

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

Treating yourself is possible when on a sugar detox

Review and photos by
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The gleaming yellow pound cake. Crackers and cheese. That errant piece of candy I discovered in a jacket pocket. A burger and a beer on Friday afternoon.

All of them, hectoring me. Pleading. Forbidden.

For I was abstaining from sugar — not only sweets, but anything processed or high on the glycemic scale (see: potatoes, corn, bread, etc.). The regimen, dubbed the 10 Day Sugar Detox Challenge, was developed by Seaside's Jennifer Visser. It was presented through her business, the Healthy Hub, as a free, community-wide event. It would help to detox together, she suggested, because it wouldn't be easy.

And indeed, when you tear your body from the jackknifing sugar cycles it's accustomed to, the withdrawals are real. You get sore, physically and mentally. After a few days you're supposed to break through, feeling more energetic, lean, sleeping better and so on. Besides trimming one's waistline — which, as the Mouth, I was long overdue for — the detox has a way of recalibrating one's tastebuds. They seem to become heightened. Natural flavors become more rewarding.

I appreciate the detox's effects because I participated last year. That first time was a true revelation, one that would forever change my eating habits. I replaced loads of empty starches with nutrient-rich veggies. But for whatever reason, my second go at the detox was more turbulent. Sugar's fangs were again lodged deeper than I imagined. For the better part of those days I was a achy, listless grump.

Eventually I sought to offset that crankiness — not to mention all the extra time I was spending in the kitchen — by eating out. And to be sure: There's not a whole lot on local menus that meet the detox criteria at face value. (In short,



At Silver Salmon, the Mouth ordered the Alder Planked Salmon Dungeness with double veggies on the side.

it's meat and veggies.) Dining out within the guidelines, I imagine, is similar to dealing with other dietary restrictions.

My first trip out was to The Stand in Seaside. It was recommended by Visser, the detox champion, who relayed her go-to sugar-free order there: a Spicy Veggie burrito, sans tortilla, add meat and avocado. As part of my laundry list of substitutions, I also had to make sure there was no rice or beans, and it made me feel a little sheepish, self-conscious of my finicky order. (It's something I hoped to overcome as there's no shame in ordering what you really want or need.) Only momentarily bashful, I was overcome with joy when handed the dish. After stressing over every detail of every meal at home, being cooked for was an enormous relief. What lay before me was akin to a big, steaming taco salad (but with no taco). Zucchini spears were the foundation. Along with celery, they were ingredients I was surprised to find at a burrito shop. With faint black grill marks, the veggies — including onions and a few slices of bell pepper — were faintly seasoned. While I expected something from a simmered marinade, the

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chicken was plain and rather dry. As I filled up, my contentment diminished; this basic sauté too closely resembled what I'd been making at home. No shots at The Stand, but I thought to myself: There's a way to ascend here; it must be possible to treat one's self while adhering to a restrictive diet.

A few nights later I slid into a booth at Astoria's Silver Salmon Grille. The ethos there seemed to fit the bill: Upscale dining boasting health. The menu makes a point of working within dietary needs. I chose the Alder Planked Salmon Dungeness (\$33), seafood that seemed to require the least modification. The fish is broiled on an alder plank "Native American style" and crowned with crab. I had to get the rosemary beurre blanc on the side, which was a shame. I tasted a



A beautifully cooked filet mignon at the Stephanie Inn put the Mouth on cloud nine.

dab — it was rich, lovely, creamy and delicious. Some of what I'd been missing. Instead of potatoes or rice I got double veggies. Prepared simply in oil, it was mostly baby carrots with caramelized onions and a few blackened bell pepper slivers. The alder plank didn't instill in the salmon any new flavor but did grant a lovely, delicate outer crust and a supple center. The dusting of crab elevated the meal above rote diet or training food — I mean, after all, we are talking salmon and veggies. (Thank goodness the veggies weren't steamed.) And while I was satisfied, even smiling for the moment, a couple hours later I was hungry again, dipping into the cupboards and firing up the stove.

As the detox came to an end I was still in search of a meal that might transcend the restrictions while at the same time remain within them. I made a reservation at the Stephanie Inn. On the second floor of the Cannon Beach hotel, it is one of the most opulent, classically fine dining options around, if not the zenith. This was, after all, to be a celebration, a toast to the detox's completion.

I explained the situation to my server, and as luck would have it she had detoxed a few years prior. With the Filet Mignon (\$50), she knew to leave out the potatoes and the sauce (a deep, elegantly refined Oregon truffle reduction). Again, alas, I was

doing double veggies. If you look at the plate — and, to be sure, the snaps from my old iPhone don't do it justice — it looks pretty basic. But these veggies — from outstanding regional farms Kingfisher and Island's End — were a cut above.

And the filet was from another stratosphere.

It came from Washington Beef, a ranch in our neighbor state's northwestern corner. (The Stephanie maintains a wildly impressive pantry from purveyors mostly within a radius of a few hundred miles.) Before being sliced into two almost-coffee-cup footprint, inch-thick medallions, the Angus filet was aged, seared to form an wholly-sealing-yet-delicately-thin crust, then finished in the oven. In the center, a tender pink sun emanated, glowing forth from a nearly raw center, dissipating with uncommon evenness toward the crust. There are no visible traces of fat or tissue — the marbling has totally rendered, locked within, osmosis; tissue, meanwhile, would be as likely found on a Stephanie Inn plate as unicorn.

Such a quality of steak would be of significant difficulty to source at retail in the area. It is then coupled with an execution every bit as extraordinary. Whilst chewing that luscious filet, it's as if God is smiling down upon you. No matter what's happening — sugar detox, personal, political, etc. — it whisks you to the moment, swaddling in the lap of luxury. All concern — actual and existential — seem to melt away.

The Stephanie Inn's beef made me not only wholly present, but it left a long tail of gratitude. That effervesce permeated the remainder of my evening. I was on cloud nine until my head hit the pillow. Wishing, hoping to dream: but for if every night I could only afford to eat so well; I could stay on the sugar detox forever.