

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

Mudd Dogs' Chicago-style hot dogs 'right on the money'

Story and photos by
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According to the National Hot Dog & Sausage Council (yes, there is such a thing), Americans devour some 150 million hot dogs every Fourth of July. What's more, between Memorial and Labor days our dear country is said to consume some 8 billion. With a 'B.'

With numbers like these, I suppose the existence of a National Hot Dog & Sausage Council isn't so surprising. Perhaps the phrase "American as apple pie" ought to be amended to something a little meatier.

Come to think of it, I've enjoyed iconic dogs from sea to shining sea, and at many points in between.

I've nibbled on Nathan's Famous on the boardwalk, beneath the twinkling lights of the Coney Island Ferris wheel.

I have filled up in New York City on Gray's Papaya's "Recession Special," not to mention at countless carts throughout Manhattan.

I've braved both the pointless lines at Pink's in Los Angeles and the late-night verbal abuse at The Wieners Circle at Chicago.

Oh, and who can forget the visit to Ben's Chili Bowl in Washington, D.C., not long after then President-elect Obama paid homage. I have scarfed Chicago dogs before a Cubs game in the shadows of Wrigley Field.

Of these prominent dogs and many more, my favorite may well be from the bygone Dog House, a drive-thru hut in Portland that offered rotating daily specials. Sunday's was a titanic cheese dog, infused with molten drippy cheese that would squirt out in all directions



Jim Mudd

when the casing ruptured.

Despite American's deep love of the dog, its provenance is European (think "Frankfurter"). Sausages go back much further. Homer's "Odyssey," from around 850 B.C., alludes to this budding love story: "As when a man besides a great fire has filled a sausage with fat and blood and turns it this way and that and is very eager to get it quickly roasted ..."

While often considered a staple of low culture, in 1939, Franklin Delano Roosevelt prepared hot dogs for the King and Queen of England.

Our affinity, it seems, has hardly wavered. At the annual Fourth of July hot dog-eating contest at Nathan's Famous this year, professional eater Joey Chestnut took his chunk out of the 150 million to be consumed that day, cramming a record-setting 72 dogs down his gullet

in just 12 short minutes.

On the North Coast today, you'll find a number of dog devotees. Pronto Pup in Seaside makes corn dogs to order, dipping them in fresh batter before a dunk in the fryer. (I have a chef friend who's notoriously picky and hard to please, yet he admits a weak spot for this carnival-style fare.) There's also the new-ish Sasquatch Sausage in Astoria, where, after grinding their own meats, nuance is found with the addition of herbs and spices, as well as refined, thoughtful toppings. I've also heard rumblings about some kind of "Monday Bunday" weekly hot dog special at the Warren House in Cannon Beach, but have yet to investigate.

Mudd Dogs

This week, though, I want to



A Mudd Dog

focus on Mudd Dogs in Manzanita, where Chicago-style dogs are done by the book. Literally. Every detail — from the poppy seed buns to the absurd hue of the sweet relish — is right on the money.

And money (or, rather, lack thereof) helped birth the Windy City's signature dog. It was first known as the 'Depression Sandwich.' Now, a hot dog isn't a sandwich, but that's a column for another day.

Anyway ... Unlike, say, the Juicy Lucy, the Chicago dog's recipe is clear. It starts with an all-beef kosher frank, usually Vienna brand, which is Chicago-based. So, of course, Mudd Dogs uses Vienna.

A properly prepared Chicago dog is either steamed or boiled, and Mudd Dogs boils. (A grilled frank with Chicago-style toppings is known as a "char.") Then comes tomato slices, a dill pickle spear, yellow mustard, pickled sport peppers, the almost supernatural, dyed-green sweet relish (a concoction that, too, is shipped in from Chicago), diced white onions, and a sprinkle of celery salt. Indeed, Mudd Dog's finished product (\$6) is almost indecipherable from those in the Vienna's promo materials, which are strewn around the cart.

Bites play the multifaceted briny acids against the thick, juicy, supple frank. Atop the pillow-y,

MUDD DOGS

58 Laneda Ave.
Manzanita, Ore., 97130

Hours: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday

Price: \$\$ – Cash and check only (no cards)

Service: Having fun

Drinks: Bottled water, soda

un-toasted bun are brushstrokes of spice (the mild sport peppers), briny tang (pickles, tomato), sharp mustard, crispness and oil of onion, syrupy-sweet relish, and a hint of earthy, seasoned salt. It is at once familiar and brightly unfurling.

Sure, you can order one plain at Mudd Dogs, or deface it with ketchup. (Some vendors in the Windy City who specialize in Chicago-style refuse to even stock ketchup.) But really, you can have a hot dog anywhere; a Chicago-style dog with this kind of t-crossing and i-dotting reverence and with such specific ingredients, not so much.

Besides bags of chips and bottled water and soda, the dog is Mudd Dog's sole offering. Well, there's also the Big Mudder (\$10). When I asked what it was, proprietor Jim Mudd picked up a footlong wiener.

"Ahh," I said, "so it's just a bigger Chicago dog?"

"Just?" Mudd said, taking playful umbrage. "You're going to have to fix your attitude up around here, bud." I laughed, then ordered two regular dogs: one to eat in Mudd Dogs' outdoor patio, and one for later. "Now we're having fun," he said.

Mudd is absolutely having fun. The summertime-only dog-cart is but a reason to share spot-on Chicago dogs and raise money for his charity, the Mudd Nick Foundation, which in 25-plus years has gathered over \$1 million for children's education.

And while the charity has multiple fundraising arms and events, Mudd was wise to include hot dogs in the mix, for America's love for them is nearly incalculable. 