

# The New York Times

## Does Portland Need a Soho House? (Does It Even Want One?)

The status-conscious social club has landed in the Pacific Northwest's crunchiest city. Some locals wonder: Why?

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In a very particular corner of Portland, Ore., there is a dive bar whose vending machine dispenses tarot cards and a dessert joint with a white-water kayak in its bathroom. On a nearby block, for vaguely environmental reasons, a dozen goats used to roam free.

The goats are gone now, replaced by an apartment complex with a Chipotle. Many Portland residents have grown to expect this kind of development; what they were not expecting was a Soho House.

That London-based chain of exclusive members' clubs, known as a posh hangout for jet-setters and celebrities, will open a new outpost this week in the gentrifying stretch of Portland known as the Central Eastside. Its arrival introduces a rooftop pool, a two-story gym and a restaurant serving steelhead tartare to a freshly renovated industrial building that once housed one of the city's scrappy artist cooperatives.

Members who apply and are accepted to the Portland club will pay \$1,950 a year for access to its amenities; \$4,500 a year also grants entry to Soho House locations in London, New York, Paris and Los Angeles.

### **From Art Cooperative to Members-Only**

With the new club, the company says it has created a luxurious space that strives to be as Portland as possible — or at least as Portland as a Soho House can be.

Andrew Carnie, Soho House's chief executive, said on a video call from London that the club was a natural fit for Portland in part because of the city's creative industries. What, exactly, does "creative" mean in this context? Mr. Carnie said chefs, tech workers, business owners and employees at Nike might all fit the bill. "We're trying to reach a crowd that's creative in their souls and like-minded," he said.

Some of the city's artists bristle at the club fashioning itself as a home for an artistic community, given the building's history.

When the building sold for nearly \$6 million in 2016 to a buyer unaffiliated with Soho House, most members of the cooperative were displaced.

Soho House is leasing the building from AJ Capital, a real estate development company that bought the Portland property in 2019 for \$15.6 million. (The company declined to share the length of its current lease.)

Both artists from the cooperative saw a bitter irony in Soho House's efforts to position itself as a creative space, given that many artists in the city would be unable to afford it — not to mention those who had already been forced out of the very same building.

"If the Troy building is being used as a private nightclub for exclusivity and fake creativity, it's not going to work," Mr. McGonigal said. He added that he believed the building was haunted.

Soho House says it has prioritized reflecting the city's artists in its more than 140-piece art collection, whose works mostly come from locals. Anakena Paddon, the art collection manager for the Portland location and other clubs, said she was aware of the artists' cooperative that had been in the building but that Soho House didn't "knowingly go back and try to track down all the original tenants."

"From what I understand it was a lot of craftspeople, a lot of makers," Ms. Paddon said. "There were a lot of different practices happening there, not all of which would be appropriate for the art collection."

“I think of all the things that big, gorgeous building could have become,” she said. “It’s kind of special that it’s remained a space for creatives, albeit in a very different existence.”

The building displays work by more than 60 artists, including Salomé Souag, who is creating a pastel mural for the building’s second floor, and Yuyang Zhang, whose collages mix graphics from Chinese propaganda posters with screenshots of Tinder notifications. Most artists were given memberships and Soho House credit in exchange for their pieces, although some were paid commissions for new work.

“I’m optimistic,” Ms. Souag said. She was impressed by the number of artists and activists that Ms. Paddon had been in touch with. “She’s inviting us in these walls, which usually wouldn’t be accessible.”

Julian Gaines, who contributed a painting modeled on a Jet Magazine cover, saw his work’s inclusion as a way to ensure Black people would see themselves on the walls of a club in a city where some seven out of 10 residents are white.

Mr. Gaines said he believed that Soho House would serve as a “creative catalyst” that could draw new talent to Portland. He convinced his dermatologist to apply.