

# MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local  
restaurant review

## Seaside's U Street Pub gets the details right

Review and photos by MOUTH  
OF THE COLUMBIA

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**T**ucked toward the back of an ocean-ending street on Seaside's southern edge, it can be easy to bypass the U Street Pub & Eatery. But this lack of main street visibility doubles as virtue — residing off the beaten path allows the all-ages eatery to double as both a tourist spot and down-to-earth local haunt.

In more ways than one, the U Street Pub reminds me of Cannon Beach's Hardware Store and Public House. They're both lived-in, and the service has a charming, if brusque, personality. They're both equal parts neighborhood bar and worthwhile restaurant. They're places where residents hold court at the tiny bars despite clumpings of tourists. Both too offer familiar pub fare — burgers, sandwiches, chicken wings, etc. And, while not quite reaching or artisan, both favor quality above the bottom line.

In particular, U Street gets the details right. It's the little things that delight, like perfectly grilling the pastrami on a flat top rather than just tossing it in the sandwich.

Indeed, those thick slices of beef radiate through the Historic Union Town sandwich (\$10.95), which I chose to "reubenize" (aka, add kraut) for two dollars more. It stayed hot until the last tantalizing, slurpy, finger-licking bite.

The Historic Union Town was a server suggestion. As it was set before me I could smell the briny, salty, fatty, cheesy, steaming vapors. The supple, juicy pastrami stacked with golden ratios of kraut, cheese and a dab of Thousand Island. The package was stout, not overwhelming in footprint, but piled pastrami at least an inch high. Melted Swiss cheese bound it together, keeping its components from spilling out. The bread, a caraway seed-flecked, light rye from Astoria's Blue Scorcher, was



PHOTO BY MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

**Above:** The Ochoco is like a cousin to a Philly cheese steak, with thin-sliced beef brisket, caramelized onions, bell peppers and a whole lot of melted Swiss.

**Left:** The Harbor Spicy Heat Clams featured a white wine and red pepper broth and a back-of-the-throat heat.

magnificent. Perfectly toasted and lightly buttered, the bread was every bit as integral as the cured meat, maybe even more so.

Perusing the menu you'll find Blue Scorcher's name frequently, and I can't overstate that importance. In a sandwich-heavy menu, bread really matters. The chain can only be as strong as its weakest link. And at U Street Pub I found few weak links.

Sandwiches come with chips. Sides like fries and salads are ordered separately. At the server's suggestion I tried the Spinach with Creamy Balsamic salad (\$6.95). I reveled in the hearty leaves, a respite from watery lettuce. The creamy balsamic had a reasonable, perky sweetness. I was surprised by wedges of peach, whose color

and flavor played counterpoint to the matching tomatoes. There too were red onions, croutons, plenty of sunflower seeds and shards of thick, salty bacon. The dish straddled the line between nourishing and indulgent. It's too bad though, that salads can't be added to the sandwiches in the form of a side, for a small up-charge. While delicious, it was neither cheap nor heaping.

While only a bit cheeky, U Street's menu offers a few suggestions. One is that you won't want to share the Shrimp Po Boy. Another is that spicy dishes won't be refunded for being too spicy. I didn't see such description as a dare, though — more like a knowing wink.

Indeed, the bowl of Harbor

Spicy Heat Clams (\$14.95) coursed with an almost radical, back-of-the-throat heat. After a few clams my cheeks were welling up, my sinuses clear, and my awareness of the December cold-snap forgotten. This wasn't pain, though. It was pleasure. I like heat. And I liked the white-wine-and-red-pepper-based broth too, even though it was too spicy to further unpack the essence of its purported 17-odd ingredients. Here again the accompanying bread was fantastic.

The Shrimp Po Boy was described as "East Coast style." If that means leaving out the pickles, well, then there you go. I've since been unable to find the difference, if there even is one. Regardless, a squeeze of lemon, or perhaps some

### U STREET PUB & EATERY

Rating: ★★☆☆

220 Ave. U, Seaside

PHONE: 503-738-7444

HOURS: Noon to 11 p.m.

Tuesday to Sunday

PRICE: \$\$ — Most sandwiches and entrées are slightly north of \$10, sides sold separately

VEGETARIAN / VEGAN

OPTIONS: A few odds and ends for vegetarians

SERVICE: Full of casual personality

DRINKS: Full bar, soda, coffee, tea

#### KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

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

other acidic infusion, incorporated the necessary bright twang. Bites were fresh, creamy and irresistible. Like the Union Town, it was another sandwich where the ratios were right on, and any ingredient that managed to escape the bread's embrace would be found and devoured.

The Ochoco (\$12.95), with thin-sliced beef brisket, caramelized onions, bell peppers and a whole lot of melted Swiss, was decidedly East Coast, something like a cousin to the Philly Cheese Steak. Rather than Cheez Wiz, though, its creaminess came also from a delightful chipotle mayo. The red and green bell peppers were perfectly grilled, blackened on the edges, smoky as if they came off a backyard barbecue. Again, a minor detail that adds up to something more.

So in that vein, the U Street Pub can't be overlooked. But then again, maybe it's best the pub remains a few steps off the beaten path — that way we residents can continue to call it our own.