lofty pub crowns the building with a sense of fun and majesty. It's a small space, but the view is vast! You and the passing flocks of birds will see eye-to-eye. All this, and your favorite drinks, too!

Approaching the hotel at street level, its roof line is seen as a mix of angled and fluid lines, and bears a resemblance to the churches dotting the countryside of eastern Russia. The Rooftop Bar's most prominent external architectural feature, its cupola, was, in its first life, a ventilator that graced an old barn in England. Inside, there is a smorgasbord of window types, with arched windows and a door reminiscent of Middle Eastern architecture. These arched wonders were rediscovered during the renovation within a first-floor interior wall that once separated the hotel

lobby from the adjoining Third Street shop.

Skylights add another dimension of space into the cozy Rooftop Bar and invite the sun and stars inside to punctuate the conversations of visitors. Like the arched windows and door, the skylights are also relics of the hotel, recycled as part of the hotel's rejuvenation. In the peak of the largest sky light, the god of malted beverages and goddesses of wine watch, from facing corners, the patrons below. Also hanging from this skylight is a wonderful, pale green, vaseline glass smoking pipe. An English Victorian beauty dating to the 1880s, the pipe has always been just ornamental, dreaming of the smoke rings that might have been.

A pleasantly pungent aroma of red wine fills the air inside the bar. It's not wafting in from the Valley wineries, but rather, rising up from the floor. The Rooftop Bar's flooring is comprised of oak slats from red wine barrels which migrated north from the Napa Valley.

Undoubtedly, standard barroom discussion here will include the "non-perpendicularity" of the bar's roof lines. We're thinking that many bets will be lost on whether the window or the roof line is "in square." The wine goddesses above hold the answer.

Before you make your descent, be sure to examine the two aerial photos on the wall by the steps. Shot in 1911 from the cupola of the original courthouse, these images provide comparative, historical vistas of McMinnville's downtown.

