

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

Pickled Fish dinner series highlights regional ingredients, chef's skills

Review and photos by
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"The purpose of these dinners," said Shelby Dodson, Pickled Fish's baker and wife of executive chef Brad, "is to highlight purveyors in the area who are doing wonderful things."

She was introducing the Pacific Northwest Partner Dinner Series, which presents prix fixe, reservation-only dinner menus revolving around pairs of regional purveyors. The series started in November and continues through March on the first Friday and Saturday of each month. (December's engagement features Elk Cove Winery and Starvation Alley Cranberry Farm. January's incorporates Drink Ok Wines and Beautiful Pig Charcuterie. For further dates, partners and reservations see: pickledfish-restaurant.com.)

Beyond shouting out great purveyors, the PNW Partner Series has a second reason for being — introducing the Dodsons to the North Coast. Prior to taking the reins at Pickled Fish some two-and-a-half months ago, they helmed the well-regarded Wheat + Barley in Echo, Oregon. As such, the Partner Series is an event with which to say: Hi, we're here and we're doing cool stuff with great local bounty!

November's Partner Series dinner was served in the rear dining room, separate from a bustling bar. (That regular dinner service continued concurrently made the event's execution that much more ambitious.) I'll refrain from diving into Pickled Fish's ambiance, suffice it to say: I reveled in it — the tactile, industrial-chic design, the expansive fourth floor views and stylish modernity that, while perhaps rote in Portland, is rare and welcome on the North Coast.

November's partners were Pink Poppy Farm and North Jetty Brewing. Each of the evening's four courses included ingredients



The first course featured a porter-braised shallot, purees of matsutake mushrooms and celery, a bacon vinaigrette, micro-greens and herbs topped with a poached egg.

from Pink Poppy and, for \$12 more, eight-ounce beer pairings from North Jetty. (The base price of the dinner, sans drinks, was \$55.)

The first course was the only one featuring North Jetty's beer on the plate as well as the glass. The porter-braised shallot was divine, with a caramelized skin that gave way to a melting, supple core. It was joined by purees of matsutake mushrooms and celery, a bacon vinaigrette, micro-greens and herbs from Pink Poppy, and crowned with a poached egg, which shivered and upon puncture flowed smooth silky protein. Each bite riffed on deep central flavors of the earthy mushroom puree and blunted bacon vinaigrette. The depth was creeping. It made me present, contemplative, full of wonder. The beer — a malt-y Scottish red — made sense, its bitterness an interlocking counterpoint in similar tones.

Between courses, Shelby Dodson said a few words. So too did North Jetty's brewmaster, who'd had the meal the night before. (A representative from Pink Poppy was unable to attend that evening.) The brewmaster said he'd spent significant time collaborating with the

chef on finding the beers to properly complement each dish.

For the second course, North Jetty came with a Fresh Hop Pale Ale. The hops for this limited edition ale were picked in September during the harvest and put almost straight into the beer. The freshness — particularly, the pine-y-ness — unfurled like the golden ratio. It was chosen, the brewmaster said, in hopes of counteracting the saltiness of the second dish. Unfortunately, it was a fool's errand. No beer — and perhaps no liquid, short of milk — could soothe the salt-bomb.

It was a lovely plate, though — a half-moon of green herbs and pickles (from Pink Poppy), a yellow flower, bronzed chips and white, marble-sized puffs of salt-cured petrale sole and crème fraîche. The concept of a fish-based, creamy mousse struck me as sound, but paired with salty, home-made chips and baby pickles just short-circuited my



The third course included a pork chop topped with mint and micro-greens, braised broccoli rabe, preserved peaches and pickled mustard seeds.

tastebuds. Sips of the ale couldn't fix it. Neither could water. It overwhelmed, like getting washed in the surf. Still, I appreciated the presentation and creativity — a few tweaks and the dish could be saved.

The third course flipped the script, the opposite of abstract-art presentation and dainty portions. Huge and hearty was the main event, something like grandma would make in the farmhouse. There was a huge pork chop, cooked tenderly, topped with mint and micro-greens, a pile of braised

broccoli rabe and some of Pink Poppy's preserved peaches. Pickled mustard seeds swirled around the plate, playing well with everything — even the peaches. While the herbs were damn-near as fresh as being

just plucked from the soil, and the pork and braised broccoli rabe a thoughtful marriage, the peaches were absolutely exquisite. Oozing with brandy, their caramelized, boozy but not overwhelming

sweetness was akin to a dessert and digestif all in one.

By this time I was fully satiated — not bursting, but hardly wanting. But when the bowl of butternut squash ice cream, fennel flavored herbs (from Pink Poppy), marble-sized pecks of pumpemickel cake and candied chanterelles was placed before me, I spooned up every last morsel. Playing well with North Jetty's coffee-tinged Semper Paratus Porter, the cake and ice cream — which I believe may have included a few drips of salted caramel — were enticingly spiced. The candied chanterelles afforded a depth and earthiness that had me remembering the first course. That I might even consider a conversational callback in coursing suggests that the Pickled Fish's new guard is on to something special.

While sheepish in front of the crowd, executive chef Brad Dodson appeared at the end of the two-hour meal. He mostly deflected, shining the light back to his purveyors.

"They're going against the status quo and helping the community," Dodson said. "They're the reason I came here."

With him, Dodson brought the ingenuity and technique to match.

PICKLED FISH PNW PARTNER DINNER SERIES

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