

# Artful food graces Cannon Beach's Spring Unveiling

Review and photos by MOUTH  
OF THE COLUMBIA

I asked a friend from Cannon Beach if he had any plans to attend Spring Unveiling. "Is that this weekend?" he murmured. "I might have to get out of town."

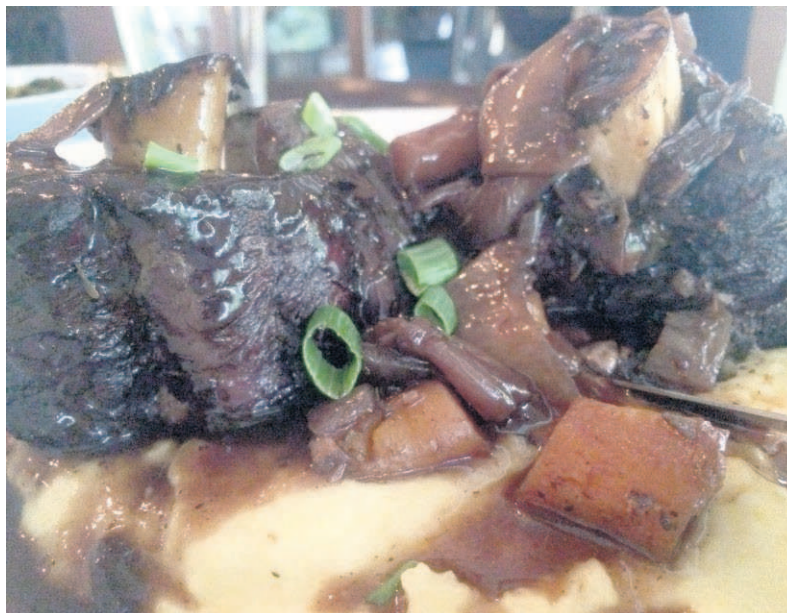
His avoidance is understandable: during festival weekend the town becomes even more clogged with tourists. And come Monday, once the visitors have flocked home, the "unveiled" art remains on display.

What my friend didn't know, however, was that one component of Spring Unveiling would be as fleeting as the weekend: Art from the Chef's Table.

On paper, the premise is as such: restaurants partner with galleries, selecting a piece of art to use as inspiration for a dish. In practice, the results run the gamut: some restaurants take the challenge, and their dish comes from a conversation with the piece. Others simply make something and affix it somewhat meaninglessly to the art, or even just slap an association on an existing dish.

Regardless of execution, the Chef's Table concept is sound: Food and art are indeed concentric circles. And while the potential for creativity is endless, not all food is art (sorry sandwich artists). Drawing that line is fuzzy and subjective. I'd offer the following, albeit loose, guideline: food is art when created with aesthetic purpose, be it of flavor, presentation, commentary and so on.

During the festival I spent two evenings alternating between galleries and restaurants. In the short time, I couldn't hardly try (nor afford) the 26 specials. The selections I made were based on how engaged the dishes seemed to be with the concept, as well as logistics, economics and, frankly, what looked good. To that end, know there were many more I wanted to try (I'm looking at you: Newman's at 988, Stephanie Inn,



Sweet Basil's: Venison Osso Bucco.

Cannon Beach Café and Wayfarer).

## The Bistro

My first stop came Friday at the Bistro. A gorgeous, sunny evening, the streets were bustling and a lot of eateries were at capacity. The Bistro, tucked back a bit and well-shaded, offered peaceful respite, rays of errant sunlight peaking through the drawn window shades and live classical guitar.

The special was an Asian-style Crab hors d'oeuvres (\$15.75) based on Christopher Mathie's bold, colorful painting of the crustacean. Though a direct interpretation, it fit — and, for whatever reason, seemed a lot more interesting than serving salmon for salmon art.

I was fortunate enough to get the day's last order of Dungeness crab legs. They came in a big white bowl, claws attached, jutting outward from a shallow pool of soy sauce, ginger, onions, lemon, and maybe a touch of rice wine or vinegar.

I grabbed the shell-cracker and went at it, enjoying the messy process as much as the crab itself, salty, buttery and clean. The sauce was a nice twist, a little zag from how

crab is normally flavored on the North Coast. It was a delectable and finger-licking. And while the literal interpretation of the painting fit, if I were explaining the dish through art I'd add some touch to represent the Asian influence: maybe a ship, a fish market or locale.

## Bill's Tavern

Saturday I began milling around a bit earlier. I took a break from the galleries on the patio at Bill's Tavern.

Raised a few feet, with a beer in hand, I felt above the hustle.

Bill's special was Seared Ocean Scallops with Mango Salsa. Touted as an appetizer, I was surprised when I was presented with a starter salad. When the scallops came, the side of rice too seemed more suited to an entree. The dish though, with its bright, Caribbean colors was an alert reaction to the easy, tropical colors of Eric Abel's "Gone Tropo."

The four scallops were lightly seared, with just the slightest crust. On the smaller side, they were simply prepared — buttery, salty, offering that splash of sea. There was plenty of mango salsa, balanced with a sprinkling of



Bistro: Asian-style Crab.



Bill's Tavern: Seared Ocean Scallops and Mango Salsa.

chopped onions, cilantro and bits of jalapeño.

It was good enough to eat alone, by the spoonful. I didn't bother with the rice.

All in all, an enjoyable pause in the day, though I was struck with a bit of sticker-shock at the \$20 price tag — steep for most any appetizer.

## Sweet Basil's Cafe

Value was not an issue for Sweet Basil's Venison Osso Bucco.

Resting atop a bed of heart-stoppingly creamy polenta with a side of perfect, soft but not soggy collard greens, one of the nearly softball-sized shanks of venison would've been wholly adequate. The two on my plate were downright magisterial.

Smoked through the afternoon then braised, they were slathered in a deep, thick, rich and unfathomably dark pomegranate red wine sauce. Falling off the bone, but chewy with the fat and connective tissue, the earthy heaviness of the meat made me feel like early man — the beast's stature and strength evident in its flesh.

The dish matched the weight and power of its inspiration, a

bronze sculpture by Rip Caswell. It could've equally been reflected by a cave painting.

## Bruce's Candy Kitchen

I finished the evening with a Floral Fragrance Truffle (\$1.70) from Bruce's Candy Kitchen, created to honor Brian Taylor's metallic garden sculptures. The truffle's essence permeated my senses like a misting perfume, expanding throughout my mouth, finishing in my nose.

## Cannon Beach Distillery

After these rich, experiential flavors, a Spring Cocktail from the Cannon Beach Distillery offered light, sharp and exquisite refreshment.

When distillery owner Mike Selberg heard Archimedes Gallery's theme was "lore" he immediately envision a crimson hue for his cocktail.

He achieved it with strawberry-rhubarb simple syrup, strawberry lemonade, pure dark cherry juice, his Dorymen's rum — infused with local cherries — and a whole lot of lime. It was tart and sweet, perfectly balanced with hardly any bite — the kind of thing you could start sipping away on while the sun's still up. It was marvelous.

Indeed, there's plenty to feast upon during Spring Unveiling — it only begins with the eyes. Art from the Chef's Table does, however, need a promotional kick in the pants. Many of the folks I met while at the galleries had nary a clue that restaurants were involved. (Neither did a number of the servers at those restaurants.)

The word ought to get out though, as the concept is not only a great opportunity, reminding chef's to branch out, challenge themselves, uncork their inspiration and literally approach food as art. But the event offers something for reluctant residents as well — instead of a canvas, it just happens to come on a plate.