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118 NUMBER, IN THOUSANDS, OF OREGON RESTAURANT WORKERS:

PERCENTAGE OF OREGON RESTAURANT WORKERS WHO EARN ABOVE MINIMUM WAGE: **79**

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A Farewell to One

Portland embraces collaborative creativity with New York City-style writers' rooms.



WRITING HAS long been a solitary pursuit: Ernest Hemingway had his cold Parisian attic, Jack Kerouac his scroll and a steady supply of Benzedrine. But the romance of going alone into battle with one's muse seems to be on the wane here in Portland, where writers are seeking a more social milieu in which to compose the next Great American Novel—a literary community.

Portland resident Jeffrey Selin intends to give them the space to build one. "Writers want the energy of other writers in the room and the friendly competition," Selin says. The 36-year-old short-story author recently quit his day job as a marketing writer to open the Writers' Dojo, an 800-square-foot St Johns studio outfitted with six work stations, antique furniture and plenty of room for lounging. For \$320 per month, writers can rent space in the dojo, which opened next to an aikido dojo in October. A "Wall of Fame" will list the publishing accomplishments of members. (At press time, the wall remained empty.)

Writing in the company of other creatives is not exactly a new notion. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was born of such a community at Lake Geneva in 1816, when Lord Byron challenged his rainbound group of wordsmiths, Shelley among them, to a ghost-story contest. Although that particular retreat was a product of unfortunate circumstance, literary communities like the

Loft in Minneapolis and the Writers Room in New York (where novelist A.M. Homes spins her tales) are cropping up across the country. It was inevitable that Portland, given its reputation as a literary city, would follow suit.

The city has a longer history of accommodating artists who seek community within their own abodes. September saw the launch of Sam Adams's pet project, Milepost 5, the new artists-only live-work condos off NE 82nd Ave, and developer Brian Wannamaker is rapidly filling his North Portland live-work studios at the Falcon Art Community on N Albina Ave. But, says Julie Duryea, owner of Souk, an organization located at NW Sixth & Everett that provides cheap, flexible meeting space and workstations for artists and entrepreneurs of every ilk, "Home offices can be lonely, and coffee shops are distracting."

The Writers' Dojo, Selin hopes, lands somewhere in between for the growing cadre of creatives who are pointing the grilles of their moving vans to the Pacific Northwest. Finding a ready-made pod of like-minded cohorts can make a new city feel less frightening, as Selin, who moved here from New York City in 2002, can attest. And with 170,000 people slated to arrive over the next five years, distinguishing yourself from the crowd may not be nearly as important as being part of it.

—Kristen Hall-Geisler