

Cannon Beach Hardware *and Public House*

Enhanced pub food in a hardware store? It's not a gimmick, just dual-purpose

Someone on their way to the “Hardware Store” in Cannon Beach is just as likely in need of a burger and fries as they are a hammer and nails. Nicknamed the “Screw and Brew,” Cannon Beach Hardware and Public House tends to both the handyman’s tastebuds as well as his toolbox.

It began as a plain old hardware store. After the adjacent space became available walls were knocked down and the pub was erected. Now one can peer from just about any vantage into the tightly packed aisles of the hardware store itself. Underscoring the dual-purpose, staff are shared. Looking for a Gorilla Glue? Need a key duplicated? Ask a waitress.

And while the hardware section may hew to the more humble of home-improvement projects, the menu caters to those hungry enough to eat a house. Served with an abundance of fries — or, if you add \$1, tots — it’s hard to imagine many entrées failing to fill even a starving construction worker.

Just as any toolbox wouldn’t be complete with a screwdriver, so too must a pub offer burgers, fries, chicken wings, fish and chips and the like. The Hardware Store goes a bit further with halibut and prawn burgers, a meatloaf sandwich, patty melt, and daily specials like fish tacos.

I opted, first, for the beer-battered, halibut fish and chips. I had to know: Were they really worth \$20? The answer is both yes and no.

The three pieces of fish were ample, severed over a mountain of fries with house-made tartar and cocktail sauces. The fish emerged blazing hot, how fried fish should. Even at a leisurely pace it remained hot until the last bite.

What the flaky, beer-battered crust lacked in crunch it gained in cleanliness. In terms of fish and chips, these were high-octane, not at all oily. Instead of needing a nap afterwards, they left me satisfied, energized and light. Unfortunately they left my wallet light as well. Everything about the fish and chips worked except the price. For a few

dollars less I’d have no qualms.

As much as the dish succeeded on the pure quality of the halibut, it was the tartar and cocktail sauces that made it sing. Each was home-made, and marvelous. The cocktail, not overly sweet, had a late-coming, spicy kick. The tartar was ideally balanced between the creamy base — again, not overly oily — and the zing of lemon, pickle and (I believe) diced red peppers.

As a lover — and collector — of hot sauce, it is a true testament to the Hardware Store’s cocktail and tartar that, when afforded with the opportunity to dabble in their vast, 20-some-bottle selection, I opted to stick with the house concoctions.

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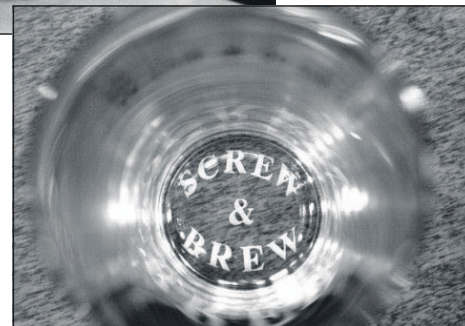
mouth OF THE COLUMBIA COAST WEEKEND’S LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEW

Story and photos by THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA • mouth@coastweekend.com



The beer-battered halibut fish and chips are a tasty, substantial meal, but so is the \$20 price tag.

The Cannon Beach Hardware and Public House is nicknamed the Screw & Brew.



When it came to the buffalo chicken sandwich (\$12), however, I needed that extra kick. Dry and crispy rather than tender and juicy, it reminded more of chicken strip than the namesake wing. It came with an almost absurd heaping of gorgonzola, but would be better sans the Panko breading. In other words: If you’re in the mood buffalo wings, just order the wings (\$6 for six, \$10 for 12).

After learning the Public House had a traditional smoker on the premises, I had to return to try the pastrami melt (\$12). (The BBQ pulled pork is also smoked.) Unlike the classic, towering deli version, the Hardware Store’s pastrami sandwich was easy to fit in my mouth — it was the one entrée I saw on the smaller side. But the

taste was sultry. The melted provolone cheese was gooey and running, smothering and swirling with the bold brine and pepper of the smoked beef. Despite the salaciousness, I did long for some sauerkraut, both for texture and digestive aid. Instead of fries, I opted for a side salad (add \$4). With hearty greens, garbanzo beans and artichoke hearts, it was substantial (but so too was the up-charge).

True to the Public House moniker, the Hardware Store is haunted by locals as well as tourists. You might spot some of the regulars drinking from ceramic cups, which indicate membership in the beer club. (A one-time, \$25 fee covers the first beer and reduces the cost of pints by 10 percent in perpetuity.) Rotating taps pour top-notch microbrews from Oregon and beyond. There’s a short wine list, house-infused cocktails and Mexican Coke.

As the front patio opens and the summer crowds pile in, space can get a bit tight. It’s the product of the retrofit, but a worthwhile trade-off for such bright, earnest, engaging character.

Though upon first glance it might appear odd, the Cannon Beach Hardware and Public House is more than just a gimmick.

Cannon Beach Hardware and Public House

Rating: ★★☆☆

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HOURS: The pub is open from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., and the hardware store is open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Both are closed Wednesdays.

PRICE: \$\$ — Entrees range from \$10 to \$20.

SERVICE: Every bit as quirky as the place itself.

VEGETARIAN/VEGAN OPTIONS: Slim. Veggie burger, chips and salsa, fries, tots, onion rings and side salad.

DRINKS: Microbrews, short wine list, house-infused cocktails (full bar), and Mexican Coke.

KEY TO RATINGS

- ★ poor
- ★★ below average
- ★★★ good & worth returning
- ★★★★ excellent
- ★★★★★ outstanding, the best in the Columbia-Pacific region