

# MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local  
restaurant review

## At Finni's, cooking is all in the family

Review and photos by MOUTH  
OF THE COLUMBIA

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Only when John Finni's grandfather feared the end was nigh did he finally pass down the family's sausage recipe. As such, it was nicknamed the "deathbed sausage."

Women in the family made their mark, too. "Italian like 'Zia' used to make it," reads the tagline of Finni's Fine Foods. ('Zia' is Italian for aunt.) And the food the Finnis share is evocative of Italian upbringing, where an aunt — or mother or grandfather — ladles mountains of spaghetti, marinara and meatballs onto an overflowing plate and still wonders if you're eating enough.

Third-generation immigrants, the Finnis — John and Jen — moved to Astoria last year to be closer to family. And while the food truck was a new venture, conceived after arrival, restaurant work goes back generations.

Finni's glossy, sea-green truck popped up in December, parked next to the long running El Asadero in the old gas station lot on Astoria's west end. It offers Italian building blocks — meatballs, Marinara, the storied sausage and so on — in a few permutations, mostly sandwiches and pasta. Available too are a few appetizer-like shared plates and sides like soups and salad. And while a sandwich with a bag of Lay's brand chips makes for a fine lunch, it's easy to see Finni's as a to-go family dinner option by coupling a few dishes.

If a group dinner is your aim, though, you'll want to call ahead. Finni's fairly involved preparation approaches restaurant-like wait times. In my three trips, I averaged 20-plus minutes between order and delivery. All of the dishes are well packed, and while I mostly dined there and never needed reheating (Finni's foods come out steaming hot), I appreciated that the pasta



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came in tins, convenient for re-warming in the oven.

Before spelling out individual dishes it seems more efficient to focus on the building blocks. The marinara was dark, thick and herby, distinguished by a lingering finish of cinnamon. The meatballs, a little bigger than table-tennis balls, were close siblings of meatloaf, mixing bread crumbs, eggy binding, onions and spices. The "deathbed sausage," freshly ground and uncased, too was herby and supple, well cooked with creeping, but manageable, heat.

I was dubious about the "homemade" bread, which was bleached white, dull and quite uniform. The hoagie 7-odd-inch-long sandwich rolls were better, heavily toasted with a crunchy, crumbling crust.

I found myself most drawn to the sandwiches. I had all three: the Meatball (\$8.50), with marinara and stretchy melted provolone; the Sausage (\$9) was shaped like a kayak, topped with sweet caramelized onions and sautéed peppers; the Italian Beef was akin to a French dip, only with the au jus poured in, rather than on the side, and topped with giardiniera, a vinegary Italian relish of diced



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bell peppers, carrots, celery and onions that provided sharp, acidic pep to the sinewy, soft, juicy roast beef.

Of the four pastas I had two: the spaghetti Pomodoro and the Penne arrabiata. (I felt like I'd gleaned already the essence of the marinara.) The Pomodoro — simply noodles, olive oil, basil, tomatoes and a light dusting of Parmesan — was elemental, but underwhelming, a tough sell at \$8. Until in-season tomatoes are plucked straight from the vine,



Penne Arrabiata was stirred penne tubes with melding of marinara and Alfredo sauces.

it'll remain so. The Arrabiata (\$10), which stirred penne tubes with melding of marinara and Alfredo sauces, combined the dark cinnamon of the red sauce with a sweet, milky white. I liked that it was pretossed on the stove, so the ratios were maintained — sauces, meats and cheeses overwhelming the pasta. It was quite spicy, too, thanks to red pepper flakes.

Of the shared plates I tried the Finni's Flatbread (\$9), which was like a sliced sausage sandwich with a lot fewer fixins, and the bread was really crunchy. The Fritto Provolone had a familiar flavor — mozzarella sticks, though Finni's prefers provolone — in a more aesthetically pleasing

### FINNI'S FINE FOODS

Rating: ★ ★ ★

490 W. Marine Drive,  
Astoria

PHONE: 503-791-5581

HOURS: 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Saturday

PRICE: \$ — Most entrées around \$10

SERVICE: Call ahead or wait around.

VEGETARIAN/VEGAN OPTIONS: A few.

DRINKS: Bottled water, soda.

#### KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

★ Below average

★★ Average

★★★ Good

★★★★ Excellent

★★★★★ Best in region

presentation: like a cheesy pie, breaded except for a cross through the center, with a circle of marinara in the center: Essentially a crusted cheese disc an inch thick, 6 or 7 inches wide, it should be shared, less your arteries deserve punishment.

Salty and beefy, the Minestrone soup (\$5 cup) warmed me on a cold day. The salad is a milky Caesar, which isn't described on the menu. At a reasonable price of \$3 when added to another dish. It was, however, drowning in the thin dressing, and topped with more long slices of provolone than a salad based on iceberg lettuce needs. The solution, however, is simple: serve the dressing on the side — then too it could survive a drive home without becoming mush. (I ate it there and it was still mushy.)

But the foundations of this Italian truck — the meatballs, sausage and marinara — are bonafide. Heavy, comfortable and familiar, Finni's is, after all, homey Italian food — of the kind grandparents approve.