

OSPREY CAFE

WITH CLEVERNESS AND GLOBAL INSPIRATION, THIS SEASIDE RESTAURANT SETS THE BAR HIGH FOR 2016

My first meal of 2016 was brunch at the Osprey Cafe on New Year's Day. Both comforting and refined, it was a marvelous way to kick things off.

Tucked toward the end of Avenue U, just shy of the beach, the Osprey feels relieved from Seaside's central bustle. It's been open for about a year and a half, and it closes at 3 p.m., serving breakfast, brunch and lunch.

The dining room is cozy, ringed with nooks. It's colored in pastels, lined with booths and tall window-seats around central farmhouse tables. A gas fireplace hums silently on the south-facing wall.

In the booths, the tables were topped with glass, offering windows to collections of foreign currency. The coins and notes have come home with the chef after a lifetime of travel. One of the bills, from Zimbabwe, was marked: Fifty Trillion Dollars. The majority of the monies, however, came from South America and the Asian Pacific. Alongside the bills and coins, recipes too made the return trip.

As it was a holiday — and one where we had celebrated the night before — we began with a round of Bloody Marys (\$6). And here, right off the bat, the Osprey showed both its cleverness and global inspiration.

The cafe doesn't have a full liquor license, though it can serve wine and beer. So to sidestep the seeming requirement of vodka in the Bloody Mary, Osprey substitutes sake. The rice wine's fit with the spicy tomato juice was surprisingly natural. Were it not for that familiar sake finish, one would be hard-pressed to tell the difference at all. But that faint after-twang remained congruent, enjoyable in its own right. (Plus, our server explained, the ratio of alcohol to juice measures up to a traditional Bloody Mary's strength.)

Perusing the menus as we sipped our cocktails and tipped back cups of bold, rich, Columbia River coffee, I was tempted by the "Travelers Breakfast" section, but I would have to return for them: on this morning, the Eggs Benedict special called to me like a chorus of angles.

The eggs arrived, perfectly poached, soft enough that a loud noise could rupture the runny yoke. They cascaded over lightly toasted English muffins and sweet, salty, juicy ham steak that was garnished with crisp pork skin. The hollandaise sauce looked a little thin, but held, and together the tastes rang decadently true — so rich,

creamy and slurpy, these divine fats and oils.

The home-fried potatoes too, were precisely and evenly prepared, constantly sized and well-seasoned. There was nary a small, crunchy, blackened, charcoal-like bite in the bunch.

The biscuits in the Biscuits and Gravy (\$10.25) took a little extra time as the biscuits were cooked to order. They too were finely executed, a mound of flaky, soft centered heaviness. The gray gravy was thick, dotted with chunks of homemade sausage.

The Arepas (\$9.25), by comparison, left me a bit wanting. Like halved hockey-pucks, the South American grilled corn and cheese dumplings were a little forward on the corn and light on the cheese. Though they came with a side of red salsa that was more like thick hot sauce, some brightness and color — like hot or bell peppers, onions or other veggies — could easily punch them up.

All three breakfast plates came with the



The Mouth loved the sweet, spicy, salty, gooey and rich Bahn Mi sandwich, with its pork belly, pickled onions, Serrano peppers, cilantro and a Sriracha mayo.

The Eggs Benedict features poached eggs over lightly toasted English muffins and sweet, salty, juicy ham steak garnished with crisp pork skin, with accompanying home-fried potatoes and fruit.

tinest side-servings of fruit. One cup — the size one might deliver a side of catsup in — featured one slice of a strawberry, one bite-sized pineapple chunk, and three watermelon cubes the size of dice. The pineapple was cut so close to the rhine it was mostly for not. Indeed, while the central components of the meals were carefully prepared, the fruit barely qualified as an afterthought. Still, a lovely a meal.

I returned about a week later to try more of the international flavors. It was fitting, I thought, that ska and rocksteady were playing over the stereo — rarely heard sounds to go with rarely found flavors.

I had the Nasi Goreng (\$12.50), a light-



ly spiced Indonesian fried rice dish with peas, shreds of carrot, bay shrimp, shredded chicken and topped with a sunny-side up egg. Quickly I found myself hoarding the small egg. When it was gone, nearly half the dish remained. I missed the texture. In its stead I drizzled in the "kecap manis," a sweet soy sauce, but found it too sugary for my taste. The pretty, pink pickled onions, though, offered a fine sharpness.

The Pork Belly Bahn Mi (\$10.25), however, was wholly beyond reproach. It looked lovely — with a palette of green, pink, brown and burnt orange. The chunks of pork belly were ample and melty soft — again, the most delectable fats. There were more pickled onions, Serrano peppers, cilantro (which I swapped for herbed greens) and a Sriracha mayo. The buttered bread was as good as any I've had on a coastal sandwich: taught crust, supple center.

Sweet, spicy, salty, gooey and rich, the Bahn Mi was one of those rare, lustful eating experiences. I ate it slowly, and after each mouthful I moaned in ecstasy, murmuring thanks out loud to no one. I thought to myself: May the Osprey Cafe set the bar for my own eating — and travels — in the year to come.

mouth OF THE COLUMBIA

COAST WEEKEND'S LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEW

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

Osprey Cafe

Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★

2281 Beach Drive, Seaside

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HOURS: 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday to Tuesday.
Closed Wednesday.

PRICE: \$ — Most entrées hover around \$10

SERVICE: Thoughtful, exuberant and knowledgeable
VEGETARIAN / VEGAN OPTIONS: Plenty for vegetarians and a few vegan outposts

DRINKS: Beer, wine, wine cocktails, full barista espresso bar, tea and juice

KEY TO RATINGS

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