

Surfcrest Pizza unafraid of gluttonous ecstasy

Review and photos by
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Among aisles stacked with chips, soda and snacks, a scent of pizza arises from the rear of Surfcrest Market.

The smell of rising dough, however, is not exactly new at the Tolovana general store.

For years the shoebox-sized kitchen was the domain of chef Jonathan Hoffman, home to his wholesale bakery, Dough Dough. In the summer of 2015, Hoffman hosted a weekly pizza pop-up. For help with pies, he hired Brad “Biggie” Hendricks.

Earlier this year, Hoffman — a three-time winner of the Iron Chef Goes Coastal competition — outgrew the Surfcrest. (He moved Dough Dough Bakery to Seaside this summer and added a weekend wine bar in October, whose ever-rotating slate of small plates is wonderfully inspired.)

Having worked the pop-up, Biggie saw potential for pizza permanence in the Surfcrest kitchen. And he was familiar with the oven, which he says affords the pies a singular character.

“It’s seasoned like a cast-iron pan,” Biggie said.

But let’s be clear: Biggie is not making Hoffman’s pies. The two employ substantially different ingredients, techniques and philosophies. Where Hoffman is reaching, refined and uncompromising, Biggie is an unabashed lover of good ol’ cheese-stacked, meaty pies.

Now, as we’ve seen recently



The Whole Hog (left half) and Maui (right half)

with Seaside’s Avenue Q Pizza (see Coast Weekend’s Oct. 12 review), pizza-making can be more than a trade, but a way of life. Like Avenue Q, Surfcrest Pizza has been run by one man: Biggie. He says he’s worked seven-days-a-week for more than 120-straight-days. Besides cooking the pies, Biggie’s also delivering them. He’s even met folks on the beach for delivery. (Recently he hired his first employee, though Biggie has yet to take a day off.)

But where Avenue Q’s Matt Kaffer — aka “the one-man pizzeria” — is monk-like in his minimalism, Biggie is a cheeky, junk food-loving maximalist. (His ever-jovial, goofy presence breathes life into an otherwise drab dining space.)

Besides a steady diet of schlocky, self-effacing puns,

Biggie’s daily specials approach — nay, covet — absurdism. Among his junk-food-mad-scientist creations: a crust made of ground-up Doritos, dough infused with bacon fat, and a biscuits-and-gravy pizza, just to name a few. These whimsical specials come and go as goofy inspirations tend to — by the seat of their pants. And as they’re just as much for giggles as for public consumption, I stuck generally to items on the regular menu for this review.

Biggie’s pies have a few other defining features besides the vintage oven: The crust is soft and medium thin; the sauce, light on spices and unsweetened, is made from roasting then food-processing onions, peppers and tomatoes, which gives it some depth; besides salami and pepperoni, the red meats are ground in-house.



Caesar salad

As a result, I found the sausage more perky and vibrant than usual.

Surfcrest’s hand-tossed pies come in a single size: reasonably large. They start at \$18 and top out at \$23, with slices ranging from \$3 to \$4. Reasonable prices all in all, especially for Cannon Beach.

The Maui (\$19), with ham, bacon and pineapple, found synergy amongst the salty, fatty and sweet. The Spicy Pulled Pork (\$23), with black beans, jalapeños, red onions, pulled pork and finished with cold shreds of romaine and diced tomatoes, resembled a taco pizza with more supple meat.

The Prawndue (\$23), with a fondue cheese sauce, chives, prawns, garlic and diced tomatoes, had a more fixed, less viscous cheese than the namesake goo. The Whole Hog (\$23), with bacon, sausage, pepperoni, mushrooms and onion, was as stacked with cheese as it was with meat. Altogether it was incredibly greasy, enough to necessitate soaking some up with napkins. Indeed, sometimes Surfcrest pizzas can be overwhelmed, lousy with grease.

SURFCREST PIZZA

Rating: ★★

3140 S. Hemlock St.
Tolovana Park, Ore. 97145

503-436-1189

Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.
everyday

Price: \$ – Large pies from \$18
to \$23

Service: Hammy, hilarious and
accommodating; dine-in and
delivery

Vegetarian / Vegan Options:
Worthwhile for vegetarians

Drinks: Beer and wine, plus
the market’s full array of soda,
juice, etc.

KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

★ Poor

★★ Below average

★★★ Worth returning

★★★★ Very good

★★★★★ Excellent, best in region

To put it another way: They’re not skimping on the good stuff, wholly unafraid to veer towards a cliff of gluttonous ecstasy.

Biggie’s absolutely capable of making lean, more wholesome pies. A special with chèvre, a mild pesto sauce, tomatoes and onions was as scrumptious as it was reasonable.

There are a few sides: salads, bread sticks, spaghetti and mac and cheese. I had a Caesar (\$7.50), with croutons baked to order. It was puckeringly over-salted, with forgettable dressing. While the sides might act as worthy additions to a party spread, I felt like sticking to the pizza.

At times Biggie’s pies were irresistible. At others, they were simply good, and occasionally a little floppy. Consistency could improve.

Nevertheless, Surfcrest Pizza not only fills the hole left by Hoffman’s graduation from the Market’s tiny kitchen, it’s a much-needed addition to the growing neighborhood. **CW**