

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

T. Paul's Urban Cafe has funky vibe, familiar flavors

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

The decor at T. Paul's Urban Cafe is busy, scattershot and colorful. It reminds me of the '90s. The ceiling is a black-and-white checkerboard. A wall is painted green. Vintage windowsills hang beside inspirational slogans, posters of Marilyn Monroe and Bob Marley. Big block letters spell out the word "FOOD."

The menu, too, is a smorgasbord, and the plates similarly colorful. Every dish, it seems, contains greens, reds, yellows and purples.

Along with color, T. Paul's is replete with cheese. It's all over — in the salads, on a steak, on and in pasta, artichoke dip, nachos and spread over crostini.

A whole section of the menu is devoted to melting cheese: T. Paul's Urban Signature Quesadillas (generally \$10 for a half, \$12 for a whole). There are more than 15 of them, stuffed with things like curried or jerk chicken, bay shrimp, steak and veggies. Goopy and easy, they do their job. A quesadilla is a pretty hard thing to screw up.

I had the Dungeness Crab Quesadilla Fiesta (\$20) — a kind of seafood sampler with Dungeness crab quesadilla — a cup of clam chowder, a salad with bay shrimp plus chips and salsa. The lean, sweet, salty crab played nice with the oily, melted cheddar, jack and feta, with sundried tomato, spinach, garlic and onion for some freshness. The chowder — thick, buttery, salty — was run of the mill. The salad had shredded cheese, too.

The Santa Barbara Cobb salad (\$18), with Gorgonzola, avocado,



1/4 Pound Flat Iron.



NW Salmon Vera Cruz.



Dungeness Crab Quesadilla Fiesta.



Santa Barbara Cobb Salad.

ALONG WITH COLOR, T. PAUL'S IS REPLETE WITH CHEESE. IT'S ALL OVER. ... A WHOLE SECTION ON THE MENU IS DEVOTED TO MELTING CHEESE.

a hardboiled egg and pesto ranch was a lake of creaminess. Though it could've used a few more apples and onions for contrast, this dinner

salad was hardly lacking heft — it had plenty of the good stuff: tender chicken breast, actual bacon, plus the aforementioned avocados

and cheese. Oddly enough, what I could've used more of was the greens.

The 1/4 Pound Flat Iron was a

T. PAUL'S URBAN CAFE

Rating: ★★☆☆

1119 Commercial St.
Astoria, Ore., 97103
503-338-5133

Hours: 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Monday through Saturday

Price: \$-\$\$ most entrées in the teens

Service: Personable, attentive, jovial

Vegetarian options:
Plenty, as long as you eat cheese.

KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

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

little chewy, but not in a bad way. From the menu's "Lite Side" section, it came with a grilled mélange of colorful veg: zucchini, red onions and bell peppers and an almost-too-sweet mushroom demi-glaze. (The Flat Iron's full-grown sibling, on the other hand, comes bathed in a mushroom Creole blue cheese sauce.) All in all, a pretty square deal for \$12.

The toss-it-all-out-there ethic continued to the NW Salmon Vera Cruz (\$20.50), which included three clams and three prawns, plus more of the colorful grilled veggie mélange and mashed potatoes, which were dusted with Parmesan cheese, of course. The slender filet was cooked medium, a bit long, and a few bones remained. The chipotle cream sauce was thin, but worth sopping up. It was ... fine — about what you'd expect for \$20 in a line cook- rather than chef-driven kitchen.

Though the brightly colored dishes at the Urban Cafe draw on a handful of regional traditions — New Orleans, Mediterranean, Northwest — they lean more toward comfort than eclecticism. While it might look funky, the flavors are familiar. **CW**