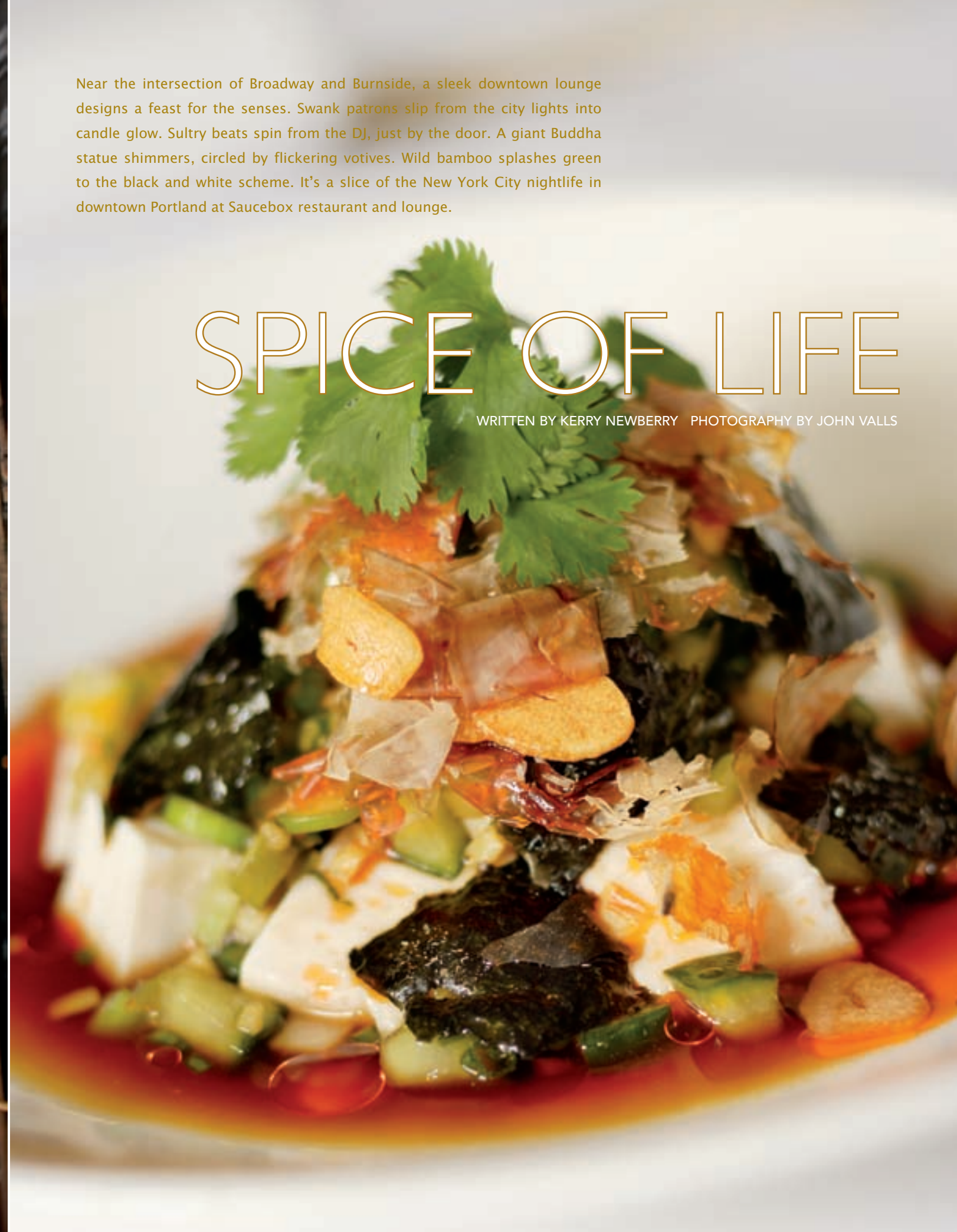




Near the intersection of Broadway and Burnside, a sleek downtown lounge designs a feast for the senses. Swank patrons slip from the city lights into candle glow. Sultry beats spin from the DJ, just by the door. A giant Buddha statue shimmers, circled by flickering votives. Wild bamboo splashes green to the black and white scheme. It's a slice of the New York City nightlife in downtown Portland at Saucebox restaurant and lounge.

SPICE OF LIFE

WRITTEN BY KERRY NEWBERRY PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN VALLS





GREGORY GOURDET, A RECENT NEW YORK CITY TRANSPLANT, is the new executive chef for Saucebox, creating classic and contemporary pan-Asian cuisine in the kitchen and on occasion by the glass. Born and raised a New Yorker, Gourdet first moved west to attend the University of Montana, graduating with a degree in French. He cooked his way through college, leading him back east to New York City to attend the Culinary Institute of America.

