

# Cannon Beach's Harding Trading Co. nears perfection

Review and photos by  
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Under the curatorial eye of Jane Harding, perfecting interior design takes about two years.

That's how long it took for Harding and her husband, Victor, to solidify the warm and worn cabin-like look and feel of Sleepy Monk, the Cannon Beach coffee roaster they founded decades back (and have since sold).

And that's how long, Harding says, it took for her to fully realize Harding Trading Co., which for its first two years was a coffee shop that included vintage housewares, a place where almost everything — from the furniture to the light fixtures, to the collection of ornamental tins and baskets lining the rafters and filling the book cases — is for sale.

In April, after those two years of subtle refinement (and a substantial, back-of-house, kitchen-building renovation), Harding Trading Co. shifted from coffee shop to restaurant. Harding says the move was planned from the start, that she and Victor always envisioned a nighttime destination.

As coffee shop, and now even more so as restaurant, Harding Trading Co. is a transportive space, something like a rustic, European kitchen or farmhouse, where bottles of French port wine appear every bit as at home as they would in the motherland. While not quite cramped or overly busy, it is both packed and compact. It's also bustling with staff, seemingly one server for every two customers.

What results is engaging, inspired and home-y — about as close as you'll get on the North Coast to feeling as though you're attending a dinner party rather than merely eating at a restaurant.

Such is the effect of this extended-family affair.

To helm the kitchen, the Hard-



Line-caught halibut with Yukon Gold potatoes, mushrooms, peas, tarragon and a sugar snap pea sauce

ings partnered with Kelly and Nate Beckland, a couple who first met in culinary school and, before moving to Cannon Beach years ago, ran a restaurant in Bellingham, Washington. The Hardings and Kelly work the front of house; Nate's the chef.

The menu fits the setting, both inside and out: French-inspired with Northwest inflection. It is envisioned as seasonal, but may well be constantly iterating: Over the first few months, items have been welcomed (a colorful, creative chicken dish that appeared to be much more exciting than what you're picturing) and have been bid 'adieu' (to my personal dismay, the lamb shank).

On one of my trips, I jotted down a general note, writ large: "excellent ingredients well prepared." It bore striking similarity to a mission statement uttered by Harding to the Cannon Beach Gazette: "Simple food done well." Indeed, here you'll find premium ingredients. You will also be charged accordingly.

The Line Caught Halibut (\$29) was a lovely, clean, sizable, flaky hunk of fish. Lightly seared and surrounded by green pool of a sugar



Steak au poivre with potato gratin and a brandy cream sauce

snap pea puree, it was an exquisite reflection of the North Coast itself, where the sea meets the shore. The melding reminded me of a similar dish I had at the bygone Street 14, though that version went in much more vividly on terroir, greens and roots of our sandy soil, whereas Harding Trading Co.'s puree was sweeter and smoother, sharpened only by the faintest heat of red pepper. With potatoes, whole peas, mushrooms and tarragon, it was the kind of lean but enticing high-octane entrée after which you leave the restaurant feeling lighter on your feet, stronger and healthier than

## HARDING TRADING CO.

**Rating:** ★★★★★

277 Beaver St., Cannon Beach, Ore., 97110

503-739-5777

**Hours:** Thursday to Monday  
4 p.m. to 9 p.m.

**Price:** \$\$\$ – Expect to pay for premium ingredients

**Service:** An intimate, extended-family affair

**Vegetarian / Vegan Options:**  
Offering both vegetarian and vegan entrées

**Drinks:** Wine, beer, shrub

### KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

- ★ Poor
- ★★ Below average
- ★★★ Worth returning
- ★★★★ Very good
- ★★★★★ Excellent, best in region

when you came in.

The house-made potato-ricotta Summer Gnocchi (\$24), with heirloom tomatoes, fresh mozzarella and basil, coated in extra virgin olive oil, was essentially comforting. As my companion said of the pillow-y pasta, "It is as it should be: You just lay into it." It's also a lovely option for vegetarians. Harding also offers a vegan entrée — at the moment, Cabbage Rolls (\$19.)

On that evening, we shared a starter: a French baguette with Brie, fig jam, arugula and a kick of Dijon (\$10), another dish that hews closely to the "fine ingredients simply prepared" ethos. The bread and the cheese are some of the few things Harding Trading Co. don't make in house. (And while I only saw it, the cheese plate looked fabulously, unabashedly funky in the best way. And as far as that goes, no matter what you're having at Harding it's almost impossible not to covet what

everyone else is; the food and the platings succeed absolutely in igniting anticipation and desire.)

Besides a seafood bisque special, nothing from the starters menu is cooked. You'll instead find salads, gravlaks, pâté and so on. It also may be unwieldy for small parties or single diners, and adds a layer of pricing (\$14 to \$16 for salads and a regrettable \$6 for bread and house-made butter) that, to many, will be prohibitive.

Besides a neat wine list, I would be remiss not to mention the Shrubs (\$5): house-made, vinegar-based, fermented, bubbly, nonalcoholic, fruit and herb infused drinks that are something like a less-funky kombucha. After a few sips and a quick primer on the process, I was dreaming of brewing my own.

I was surprised by the heft of the Steak au Poivre (\$30) that was placed before me, propped up at angle on a cube of potato gratin. The diners beside me were taken aback by the potatoes: beneath a brittle top, layers sliced almost paper-thin, between which a smooth, gooey, creamy cheese emerged. The peppery steak itself, an Angus strip loin, was perfectly medium rare, well-seasoned, with a fine sear and lovely, even center.

Though not quite pray-to-the-maker-after-every-bite transcendent, certainly this was an elevated, and hearty, meat and potatoes. The same goes for the rest of the menu. If short on innovative synthesis or a distinctive signature, the ingredients, preparation and presentation at Harding Trading Co. are unimpeachable and damn-near phenomenal.

But knowing how Jane Harding likes to tinker, and how achieving her vision of perfection takes time — two years, as it were — there's no reason to believe they won't arrive at the pinnacle. But, hell, just out of the gate they're awfully close already. It may not take much longer. 