

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

Big new eatery offers thoughtful flavors

Review and photos by
MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

To set foot in the brand new Pelican Pub & Brewery is to bask in its arresting scale. Stare up at the peaked ceilings, the magnificent beams, the shiny brewing tanks, the enormous tide clock, and the industrial-sized, stainless steel line kitchen. Try not to think about how much it all cost.

As part of the craft brewing revolution, Pelican's shiny, outsized digs are no surprise. The 20-year-old brewery, with origins in Pacific City, is a growing regional player along the lines of a Buoy or Fort George. Such expansion makes perfect sense — Oregonians' thirst for brewpubs serving fancier burgers and IPAs seems practically unquenchable.

But as viewed through the lens of Cannon Beach, a community that regards quaintness as near-dogma, Pelican is an outlier. While sleek and anything but gaudy, Pelican's scope is transporting. It feels almost like being in Portland. How you react to that bustling modernity — and the future it suggests — will greatly color your opinion of Pelican.

So will the prices. It ain't cheap.

Among the more egregious asks is Pelican's Famous Tower of Rings, a vertical stack of onion rings that costs a sky-scraping \$13.99. Presentation aside, these are seven hearty, bangle-sized, plain ol' onion rings. They'll sooth that craving, but won't have you re-thinking the dish. It's like a construction project gone two or three times over budget.

The Fish and Chips (\$17.99) were another tough sell. The three flat, wide, wallet-sized fillets were especially bread-y. The fish-to-bread ratio was something like two-or-three to one. The peppery, Panko breading enveloping the Alaskan cod was crisp, but it lacked a real crunch. The fish itself



The beer tasting tray somehow lacked variety with four IPAs, two ales and a lone stout.

was ... fine. What puzzled me, though, was why Pelican didn't go with a beer batter? The restaurant does the French fries that way, and just about everything else on the menu shoehorns in beer as an ingredient at every turn. More importantly, when it comes to fish and chips, beer battering is far, far superior to breading.

The Smoked Oyster Bruschetta (\$16.99) was also a bit spendy but much tastier. The five smoky, almost barbecue-styled oysters, daintily styled with Cream Ale aioli, roasted tomato and arugula on crostini, offered a deep, fresh pick-me-up. I

also enjoyed the Sun-Dried Tomato Spinach Dip. On a chilly day it was hot and comforting, with an understated, smooth goat cheese. (The flatbread, though, was overcooked and, in places, nearly burnt.)

Every dish on the menu, even the appetizers and salads, suggests a beer pairing. I tried it with the Spicy Burger (\$14.99), which may have been wishful thinking. A handsomely assembled stack, the burger stood up to its name, making me sweat; but I couldn't really taste the Umbrella IPA beer paired with it. The burger patty was afforded full coverage by a peppery poblano pepper, fresh mozzarella, field greens, a chipotle aioli, tomato and chili seasoning on a brioche bun. Strings of fried onion added crispy texture. I



The Spicy Burger stood up to its name.

too tried the Bleu Cheese Burger, also on a brioche bun. There were three chunks of supple pork belly, along with a light cheese spread. A fine pub burger, it lacked the magic required of a \$16.99 price tag.

From the entrées I tried the 14-Hour Slow Smoked Tri-Tip (\$23.99). The mound of meat was appropriately pink-centered and smoky, with an excellent, salty, well-seasoned outer crust. With the accompanying mashed potatoes and slaw, it's a serious plate of food. On the leaner end was the Pale Malt Salmon (\$23.99). The simply prepared, salty fish was buttressed by a hearty quinoa patty and buttery asparagus.

There are also an array of personally sized pizzas, dubbed flatbreads, cooked in an oven with an open flame. I particularly enjoyed the MacPelican's Ale Sausage (\$14.99), with balsamic-marinated red onions, fresh, stretchy mozzarella, basil tomato sauce and thick slices of an Italian sausage that was just fatty enough. It had a little of everything — salty, sweet, bitter, fatty — as well as a perfectly crisp, thin crust. The Smoked Tri-Tip (\$14.99) flatbread, I thought, could've used some kind of sauce or oil with the bleu cheese spread. As is, it was a little dry.



The Sun-Dried Tomato Spinach Dip was comforting, though the flatbread was a tad overcooked.

Then, of course, there's the beer. Unlike many in craft brewing's IPA arms race, Pelican's standout is the Kiwanda Cream Ale, which manages to somehow be both creamy and light. I tried a tasting tray (\$7) and yet, somehow, was left wanting by lack of variety. Of the seven tasting cups, four contained IPAs and two were ales. The last was a stout, and by simple virtue of comparison the deep, molasses flavor was so welcome. Of the similar IPAs, I preferred the Imperial, which had a bite befitting an 8 percent alcohol content. What the taster tray left out was the Pilsner and Lagers, which would've provided a more complete spectrum of Pelican's offerings.

Of course, that could be easily remedied. And, indeed, this grand

PELICAN PUB & BREWERY

Rating: ★ ★ ★

1371 S. Hemlock St., Cannon Beach

PHONE: 503-908-3377 or 503-908-3647

HOURS: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday; 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

PRICE: \$\$ – Particularly spendy for pub-fare.

SERVICE: Friendly, still working out the kinks.

VEGETARIAN / VEGAN OPTIONS: Vegetarians will do alright.

DRINKS: Full bar, coffee, house-made root beer.

KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

- ★ Poor
- ★★ Below average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Best in region

undertaking is sure to be tweaked in the weeks and months to come. (I'm giving a pass on service snafus for the moment.) Some aspects, though, were set with the foundation. A restaurant this large is only so capable of providing a personalized, intimate or refined experience. But, on the other hand, it brings capacity, and a lively experience — as I said, at times, you might as well be in Portland. That might come in handy in the dark winter months.

As for the food, of the many dishes I tried the majority were wholly adequate, safe and often pointed in the neighborhood of, if not greatness, thoughtfulness. In the end, though, the dishes left more indelible marks on my wallet than my palate.

Writing for the New York Times, critic Pete Wells recently encountered an enormous eatery. He wrote of the "pleasures and pitfalls of a big restaurant." The same could be said of Pelican.