Gourdet landed an externship at the legendary Jean-Georges flagship restaurant where he worked for over five years, then stepped into the position of chef de cuisine at Jean-Georges Chinese/Modern Asian restaurant 66. His culinary mentor for his 10-year tenure with Jean-Georges is Gregory Brainin, the head recipe developer.

Taste everything, he opined. “And season as you go,” adds Gourdet. Gourdet follows this philosophy in the kitchen, seasoning dishes with elegance and care. Though his mantra is keep it simple, his ultimate goal is for enduring flavors. “I like very vibrant flavors. I like to use lots of herbs and I love to use spices,” says Gourdet.

“My chilies keep me grounded,” he adds. “I learned a lot about playing with spices and heat from my family,” says Gourdet, of his Haitian heritage. “We were raised with a jar of pickled chilies on the table.” Fresh fruits like mango and papaya were always in the kitchen. His aunt would return from trips to Haiti with jars of cinnamon, star anise and almond extract.

“I play with sweetness a lot too,” he says. He enjoys contrasting flavors, like salty and sweet, and textures, “crunchy and chewy,” he says. A starter evoking this intent is the Spice Roasted Beet Salad. “It’s a classic pairing, goat cheese and beets, but at the same time this has some elements you wouldn’t expect so it elevates it,” Gourdet explains.

Previous page: Executive chef Gregory Gourdet’s menu includes a tantalizing and healthy entrée of Warm Local Tofu, a marriage of crunchy vegetables, citronette, bonito, and toasted chili oil. Above: Beautiful and seductive is how Storm Tharp describes the eyelash, one of two Portland artists Saucebox spotlights in the dining room. His installation piece *Maybelline* is inspired by The Tarantula Arms hotel in Street Car Named *Desire*; the Daniel Duford mural above the mirrors is part of a series called *Deleted Scenes*, chronicling the adventures of a *One-Armed Superhero*.

Pan Roasted Halibut



PAN ROASTED HALIBUT

Yellow Pepper and Fennel Fondue,
Apple-Jalapeño Salad, Coconut-Yogurt Emulsion

(pictured on page 81)

FOR THE FENNEL GLAZE

8 oz. Fresh lime juice	1 T. Salt
8 oz. Sugar	1 T. Crushed Thai chili
2 T. Fennel seeds, toasted until fragrant and crushed coarse in a spice grinder	

Combine all ingredients in a small saucepan and simmer to reduce by 1/3.

FOR THE FENNEL-PEPPER FONDUE

2 Medium yellow onions, sliced thin	2 oz. Ginger, julienned
2 Bulbs fennel, washed, sliced thin	10 Cloves garlic, sliced thin
2 Yellow bell peppers, deseeded, sliced thin	Olive oil
	Salt

In a shallow pot, sweat garlic, ginger and onions in salt and olive oil until translucent. Add yellow peppers, fennel and a little more salt. Cover to sweat. Once vegetable juices have been released, uncover pot and cook vegetables gently until tender.

FOR THE COCONUT-YOGURT EMULSION

8 oz. Coconut milk	2 oz. Yogurt
8 oz. Coconut juice, with pulp	1 T. Salt

FOR THE APPLE-JALAPEÑO SALAD

Fennel, shaved thin on a mandoline	Fennel fronds, picked
Scallions, sliced thin	Thai basil leaves, picked
Red jalapeño, sliced thin	Olive oil
	Sea salt

TO MAKE FISH

6 oz. Halibut fillet, per person

Season halibut with salt, sear gently only on one side in a hot pan with a little olive oil. Finish cooking in a 400F degree oven for about seven minutes. When the center of the fish is just slightly pink take out of the oven, drizzle with some fennel glaze and baste. Let fish finish cooking and rest off heat.

TO PLATE

Reheat fennel-pepper fondue, place a mound off center in a large serving bowl. Place a piece of fish on top of fondue. In a small sauce pot heat up coconut-yogurt emulsion and whisk until frothy. Spoon sauce into bowl. Place the salad on top of fish. Drizzle plate with olive oil.



He infuses seven different spices into the flavors of the beets, served with a creamy goat cheese sauce. The salad is finished with a housemade hazelnut brittle and goji berries. “Which are high in antioxidants and promote longevity,” says Gourdet. “Plus they are just fun,” he says smiling. “They are small and tart and sweet at the same time.”

The creaminess from the goat cheese contrasts with the crunchiness of hazelnuts. “This is followed by a little punch from the goji berries and a leafy floral note from the cilantro,” says Gourdet. His intent is to provoke the palate, stimulating the senses with juxtaposition.

