

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

New Shelburne Dining Room owners prize kitchen's legacy

Story and photos by

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The grandfather clock is gone.

For years it stood in the corner of the Shelburne's Dining Room, chiming a few minutes before every hour, marking time's passage over sumptuous, lingering meals.

The metallic clang, one you might hear multiple times over an evening, was a reminder that time spent, unhurried, in the presence of fine food and plenty of wine, while surrounded by art and history and spurred by compelling conversation, was time well spent.

The clock was removed during the Shelburne's recent renovation. In short, the Shelburne's longtime owners/operators David Campiche and Laurie Anderson, who purchased the historic property in 1977, sold earlier this year to Tiffany and Brady Turner, whose portfolio includes the nearby Adrift Hotel and adjoining restaurant, the Pickled Fish. (For more on the transition, the Brady's connection to the Shelburne and more, see last week's column.)

With the clock went a lot little things — paintings, pottery, all manner of artifacts. Like the rest of the hotel, the Shelburne's revamped dining room is a tad sleeker, less cluttered, perhaps better dusted than it used to be. But the essence of its previous charm — along with an integral, longtime server — remains. It's a magical space.

As compared to the refurbished lobby and pub, the dining room feels the least disturbed. (The revamped Inglenook, however, is a tacky misstep, something akin to a

man cave.)

An old benediction remains, however, etched into the dining room rafters: "eat, drink and be merry, of tomorrow take no heed."

Something about the room inspires it, and that history remains compelling.

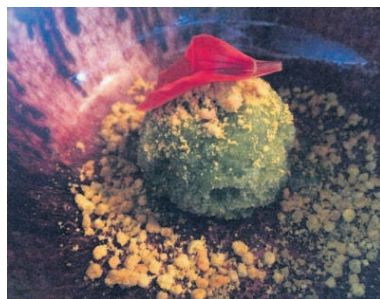
Certainly it's not lost on Brad Dodson, the Shelburne's new executive chef. Dodson, who also oversees the Pickled Fish, said he very much hoped to retain the time-winding, fine-dining experience for which the Shelburne is known. (Presumably, then, Dodson is aware of the kitchen's rich legacy, where renowned chefs like Nanci Main and Jimella Lucas made legendary gourmand James Beard swoon.)

So when the Shelburne Dining Room re-opened in mid-July, Dodson came out swinging with a 12-course tasting menu. Twelve. That's more than twice as many as any other prix fixe meal I've found in the whole Columbia-Pacific region.

Not content with that degree of distinction or difficulty, Dodson — along with sous chef Casey Venus — offered the tasting menu alongside the Shelburne's brand new dinner menu. If that wasn't enough, the tasting menu was offered throughout the night. Different tables were beginning their journeys as others were hours deep.

Ambition meet execution. Rubber, road. All this on opening weekend, no less.

If there was a thread through the 12 courses (\$75/\$105 with wine pairings, and really you gotta get the wine pairings), it was a preference for regional, seasonal ingredients. Among them: oysters, cranberries and a rainbow of edible



LEFT: Nasturtium sorbet with bee pollen. MIDDLE: Seasonal berries, Skamokawa goat cheese, honey brittle. RIGHT: Beef carpaccio, cured duck egg, pickled sea beans, sourdough croutons, nasturtium, borage.



flowers from the Shelburne's own garden.

But the thread was a thin one. This wasn't a meal intent on telling a story. It was, rather, a reason to ground diners in the Shelburne's historic digs, for them to revel, ruminate and imbibe for hours — just like folks have done here for nearly 120 years.

On the tongue, it was a refined and gleeful exploration. Some dishes made you think. Some changed shapes. Some made you swoon.

Techniques, both classic and modern, ran the gamut, as did influences from France (an enveloping, unfurling and velvety chicken liver mousse) to Latin America (a spicy escabeche served alongside a riotously crunchy, fried and smoked smelt), to New Orleans (boiled crawfish) and beyond (a salmon skin airy and crisp like a cracker).

The presentations were often as artful as they were exciting. The Beef Carpaccio offered a paper-thin slice of raw beef as pinkish-purple canvas to a Jackson Pollack-like dusting of delicate blue, red and fiery orange edible flowers, all bound by the yellow shavings of rich, salty, almost cheese-like cured duck egg yolk.

As an earthy, icy palate cleanser, the Nasturtium Sorbet got a minimal measure of sweetness from clumpy bee pollen. The dusting of pollen mimicked the paint job of the bowl — a ceramic thrown by David Campiche, no less. The savoriness of the sorbet, combined with clumpy, dry pollen certainly threw me for a loop.

The meal's only misstep was

a course of the Fried Oysters and mashed potatoes. Essentially a "chicken-fried oyster," it was comfort food that by comparison seemed exceedingly dull.

Among the most exquisite bites was the supple ocean kiss of Dungeness crab, topped with beads of salty, black sturgeon caviar in a savory, criminally creamy sea urchin roe custard.

In this dish the wine pairing — a soft, big-bodied 2017 Viogner from California — completed the circle. In the dozen wines seemed a bit of everything from leathery ports, buttery and full-bodied reds to dry, unsentimental bubbles and sweet, pillowy whites. The wines delivered new angles with which to approach each course. Sometimes they re-contextualized it altogether.

During dessert — a Hazelnut Rockie Road Semifreddo — chef Dodson appeared to say hello. (He did this with all tables having the tasting menu.) He said just about everything you'd want to hear from a chef taking over one of the Columbia-Pacific's most hallowed kitchens.

Then came the bombshell: Dodson would be leaving at the end of the month. By the time you read this, he's probably gone. (If you act fast, though, you might snag one of his final tasting menus. Call ahead.)

He's leaving to join the team at the Willows Inn, a renown restaurant counted among the world's 50 best, where reservations are difficult to come by and tasting menus begin at \$225. Dodson will join a team led by

chef Blaine Wetzel, who studied under perhaps the world's most celebrated chef, Rene Redzepi of Noma. Dodson said he's intent on learning as much as he possibly can. He's really going for it. Good on him.

A new executive for the Shelburne (and Pickled Fish) had not been named as of press time, but Dodson figured it would be sous chef Venus, with whom he collaborated on the tasting menu.

So if change at the Shelburne was big (ownership), it's now going to be a little less big (a new executive chef).

Indeed, just when you think the next regional star is ready to make his mark he's called up to the big leagues. (Remind me to see where Dodson's at in a decade or so — the sky's the limit.)

And, so, here we are ... kind of back where we started. We'll have to wait and see what becomes of the Shelburne Dining Room after a new chef is named and settled in.

But I think one thing is clear: In the Turners the Shelburne has found owners and stewards for the next generation. At least in the promotion of Dodson, they appeared to prize the kitchen's legacy alongside the property's mesmerizing potential.

And, despite the removal of the grandfather clock, I managed to find a new, if less auspicious, indicator to mark the passage of time during a long, enchanting dinner: the candles. When I arrived they were stately and tall. Two hours, 45 minutes and 12 courses later, they had melted to mere stubs. **CW**