

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

Astoria ice cream shop serves up creamy goodness, distinct fries

Review and photos by MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Frite & Scoop started at home. There, Kevin Malcolm began tinkering with ice cream. Eventually his hobby became obsessive, and when he and wife, Lisa, moved from Seattle to Astoria in 2014 they were astounded to find no shops offering homemade ice cream. They decided to take a chance, pairing Kevin's ice cream fascination with Lisa's penchant for Belgian fries (aka "frites").

They found an ideal location on the Astoria Riverwalk — perfect for wandering tourists. The interior is cute and friendly, with tables inside and on a covered, wind-shielded patio. Ordering at the counter can take a moment since Frite's scoopers encourage customers to sample from the 12 different ice creams and sorbets in the freezer. There's also a selection of baked sweets, including cookies, Rice Crispy treats made with brown butter and so on — all of which make fine pairings with the frozen desserts.

Savory selection is a lot easier. It's about choosing a size — from Regular (\$4) to Double (\$8) — and some dipping sauces. The Double is a nice snack for two adults to share, but it's certainly not a meal.

The frites are twice fried. They're cut thick and short, like husky steak fries. The two-part process affords a crispier crust while maintaining a softer center. It's a process that Frite & Scoop monitors obsessively. Finding that ideal frying time — five minutes — was the result of relentless research. What the process yields is distinct, though it won't have you re-thinking the very existence of fries. They're served in an elevated cone with a steel base and a paper sleeve, salted with plain sea salt or a mild rosemary whose nuance only becomes apparent when one avoids the dipping sauces.

But why would you want to do that? The flavors are myriad, from

savory to sweet. They come in two basic tiers: free — which includes regular ketchup; a thin, mild honey mustard; and North Coast Fry Sauce, a ketchup-and-mayonnaise blend I found overly sweet — and premium, which cost 75 cents apiece. The paper cups are firmly medium sized, and it's a shame the first premium sauce isn't included. Were a Double frites serving reliant on one premium dip, a single cup wouldn't be enough.

That was the case with the Malt Vinegar Aioli, which my companion and I — along with owner Kevin — agreed was our absolute favorite. Creamy with the perfect, bitter vinegar bite, I'd swap it for any tartar sauce. (Heck, it might be worth buying a side to take up to the Bowpicker...) To my surprise, the Blueberry Mayo worked. While it made for a more dessert-like potato, it wasn't overwhelmingly sweet. The Thai Chili was, lamentably, more sugar than spice. The Chipotle Aioli offered a smokiness with a back-of-the-throat heat. The Dill was fresh and pointy, cranked up with sour cream. Though spending a few dollars on sauces, some of which you won't enjoy nearly as much as others, is a minor luxury, sampling so many of them together was a joy, both in taste and in aesthetics. Many of the flavors arose from a creamy base, and all shared a lovely, congruent, pastel color palette.

After frites we went back for ice cream. In handing out samples, Kevin bulged with pride, sharing the scratch process for the base custard that uses only five ingredients. Like the



Frite & Scoop serves a dozen different ice cream flavors, created in-house; there is always one vegan option.

dipping sauces, the ice creams at Frite & Scoop are creamy uber alles. (Mostly that's the custard base, which includes more egg than traditional ice cream.) The flavors are generally deep and rich, though there are a few tart, shaper edges. They're available in Little Scoops (\$2), Singles (\$3.50), Doubles (\$5.50) and Pints (\$8). Run-of-the-mill, mass-produced cones are free, but it's worth ponying up the extra 50 cents for the Krumkake cone, a waffle-like cone made in-house with a melted Hershey's kiss at the bottom.

That's how I had my Lemon Meringue Pie, which perfectly balanced creaminess with a citrus curd. It was an ideal marriage of sugar and salt that kept me coming back for bite after bite: "This will be my last ... after

The Belgian frites come in two sizes with many choices of accompanying dipping sauces.

this next one ... I'll put it down, just one more." The chunks of doughy pie, too, were delectable. (Along with the frites, Lisa handles all the baking duties for the frozen components.)

The Zesty Lime wasn't quite zesty or lime-y enough — cream prevailed. The vegan Berry Sorbet was adequately tart, and I enjoyed the seeds and chunks of berry. (Frite & Scoop always stocks at least one vegan alternative.)

Hokey Pokey is Frite & Scoop's most popular flavor, so much so that the ice cream shop has launched a chocolate iteration. The original Pokey is rich and buttery with a honeycomb candy that offers a luscious, soft crystalline textural experience.

Indeed, Frite & Scoop excels as much texturally as anywhere. Rather than inundating eaters with toppings, these ice cream makers rely on scarcity, a dance with supply and demand that really makes the additions like finding hidden treasure. Often, the additions run through the creamy custard like veins of gold.

The chunks of chocolate-covered toffee and pecans in the Turtle Sunday were decadent, far superior to

FRITE & SCOOP

Rating: ★★☆☆

175 14th St., Astoria

HOURS: Noon to 7 p.m. Sunday, Monday and Thursday. Noon to 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Closed Tuesday and Wednesday. Hours change seasonally.

PRICE: \$ – premium snacks

SERVICE: A vibrant, earnest, generous family atmosphere

VEGETARIAN / VEGAN OPTIONS: Always at least one vegan sorbet, vegetarian fry sauces

DRINKS: Boutique sodas, complimentary water.

KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

- ★ Poor
- ★★ Below average
- ★★★ Good & worth return
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Best in region

the plain Toffee flavor (though either would go smashingly with some espresso). The Cinnamon Donut twinkled with cinnamon like osmosis, though was light on the donut. The berry in the Strawberry Oreo was second to cream and cake. The Chef's Choice, which featured red fault-line streaks, tasted buttery with no hint of fruitiness that the color implied. Again, though: tremendous texture.

In aggregate, cream was the dominant flavor. Unlike Buttercup in Nehalem, which conducts more radical flavor experiments, Frite & Scoop inhabits a narrower lane — but it's one Kevin and Lisa are in total control of.

Indeed, sticking with the segments they're most comfortable — and avoiding the ones they're not — is what makes Frite & Scoop such a success. That, and the vibrant, caring, family-friendly atmosphere they've created for customers and employees alike. Indeed, Frite & Scoop represents the better instincts of modern food as well as the growth of Astoria. The two go hand-in-hand.