



Every Wednesday night during the school year, the Depot hosts Burger Night, where diners create the burger of their dreams from a seemingly endless list of topping choices.



Michael Lalewicz, co-owner and executive chef at the Depot Restaurant in Seaview, Washington, applies his special blend of seasonings to two 14-ounce rib-eye steaks.



One of seven nightly desserts, the Depot Restaurant’s sorbet duo changes regularly, based on the freshest fruit available. This photo shows the delectable combination of blackberry and pineapple, with a sidekick sugar cookie, all made from scratch.

**BEST FINE DINING, BEST BURGER,
BEST DESSERTS, BEST CLAM CHOWDER & BEST CHEF**

The Depot

Seaview, Washington

Story and photos by
LYNETTE RAE McADAMS

Deep in the heart of historic Seaview, Washington, tucked back quietly on the corner of 38th and L places, there’s a tiny fold in the otherwise orderly fabric of the gastronomic universe, a fissure in the space-time continuum of modern cuisine. It’s a place that looks forward and back all at once without blinking; a spot where you can cross three oceans but never leave the dock. With pride and with passion, it walks the fine line of an identity crisis without ever losing its soul: It’s the Depot Restaurant — an extraordinary 900 square feet of space in this world, where they somehow manage to get everything right.

It’s one thing to be well known for a particular kind of food or atmosphere — some single element that encapsulates your brand and consistently lets you shine. But balancing multiple acts takes a whole different set of skills — and it’s something the Depot does superbly. Defending their longstanding Readers’ Choice Award titles in four different dining categories again this year, and rounding it all out with a first-time win in the newly created award for Best Chef, it’s time to take a closer look at what makes this place so exceptional.

Best Fine Dining

Housed in a 125-year-old train station (once part of the famous “Clamshell Railroad” that operated according to the tides), the charm of the Depot is apparent from the moment you step through the door. Exclusively a diner house, the restaurant glows with soft lighting, and the warmth that greets you on arrival (one-part heat from the busy kitchen, one-part perfect hospitality), sets the stage for a great experience.

Owned and operated by the husband-and-wife team Michael Lalewicz and Nancy Gorshe, the restaurant hums with a passion for excellence, but it never feels intimidating or pretentious. Describing their establishment as “casual fine dining,” the ever-gracious Gorshe is quick to insist that patrons arrive comfortably dressed to their own taste — it’s only the food that’s required to be exquisite.

And is it ever.

Across a menu offering flavors spanning at least four continents, Lalewicz’s talents come through like a beacon, illuminating the palate with dishes like Greek lamb meatballs over parmesan risotto, and pan-seared duck breast in a fig Marsala glaze. Add an impressive international wine list and an expert team of friendly servers, and whether you show up in a suit and tie, or jeans and

your favorite hoodie, you can count on feasting like a monarch (and getting treated like one, too.)

Best Burger, Best Clam Chowder, Best Desserts

Six nights a week, fancy food might be the Depot’s forte, but drop in any Wednesday during the school year, and you’ll be amazed at the way the place knows how to let its hair down. In a kind of homage to the 50-some



The Depot Restaurant’s “Clamshell Railroad Clams Chowder,” made to order in a creamy broth, features whole wild Willapa Bay steamers and chopped Pacific razor clams.

years the building spent as a neighborhood tavern, on this night only, the Depot abandons its regular menu for Burger Night, a community favorite that fills the house.

The fare is simple, but epic: Limited only by their own imaginations, guests mark choices on printed slips at the table and create their own burgers by selecting type of patty (beef, buffalo, or grilled portobello mushroom), then choosing as many toppings as they want from a list that includes all the traditional favorites and then some (consider a pineapple ring or a fried egg, maybe a smattering of hot peppers).

Not in the mood for a burger? Always available, Lalewicz’s chowder — teeming with chopped razor clams and whole Willapa Bay steamers — sings with the flavors of garlic and leek, and has a legendary local following.

And then there’s dessert — the course whose only flaw lies in having to make a choice.

Up to seven scrumptious offerings adorn the menu every night — each worthy of an independent award. Among them: chocolate espresso pot de creme, tiramisu, and perhaps the world’s most perfect vanilla bean flan.

