

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

Need a new lunch haunt? Try one of these.

Story and photos by
MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA
MOUTH@COASTWEEKEND.COM

As the Mouth, the great majority of my dining out is work-related. But there a handful of places I return to while I'm off the clock. The reasons I revisit are many — a particular dish I can't get enough of, an inspired ambiance or perhaps just a really great deal.

Rather than multi-course dinners, for the purposes of this week's column we'll stick to lunch — places I bop in and out of during the day, be it whilst running errands, meeting friends or taking a moment to myself. So, without further ado, a few of my favorite haunts — not as a critic, mind you, but simply a guy needing a bite or a place to while away.

BUOY BEER CO.

No. 1 Eighth St., Astoria

Buoy's waterfront building is one of the most engrossing, immersive indoor spaces on the North Coast. The floor-to-ceiling windows, the view of the Columbia's mighty mouth where seals frolic and freighters slowly chug, the glass floor panels above lounging sea lions, the dining room is ever bright and bustling. Regardless of whether rain's beating down in sheets or the sky is endlessly blue, I find Buoy tremendously invigorating. Thanks to that inside-out conversation with grandiose nature, Buoy could sell little more than nuts and gum and I'd still want to spend time there.

Of course, it doesn't hurt that Buoy has one of the better brew pub kitchens around. It does the standards with care and provides a few exciting flourishes. I particularly love the hulking yet lean bison burger. (Indeed, were bison meat ever abundant, I'd have more burgers with it than beef.) I love that Buoy serves oysters on the shell (as well as in shooters) with a presentation — on a bed of blue

rock salt — that's right in line with the company's sharp graphic design. I love that the kitchen is accommodating for folks with dietary needs, and I love that the brewery's excellent beers come in 20-ounce glasses. Indeed, no matter what mood I enter with, lunch at Buoy always sends me off springing with an inquisitive sense of wonder.

CANNON BEACH HARDWARE AND PUBLIC HOUSE

1235 S. Hemlock St.,
Cannon Beach

If I've got a meeting in Cannon Beach — or if I've just finished one — the Screw & Brew is my choice to gather or unwind. In a town that's often overwhelmed by summertime animals, the Hardware Store provides a grounding authenticity. (You can also find hammers, nails, paint, duct tape and so on.)

With regulars usually clustered around the bar, the adjacent tables are fine places to share some appetizers. I prefer the calamari, which are clean — not too greasy or chewy — and the wings. Here's a tip I got from a local: Order the salt and pepper variation — that way the skin gets nice and crisp. If you want spicy, barbecue or spicy-barbecue sauce, get it on the side and dunk away. It's the best of both worlds. But for when I've got an eye on my waistline, the Hardware Store's hearty salads come in handy. With artichoke hearts, cucumber, cherry tomatoes, chickpeas and sunflower seeds, even the side salad makes a fine light lunch.

ROLL & BOWL

Pop-up @ Farmers Markets

It hasn't been long since I've written about the relatively new Roll & Bowl, but I've been returning as often as I can. The sushi and ramen pop-up is a regular at farmers markets up and down the coast. Each week



The salt and pepper chicken wings at Cannon Beach Hardware and Public House have crispy skin.



A veggie sushi roll by Roll and Bowl food cart.



Buttercup in Nehalem makes chowder as well as ice cream.



The beef at Kabob Cottage delights with its saffron spice.

Roll & Bowl gets better, incorporating more fish and locally sourced produce. Bell peppers in sushi? Why didn't I think of this? And while the ramen bowls — with bone broth, plus the integral additions of duck egg and pork shoulder — are becoming more balanced, I remain ensconced by the wraps and rolls. Tuna with a zing of pickled onion? Yes, please. Smoked salmon? Bring it on. And, as the produce is of such high quality and so righteously fresh, the vegetarian options stand neck-to-neck with the omnivorous ones. As farmers market season winds down, here's hoping that Roll & Bowl finds a winter home. Whispers say: It's looking.

BUTTERCUP

35915 N. U.S. Hwy 101, Nehalem

Since she's collaborating with regional chefs and culinary artisans every month, it's always worth stopping by Buttercup to see what Julie Barker is up to. Who knows? It could be something like apple pie paired with a cheddar-crust cone. Just the same, I crave the standards. The vegan chowder is astounding, so rich

and creamy, at once elegant and vexingly elemental. The marshmallow ice cream too. I couldn't care less for the namesake product, but Barker's frozen interpretation makes me think twice. On a hot day or a cold one, Buttercup is a delight, both inspired and familiar.

KABOB COTTAGE

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

By weight, saffron is more expensive than gold. And when that saffron spices the beef at Long Beach's Kabob Cottage, you'll experience its value — deep, delicate, almost ancient. And while there are plenty of Persian flavors you can find at the Cottage, it's just hard to pass up the beef — be it over rice or as part of a wrap. And while I'll continue to support the very charming first-time restaurant owner Behnoosh Ghorbani whenever I'm in Long Beach, I'm equally excited that similar flavors are now being found in Seaside at McBani. You should be too. Forget gold: Sprinkle a little saffron in your life!

SEA BREEZE

84774 U.S. Hwy 101,
Seaside

I know what you're thinking: "The Sea Breeze?! You only gave that place two-and-a-half stars!" And, to a point, you'd be right — there are a lot of dull, heaping platters at the Sea Breeze I have absolutely zero interest in eating again. See: steak, deep-fried shrimp. Nonetheless, I adore the dive-y, time-warped wood panels every bit as much the burger and beer special. Announcements of the deal have since been taken off the wall, and I'm starting to fear it's headed the way of the prospector. I hesitate to even be trumpeting it here — loose lips sink ships, as they say. But, dear reader, there's just no better value on the coast, and the casual digs only multiplies my retro bliss. Sure, it ain't fancy, and it ain't fine, but that don't mean much. There's something about a cheap burger and a Budweiser in a run-down joint on the side of the highway that makes me feel at home. And THAT'S what makes America great.