

Favorite restaurants of 2015

Since inheriting the Mouth's knife and fork this spring I've reviewed 33 different restaurants. The following are my favorites of the bunch.

Coincidentally, my picks represent a single eatery from each population center in the coverage area.

It's also worth noting that all but one have been in business under two years, and that four started in 2015. Which is to say: The quality of dining on the North Coast is like a rising tide.

Street 14 Café

1410 Commercial St., Astoria

The Thursday-through-Saturday dinner service that began this fall at Street 14 served some of the freshest, most finely prepared and enticing meals I had all year. Everything I ate was sharp, both elementary and exciting. That's due to the ethic of owners Micha and Jennifer Cameron-Lattek — who set out to work with local farms year-round — as well as the crisp execution of chef Andrew Catalano, who cut his teeth at New York's venerable Gramercy Tavern. Menus are printed anew each week, and if you blink something delectable might disappear, like the sinfully succulent Braised Pork Belly that is now but a drooling flicker tattooed on my tongue. Nonetheless, that turnover forces adventure. Indeed, change is good. It results in eating experiences that not only reflect the region, but its up-to-the-minute essence and mood.

Buttercup

35915 N. U.S. Hwy 101, Nehalem

With Buttercup, Julie Barker hit the trifecta. After anchoring two successful restaurants in Manzanita — the Blue Sky Cafe and Bread & Ocean Bakery — Barker found a new muse in Nehalem's Buttercup. There she serves two things: chowder and ice cream. But within those supposed confines Barker becomes creatively unbridled. On constant, monthly rotation are numerous chowders, all of which are cooked to order. In addition to traditional clam there are always gluten-free and vegan options, some of which appropriate curry and other soups/stews as much as they do chowder. Same goes for ice creams, which include vegan cones and sorbets, as well as truly wild — but somehow also strikingly sane — cone-cream pairings. One month a spiced apple ice cream came on a cheddar cone. Other pair-

ings have included marshmallow ice cream and a chocolate-dipped waffle cone, and blackberry cobbler on cinnamon. Of these rotating monthly specials, Barker regularly collaborates with local chefs and uses some of the best local ingredients. Indeed, it's almost like she has the Midas touch.

Kabob House

107 S.E. Third St. Long Beach, Washington

Before Behnoosh Ghorbani — call her "B" for short — opened the Kabob House in Long Beach, she'd never worked at a restaurant, let alone started one from scratch. What she had done was a great deal of cooking at family parties and events. At those gatherings B would inevitably grill beef and chicken kabobs, a staple at Persian celebrations. So when B decided she'd had enough of the dental industry, she figured she'd take a shot at sharing those family recipes. At Kabob House, B keeps things relatively simple, draping the tender, succulent kabobs on rice, salads, wraps and the like. Besides specials and a few sides, that's about it — and frankly, that's fine. The kabobs — particularly the beef, which is tantalizingly spiced with saffron — are classic, regional flavors that have heretofore been missing on the North Coast.

The Kitchen

1820 S. Roosevelt Drive, Seaside

While The Kitchen's footprint might be the funkiest on this list, its food is probably the most



Photo by Mouth of the
Columbia

The Tiki Salad, left, is a familiar and well-executed dish at Castaways. The Honey Orange Coconut Prawns, right, are crispy, sweet and sumptuous.

Photo by Joshua Bessex

The Pork Belly and Beet Salad were on the seasonally changing menu at Street 14 Cafe this fall.



comforting — kind of like what grandma might make. Tucked inconspicuously in a shed-sized shack along the main drag in Seaside is a kitchen with a Dutch door ordering window. The day's menu hangs on a dry-erase board you can see while driving by. Usually there'll be two or three items — perhaps a soup, a sandwich, or a lunch-time entrée (The Kitchen closes at 5 p.m.). What gets prepared each day is based on the whims of owner-operator Jeanne Odonovan. I've pulled over for everything from African-spiced lamb meatballs to creamy lobster bisque. But nothing makes me want stop more than her rich and subtly complex muffaletta sandwich.

Castaways Restaurant and Tiki Bar

316 Fir St., Cannon Beach

Despite being the one truly veteran establishment on this list, Castaways Restaurant and Tiki Bar remains vital. "If I didn't want to keep learning I'd be done," Chef Josh Tuckman told one of his tables as they'd finished their meal. It was one of the only times all year I've seen a chef emerge from behind the cloisters of the kitchen. He came out not only to share with his custom-

ers, but to listen. Tuckman's dishes travel too. Sprouting mostly from French-Cajun roots, they hopscotch through the Caribbean, over to Europe, Asia and beyond. A classically thorough sense of preparation overrules any fusion for fusion's sake. Although getting a table in the tightly packed, former residence in Cannon Beach can be tough, everything on the menu — from the Honey Orange Coconut Prawns to the Nawlins Style Jambalya to the Seafood Chowder, steaks and Tiki Drinks — is equally at home.

Tacos El Catrin

5 U.S. Hwy 101, Warrenton

Almost as much as burgers and fish and chips, there's no shortage of Mexican food on the North Coast. Off the top of my head I can think of at least three pairs of Mexican restaurants where you can see one whilst dining in the other. Thankfully, Tacos El Catrin resists homogenization. Rather than a smattering of Americanized burritos, watery salsa and the hundred-item combo menu, Tacos El Catrin's more refined and traditional offerings delight by taking the path less traveled. The Pazole, available on weekends only, is an experience of construction whose component flavors sashay from one spoonful to the next. The smoky Mole too made me a believer. Plus, all of the dishes are wonderfully colorful and plated accordingly. With Tacos El Catrin, here is yet another chef with a vision. After nine years at the Stephanie Inn, chef Enrique Reyes took a chance and realized his. Here's to more like him — and the others on this list — in 2016!

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