

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review



PHOTO BY JOSHUA BESSEX

For Best Breakfast, readers selected Astoria Coffeehouse & Bistro. Breakfast items include eggs, bacon, biscuits and fruit.



PHOTO BY MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Buttercup in Nehalem makes chowder — such as traditional clam chowder, left, and Thai veggie chowder, right — to order.



PHOTO BY MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

The grain of the fish is apparent in Grizzly's tuna fish and chips in Seaside.

The Mouth responds to the Readers' Choice Awards

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Each year I await the Coast Weekend Readers' Choice Awards with baited breath. (They came out last week). Obviously I pay particular attention to the Dining category; your votes help me understand what's enticing to North Coast eaters writ large.

For the most part I find your anointments strong. I also think the awards are a great way to keep the conversation going. Below I'll highlight a few Readers' Choice selections that stood out — both where we agree and diverge.

Before I do, I'd like to extend the invitation to continue this exchange. Send me your own personal picks! Choose one or two categories you feel passionate about and explain why. If I get enough I'll turn them into a column. Email me at mouth@coastweekend.com

Beyond the Readers' Choice categories, there's still more I want to know. In regular reviews, I want to know when you feel I've missed something, when I've nailed it and when just I'm flat wrong. I want to know not only your favorite restaurants, but your favorite dishes therein. I want to know your guilty pleasures, your choices for health-conscious eating, and where you go to treat yourself.

Also, I'm interested in what restaurants you'd most like to see reviewed. (Again, emailing mouth@coastweekend.com is best, but notes passed through the Astorian's mailbox and office will find me.)

So please: Drop me a line. And not just this week. Let's continue the conversation throughout the year.

Now, without further ado: What struck me from the Readers' Choice Awards.

BEST BREAKFAST: ASTORIA COFFEEHOUSE & BISTRO

It's worth mentioning out front that Astoria had a leg up in the awards — just three of 22 categories were won by restaurants outside the city. To that end: No shots at Astoria Coffeehouse & Bistro. It's terrific. But if I woke up on another end of the region I could find equally fine breakfasts — particularly Wanda's in Nehalem and Osprey Cafe in Seaside. At Wanda's I love how big portions meet speedy finesse, and how country meets the coast. At Osprey I appreciate both the attention to detail and worldly flourishes. (And, as we're dotting the North Coast regions, I'd love to hear recommendations on the best breakfast on the Long Beach Peninsula!)

BEST CHEF: ANDREW CATALANO, STREET 14 CAFE

Here more than anywhere else, readers, we are simpatico; there's hardly a 2016 winner that we agree more on than Street 14's Andrew Catalano as Best Chef. Catalano excels in three most important realms: execution, ethic and invention. While some of Street 14's dinner dishes employ complex technique, others are superb because they're straightforward. The fine, exceedingly fresh ingredients the restaurant sources from local farms require less massaging — and, some-

times, less ego. Working with these local producers and creating a new menu every week based on what's available moment to moment not only shows off Catalano's nimble skills, but also provides a dining experience that's most reflective of our bountiful region.

BEST FINE DINING: CARRUTHERS

Carruthers is certainly upscale. And its boutique hotel lobby-esque, art deco digs are something to behold. But for some reason the label "fine dining" doesn't quite stick for me. When I think about fine dining, I think about something a little more subtle and private, where the food and service are indeed terrific, but offered with preternatural, quiet ease. There's a grandiosity and a bubbling scene to Carruthers that deserves a different descriptor. Call it, rather: "cosmopolitan."

BEST FISH AND CHIPS: THE BOWPICKER

While my original review of Bowpicker — in which I awarded 3 stars — had me eating outside the charming land-locked boat more than once, I wonder if it's time I check back in. It's just that the North Coast seem to love Bowpicker so, even after waiting in long, snaking lines. I found the atmosphere charming but the product short of overwhelming. If I wanted fish and chips I'd go one of two ways: to Seaside's Grizzly Tuna, which offers similar fish at a better value with an unmatched crunch, or the Public Coast in Cannon Beach, which delights on the high end with an exquisite halibut

and beer-battered crust that will melt your tastebuds as it rattles your bank account.

BEST MEXICAN FOOD: LA CABANA DE RAYA

La Cabana De Raya is a similar situation to Bowpicker. I don't dislike it, and I get why readers like it. But when I think about La Cabana De Raya the first thing that comes to mind is the "mangonada," a frosty, creamy, fruity and delicious dessert cocktail. The food comes second. Not so at Readers' Choice runner-up Tacos El Catrin in Warrenton. Sure, El Catrin doesn't offer the usual, quick, affordable comfort food like La Cabana De Raya — you know: big, cheap burritos and the like. What Tacos El Catrin does is expand the truly traditional. The restaurant goes to significant lengths to honor those recipes with thoughtful, nuanced preparation.

BEST CLAM CHOWDER: THE DEPOT, SEAVIEW

As heretofore the only restaurant I've awarded five stars, my appreciation for The Depot is beyond reproach. That said, there's no place I'd rather have clam chowder — or, rather, any chowder — than at Buttercup in Nehalem. In part, that's because Buttercup's varieties — from vegan to carnivorous — are regularly rotating. (And to be sure: The curry-like vegan version is wonderful, as good as any other.) I love Buttercup too because, just like The Depot's, its chowders are made to order, allowing each ingredient its individual say. It makes for great conversation.