

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

At FishMongers in Hammond, the barrel-chested fish sandwich is where it's at

Review and photos by
THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA
MOUTH@COASTWEEKEND.COM

It's rather fitting that just hours before I discovered FishMongers I stood wide-eyed in disbelief at the absurd line assembled in front of Bowpicker in Astoria.

As Ed, a co-owner of the nearly three-month-old FishMongers would tell me, that lurching line for fish and chips at Bowpicker was the inspiration for FishMongers. Ed said he'd grown sick of working at the mill, adding: "I saw the lines at Bowpicker and said, 'I want in on that.'"

So Ed and co-owner Ross got a storefront in Hammond and built a take-out counter that, with its dark stained wood, resembles an English pub (though, sadly, there is no beer).

While not quite as limited as Bowpicker's tuna-fish-and-chips-only menu, FishMongers', too, is quite concise. They sell fish and chips, fish sandwiches, fish tacos and a shrimp cocktail. All, save for the shrimp cocktail, are beer-battered and deep fried, boxed and served to-go. And that's it. Do one thing — or rather, a few things — and get it right.

With the fish and chips and the sandwich, choose tuna or cod. The tuna is denser, with more body, grain and flavor. The cod is lighter, flakier, more neutral. All come in heaping, blue-collar portions at reasonable prices. No one is going to feel shortchanged.

For my money, the Fish Sandwich (\$11) is where it's at. The barrel-chested sandwich is damn-near worth the price of admission alone, the accompanying fries and a cup of dijon-smacked coleslaw the cherry on top. The crispy, beer-battered hunk of fish



Cod fish sandwich

is covered with a layer of melted cheese, slathered with a thick coat of drippy, creamy, smooth, dill-heavy tartar sauce, and topped with few briny pickles whose inclusion is critical — the acid makes it. The sandwich lands with a satisfying thud — the fish steaks are, at minimum, an inch thick, often thicker. It's somehow both hulking and indulgent without knocking you out. I also appreciated the careful construction, as if they were intended to be eaten by the maker himself.

The Fish and Chips (\$11 for cod, \$13 for tuna) were familiar.

But, really, as long as you nail the crust (they do), and the fish (from Ocean Beauty) is acceptable (it is), what else are we really talking about? The answer is portion, and FishMongers piles it on: four big pieces of fish and more fries than you could possibly need.

It wouldn't hurt, though, if there were more exciting, signature dipping sauces. FishMongers' coleslaw, though, has character — dijon-forward, a bit of spice, milky and not too sweet.

The Shrimp Cocktail (\$8), however, is ripe for rethinking. Besides the fact that it's filled

with bay shrimp rather than big meaty prawns, the delivery vehicle — a domed plastic cup made for milkshakes — is flawed. As a customer sitting next to me fumbled with it, trying to get the tiny shrimp out of the tiny opening she dropped some on the ground, huffing in exasperation, "I can't figure out how to eat this thing!" Even if she could, the colorful layers of red cocktail sauce, pink bay shrimp and green celery were hardly enticing.

But the trio of Fish Tacos (\$9) were spot on, with slaw and golden tubes of beer-battered rock-

FISHMONGERS

Rating: ★★☆☆

890 Pacific Drive
Hammond, Ore., 97121

503-861-8778

Hours: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.,
Monday through Sunday

Price: \$ – Big portions for
around \$10

Service: To-go and upbeat

Vegetarian / Vegan Options:
Pescatarians only

Drinks: Bottled water, soda

KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

★ Poor

★★ Below average

★★★ Worth returning

★★★★ Very good

★★★★★ Excellent, best in region



Tuna fish and chips

fish cradled by lightly browned flour tortillas. While bread-y and no more distinct than the cod, I appreciated the appearance of rockfish — an abundant local catch — on the menu.

And that's pretty much the long and short of it — the whole FishMongers menu in a nutshell. Which is exactly what first-time restaurateurs should be doing: focusing on a few things and getting them right.

And with FishMongers' proximity to Fort Stevens State Park, they may indeed cash in on their dreams of harnessing that fish-and-chips-seeking tourist market. But, year-round, FishMongers' value may be just as important to locals. As one customer, already a regular, told Ed, grinning ear-to-ear with to-go box in hand, "I hope y'all are here for years to come." **CW**