One of his favorite dishes from the summer was a honeydew and cucumber gazpacho. He describes it as a play on hot and cold. He served the puree of honeydew and cucumber with pickled cantaloupe, chilies, cardamom and shallots.

“Half the soup was frozen and we shaved this to make a granita,” Gourdet explains. The soup was poured around this and finished with jalapeño oil. “It was a crazy contrast of spicy and sweet, crunchy and cold and icy-cold and heat from the chili oil,” he adds. A garnish of cilantro and mint provided a floral boost for the finale.

The inventive dish was the star for the summer. Gourdet plans to innovate each season with new flavors, while paying homage to classic dishes that have graced the Saucebox menu since it opened in 1995.



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SPICE ROASTED BEET SALAD

With candied hazelnuts, goji berries, and creamy goat cheese vinaigrette

(pictured to right)

FOR THE BEETS

16 oz.	Red beets	2	Dried Thai chilis
16 oz.	Golden beets	16	Cardamon pods
6 pieces	Cinnamon stick	2 T.	Salt
6 pieces	Star anise	4 oz.	Water

Wash beets. In two small ovenproof dishes, roast beets with half of spices, salt and water in each container, covered with aluminum foil. Roast at 375F degrees until tender, about one hour depending on size of beets. Once cooled, peel beets by rubbing peels off with paper towels. Cut beets into wedges.

FOR THE CANDIED HAZELNUTS

2 C.	Hazelnuts	2 T.	Crushed Thai chili
2 C.	Sugar	2 T.	Sea salt

Roast hazelnuts in a 425F degree oven for 10 - 15 minutes or until the skins become dry. Once cooled, rub nuts between a towel to remove skins. Place sugar in a sauté pan, melt sugar over very low heat until dark golden brown. Do not stir sugar. Move pan around to make sure sugar is melting evenly. Once sugar is melted add hazelnuts, salt and chili. Stir to combine with a dry rubber spatula. Once all mixed, transfer to a plate to cool at room temperature. Once cooled, chop brittle into little pieces with a heavy knife.

FOR THE DRESSING

8 oz.	Goat cheese	1 T.	Salt
2 oz.	Rice wine vinegar	2 oz.	Olive oil

Puree first three ingredients in a blender. Drizzle in olive oil. Add a little water if necessary to achieve a creamy, sauce-like consistency.

FOR THE DRESSING

1 C.	Celery ribs, sliced	Scallions, sliced, for sprinkling
1 C.	Romaine lettuce, ribs only, no leaves, sliced	Red jalapeño, sliced thin, to taste
	Goji berries for sprinkling	Cilantro, whole leaves
	Crystallized ginger for sprinkling	Red wine vinegar
		Olive oil
		Sea salt

TO PLATE Place beets in two bowls, add celery and romaine to bowl of yellow beets. Season beets with salt, a little vinegar and a little olive oil. On a serving plate, drizzle goat cheese vinaigrette. Place yellow beets, celery and romaine on plate, follow with red beets. Garnish salad with scallions, goji berries, crystallized ginger, hazelnut brittle, a few jalapeño slices and cilantro. Drizzle with a little more goat cheese vinaigrette and a bit more olive oil and sea salt.



The Korean style baby-back ribs have been on the menu since the opening. The pork ribs are slowly braised with soy, ginger, sesame, black pepper and santaka chilis, served with a housemade kim chee. "So it's a little spicy, a little sweet," says Gourdet. "They are a little reduced and lacquered, so nice and sexy."

Another classic entrée is the salmon dish. "Right now we are using wild King Salmon," says Gourdet, "with a Javanese sauce of hot pepper, garlic, lime, a little palm sugar, served with a side of sautéed spinach, fried leeks and jasmine rice."

From the Dim Sum selections, the Tapioca dumplings are very traditional for Saucebox. The dumplings are filled with chicken cooked with peanuts, fish sauce and cilantro, then drizzled with garlic oil. "It's so interesting because of the texture on the outside," says Gourdet compared to the tender and sweet chicken on the inside. The soft and supple dumplings pair with a side of garlic chips, and "a little crunch sneaks in," Gourdet adds, happy for more contraposition.

The pan-Asian cuisine at Saucebox fits perfectly with Gourdet's own taste. He leans toward colorful, healthy food, using mostly vinaigrettes and vegetable sauces to build full-flavors with elements of heat and acidity. He's also an avid runner and yoga acolyte. Select cocktails from the menu support this pursuit to health and longevity.

