

The Kitchen

Don't overlook Seaside's quirky and inspired hole-in-the-wall

Chances are you've passed The Kitchen numerous times while driving through Seaside. Whether or not you noticed the shack-sized take-out box near the south end of Roosevelt Drive is another matter.

The Kitchen truly is tiny, a hole-in-the-wall that's easy to overlook. But make no mistake: Though the name is hardly compelling, the food is.

Each day from Tuesday to Saturday, owner and operator Jeanne Odonovan drums up two or three dishes. You'll see them written on a whiteboard outside. Per her hours, it's mostly lunchtime fare: soups and sandwiches and so on. But then again, most anything is possible; Odonovan seems to be limited by her own creativity and mood.

If something on the day's menu strikes you — like the African Lamb Meatballs that originally drew me in — pull on over and have a look. Sidle up to the Dutch door. Peer at the kitchen inside. It's bright, clean and cute — much like Odonovan herself, who mixes the colors of her outfits and aprons as well as she does her spices.

It would, of course, be wholly inappropriate to ask a lady her age. But based on some crayon art hanging from a cabinet made out to "Grandma," it's safe to assume Odonovan's station. And that's what The Kitchen offers: home cooking like your own grandma (or younger aunt) might make had she culinary designs and a well-stocked fridge.

On my first visit I ordered the African Lamb Meatballs and a cup of the salmon chowder. As it was only moments before The Kitchen's 5 p.m. closing time, Odonovan had run out of the accompanying saffron couscous. She made up for it by adding some fresh French bread and offering a little discount, plus half a small red pepper (a cherry bomb, I believe) that was stuffed with chèvre. It was one or two bites, and it was a delightfully bright, brash kick.

The meatballs too, served in a thick red sauce, were garlicky and marvelous. Hints of cinnamon and orange invoked the sweet tang of the dish's African namesake. With the succulent lamb, the subtleties of Odonovan's spicing turned regular meatballs and red sauce into something more sublime.

The smoked salmon chowder too was nuanced. The broth was creamy, rich and seasoned with basil. Smoked salmon permeated, both in healthy chunks and in being cooked down into the broth. The slow-cooked potatoes too were falling out of their skins into a smooth, hearty paste. Against

the softness, celery offered crisp contrast.

All together, after tip, the chowder and lamb meatballs ran me \$11. For lunch, it was refreshingly refined and ideally sized — enough to satiate without needing a nap.

I returned a month later for Cuban stew and a muffuletta sandwich. As before, Odonovan threw in a few extras — a beef taquito with tangerine-avocado dip and artfully cut roasted onion — in my bag for no extra cost. Again, the pricetag after tip was \$11. (It must be said: while Odonovan happened to be generous with me it might just as well have been the luck of the draw — don't go expecting to get anything you don't pay for.)

At first glance, with bread hanging over

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The Kitchen's muffuletta sandwich includes mortadella, salami, ham, mozzarella and provolone coated with an olive oil spread of finely diced green olives, garlic, celery, cauliflower and carrot.

The Kitchen may be small, but it serves up big flavors.

the sides, the muffuletta looked a little slim. But looks can be deceiving. As I bit in past the fresh bun I discovered mounds of mortadella, salami, ham, mozzarella and provolone. They were coated with an olive oil spread of finely diced green olives, garlic, celery, cauliflower and carrot.

The muffuletta was briny, salty, garlicky and staggeringly sumptuous. Imagine an Italian tasting plate of meats, cheeses, olives and the like, and you're getting warm. That afternoon's muffuletta would be my first at The Kitchen, but it wouldn't be my last.

The accompanying Cuban stew was vegetarian and its less-fatty components made an ideal partner. In a thin tomato base and



spiced with cumin there were white and black beans, corn, squash, onions and rice. The stew was simple and comforting — maybe something like your grandma would make.

A few weeks later I returned yet again, unable to resist another muffuletta. It was everything I remembered — and craved — from the first. With it I had a shrimp lobster bisque. This time it was \$12, after tip. (Odonovan threw in a cup of ice tea, filled with infused berries, and a tasting cup of fruit salad.) The bisque, kind of like a chowder with only broth and meat, was decadently rich but one-note.

Indeed, just about everything I tried from The Kitchen I quite enjoyed. Heartening just the same is Odonovan's personality and chutzpa. You're being cooked for and served by a single person with a singular vision. It's almost like a food truck, only with a more versatile kitchen and rotating menu.

So now, every time I pass through Seaside, I take an eager glance at The Kitchen's offerings for the day.

mouth OF THE COLUMBIA

COAST WEEKEND'S LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEW

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

The Kitchen

Rating: ★★★★★

1820 S. Roosevelt Drive, Seaside

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Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday.

Price: \$ — two-item lunches usually cost around \$10.

Service: Take-out only. A colorful one-woman show, orders take approximately 5 to 10 minutes

Vegetarian/Vegan options: Menu-dependent, but dishes often lean on animal products.

Drinks: None, unless you're lucky.

KEY TO RATINGS

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