BEST FINE DINING

Runner-up: Bridgewater
Bistro, Astoria

Honorable Mention: T.
Paul’s Supper Club, Astoria

BEST CLAM CHOWDER

Runner-up: Norma’s
Ocean Diner, Seaside

Honorable Mention:
Mo’s, Cannon Beach

BEST DESSERTS

Runner-up: Bridgewater
Bistro, Astoria

Honorable Mention:
Frite & Scoop, Astoria

BEST BURGER

Runner-up: Buoy Beer
Co., Astoria

Honorable Mention:
Albatross, Astoria

BEST CHEF

Runner-up: Marco Davis,
Columbian Cafe, Astoria

Honorable Mention:
Geoff Gunn, Bridgewater
Bistro, Astoria



Laura Gilgore and Brianna Warfield, two long-time Depot servers, hold baskets of custom-built char-grilled burgers during the Depot’s popular Burger Night, which takes place every Wednesday during the school year.

Here’s what’s odd: As desserts go, they’re really not flamboyant; but they are sublime — each one the epitome of its class.

Best Chef

That same drive for perfection that permeates every aspect of a Depot experience can all be boiled down to Lalewicz — a Detroit native who recalls that, growing up, his Polish household was filled with the smell of garlic, tomatoes and vinegar. Looking back on the moment he first felt a deep connection to cooking, he describes a morning spent alone in the kitchen, caramelizing onions to accompany a fried egg.

He remembers his fascination as the onions danced in the melted butter — the way they changed to a shining translucent, their edges rimmed with gold; and how the egg, nestled there in the center of it all, gurgled and thickened against the heat of the pan as all the aromas deepened. Experimenting, he tasted and re-made the dish three times before he was satisfied with it — just as any exceptional chef would do.

But at the time, he was only 8 years old.

Today, in his restaurant’s small (but magical) display kitchen, Lalewicz is obviously light-years beyond learning the intricacies of an onion, but that same quest for and attention to quality still flows through his work, evolving over the years into a philosophy of cooking he calls “complex simplicity.”

Aiming always to enhance and hone the inherent characteristics of his ingredients, he crafts every single element of a dish from scratch, building layer after layer of complimenting flavors, until, together, all things are elevated.

It’s a masterful art, but Lalewicz laughs it off humbly: “I just surround myself with the very best ingredients I can, and then try not to mess it up.”

The results are an innovative style of Northwest cuisine that combines the dedication and technique of a fine French bistro with all the authenticity and slow-churned love of a soul food cafe.

Of course, for Lalewicz, satisfaction in his life’s endeavor doesn’t come from producing fabulous food alone; for him, joy arrives on an empty plate — preferably one that’s been licked clean.

“When you make somebody happy and they tell you,” he says, grinning, “that’s everything.”

BEST CHEAP DATE, BEST PLACE FOR A PICNIC & BEST TOURIST ATTRACTION

The Beach

Clatsop County, Oregon or Pacific County, Washington

By DWIGHT CASWELL

When informed that she had won three “Bests” in Coast Weekend’s 2014 Readers’ Choice Awards, Beach refused to take full credit.

“It was teamwork,” she said. “I couldn’t have done it without Ocean, Sun and Sky.

“Without them I’d be nothing more than sand, but together we make the most beautiful waves and dunes — and the sunsets! Sun does so much with Sky’s clouds!

“And of course we have a marvelous supporting cast. Aren’t the birds wonderful? And let’s not forget the molluscs. A lot of people visit me just for the molluscs.”

When asked what she thought of being named Best Cheap Date, Beach said, “I wish they hadn’t put it like that.”

One of Sky’s clouds passed over, momentarily darkening Beach, but she brightened immediately. “I think of myself as low maintenance. It’s true that I’m free and easy, but that’s not such a bad thing, is it? I only hope you still respect me when it’s over. As you turn to look at me one last time, all I ask is that you don’t litter.”

Locals take great pride in keeping our beaches clean. Volunteers are always welcome. For more information, visit the GrassRoots Garbage Gang at ourbeach.or, SOLV at solv.org or check out the Beach Drive Buccaneers on Facebook.

BEST CHEAP DATE

Runner-up: Columbian Theater,
Astoria

Honorable Mention: Astoria Sunday
Market

BEST PLACE FOR A PICNIC

Runner-up: Astoria Column
Honorable Mention: Ecola State
Park, Cannon Beach

BEST TOURIST ATTRACTION

Runner-up: Astoria Column
Honorable Mention: Haystack Rock,
Cannon Beach



Photo by Alex Pajunas

Guilbaldo Gonzalez, left, of Newberg, and his wife, Wendy, stoop to pick up garbage during SOLVE’s Treasure the Beach Cleanup on a brisk January morning in Seaside.



Photo by Damian Mulinix

Walking the beach on Fourth of July, you never know what you might encounter, such as a teenager buried up to his armpits in the sand.



Photo by Andrew Tonry

Watching the sunset at the beach in Seaside is a sight not to be missed.