Items with two stars denote the most powerful anti-aging, antioxidant rich super-fruit concoctions. Eternal Youth, for example, is a muddled housemade goji-ice, house-infused kaffir lime gin, lilikoi and lime sipper. Three stars marks a sexual stimulant, like the Royal Fire, muddled housemade sxhizandra-ice, house-infused ginger vodka, harlequin and orange.

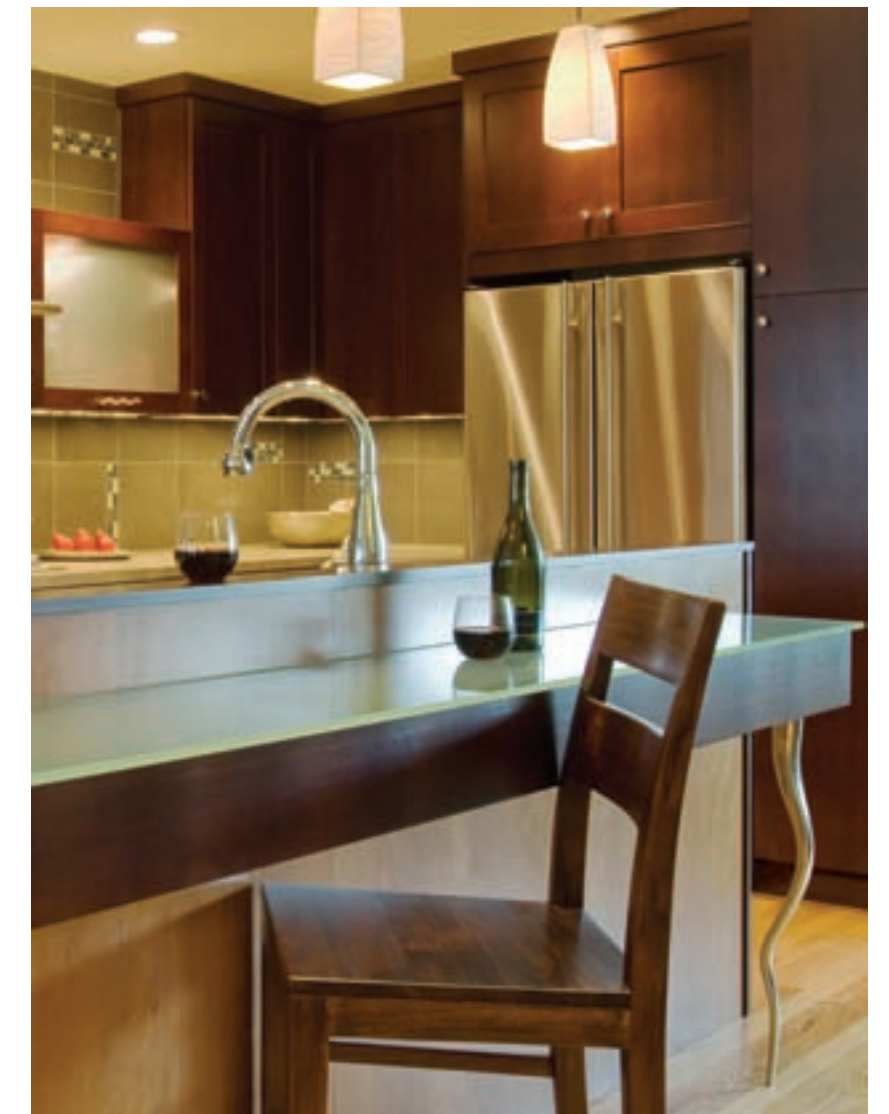
"Right now we are using wild King Salmon with a Javanese sauce of hot pepper, garlic, lime, a little palm sugar, served with a side of sautéed spinach, fried leeks and jasmine rice."

Gourdet is soft-spoken and serious on the subject of food. Like his cuisine he's a study in contrasts, a serene demeanor paired with a spirited mohawk. He is so detailed with his intent to foil flavors, one can't help but believe in the chef's quest to create epicurean epiphany.

The first autumn dish for the menu is a butternut squash and coconut milk soup. "Taking something simple but again elevating it with some local apples and shallots pickled with cinnamon, star anise and cloves," he says. "We'll do a maple crème fraiche, crystallized ginger and finish with toasted chili oil."

"There is a contrast of slightly sweet, slightly spicy, a crunch from the pickled apples with some acidity, and a little richness, because it's cold out, with the maple crème fraiche," Gourdet explains. "Why not enliven all the senses?"

Saucebox is located in the heart of downtown Portland at 214 SW Broadway. It is open every night, dinner being served from 5pm. Happy hour specials run Monday through Friday, 4:30pm to 6:30pm and Saturdays and Sundays 5pm to 6:30pm. For more information call 503.241.3393 or visit online at www.saucebox.com



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