

Feeling like a grown-up at the Sokol Blosser Winemaker Dinner



R.J. MARX/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

Chef Aaron Bedard and staff at the winemaker's dinner.

The Stephanie Inn's reputation precedes it and anyone looking for the most luxe look at Cannon Beach would be wise to take the plunge. Located in the southern part of town, tucked on a side street off Hemlock by the ocean, you can almost feel the luxury lapping as you walk up the stairs.

The Sokol Blosser Winemaker Dinner is a regular event pairing the restaurant's extraordinary cuisines and the wines of Sokol Blosser.

Being in the upstairs dining room makes you feel like a grown-up, but not in that stuffy way.

Rather you know you are about to have something demanding of your senses, your experiences and your fine taste.

Chefs and sommelier ratchet up the game — we are moving to another level and expectations run high.

When you are eating here, you feel you have arrived. The atmosphere is as elegant as the cuisine is sophisticated. With staff attentive but not too solicitous.

Everything strikes the right balance — the Japanese have a word for it, “umami,” sometimes defined as that uniquely perfect degree of “mouth-feel.”

‘Camaraderie’

I met Aaron Bedard on location in his dining room a week after the dinner, because I don't like to mix business and indulgences. We sat down prior to the lunch hour in the dining room in one of those glorious Cannon Beach days where the sky is as azure blue as the Mediterranean Sea.

Bedard's upbringing is unlikely for a master of haute cuisine — he's from La Grande, Oregon, where dining choices include Denny's and the Rusty Spur Cafe.

Bedard was raised in the restaurant business — his father ran a chain of KFCs. “When I was 14 I started working in restaurants just to make money and keep busy,” he said. “I learned a good, solid work ethic.”

He also learned he didn't want to work in that style of food and service. “I also realized I didn't want to be in that style of restaurant environment. I wanted to be in a little more refined food and service. This fit into that really well.”

After graduating Western Culinary Institute Cordon Bleu, Bedard came to Cannon Beach an intern under Executive Chef Crystal Corbin.

“I didn't have that much of a palate until I got training and working here at the hotel, under some really fantastic chefs to guide me,” Bedard said.

Bedard is the “Iron Chef Goes Coastal” People's Choice award winner for his short-rib ravioli, a dish flavored with Boursin cheese and Dijon mustard. Fresh homemade pasta, of course, and a bleu cheese cream sauce complement the dish.

While the restaurant gets “a lot of guests” from the hotel, everyone is welcome.

Laurence Thomson is the restaurant's sous chef.

On the menu at Sokol Blosser Winemaker's Dinner

COURSE 1: Spring salmon ceviche, fresh cucumber, red onions, cilantro and fried corn tortilla paired with Evolution Brut Sparkling

COURSE 2: Fennel dusted halibut filet, shaved asparagus, toasted almonds and Bee Local Honey beurre blanc paired with 2013 Müller-Thurgau

COURSE 3: Intermezzo: Raspberry and rosé sorbet

COURSE 4: Marinated lamb loin, Humboldt fog & morel mushroom risotto, sautéed spinach, baby carrots and Dijon reduction sauce paired with 2013 Dundee Hills Pinot Noir

COURSE 5: Caramel flan, dried apricot compote, caramel tuile cookie and candied Marcona almonds paired with 2013 White Riesling.



R.J. MARX/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

Caramel flan, dried apricot compote, caramel tuile cookie and candied Marcona almonds.



R.J. MARX/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

Fennel dusted halibut filet with shaved asparagus, toasted almonds and Bee Local Honey beurre blanc.



R.J. MARX/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

Stephanie Inn Executive Chef Aaron Bedard offers a spring menu presenting local ingredients.

“We do get a lot of guests from the hotel,” Bedard said. “We're attached to the hotel and we're very service-oriented for the hotel. But I think our clientele is someone looking to experience fantastic service, Northwest cuisine in a nice romantic, quiet, professional environment.”

Bedard, 39, lives in Seaside and is the father of three.

He defines Northwest cuisine as taking fresh, local ingredients and preparing them simply. “We have such beautiful ingredients, I try to just kind of let them sing a little, let that be the highlight,” Bedard said.

The Cannon Beach atmosphere is more free-spirited than East Coast dining experiences and more “rustic” than the Portland restaurant scene, he said. “That's one of the reasons I like it. It's a slower pace. It's really nice.”

There are more than a couple celebrity chefs in Cannon Beach — Jonathan Hoffman, John Newman and Will LeRoux immediately come to mind.

“We don't necessarily have a scene, but the culture here is kind of tight,” Bedard said. “I know almost every chef in town, and we all kind of take care of each other, which is really awesome.”

“Sometimes you run out of something,” he added. “I can call Chef Newman. We borrow back and forth. The camaraderie is really nice to have.”

Locally, Bedard said he loves to dine at the Irish Table, and he likes the loose atmosphere of the Hardware Store. “It's very modern and the food is fantastic there.”

Chef Dave Bonnett of the Hardware Store (aka “Screw and Brew”) and Bedard

helped judge the 2015 American Legion Chili Cook-Off, and Bedard is one of the biggest supporters of the Cannon Beach Farmers' Market, returning in June.

Bedard said he welcomed the arrival of Public Coast and Pelican Brewing, adding Cannon Beach as a destination to the brewpub scene.

With new restaurants coming, Bedard said he sees a need for him and his staff to “hit the high mark.”

“We're striving for the last 5 percent,” he said. “The 95 percent is pretty good, but it's the last 5 percent that really pushes us above. We have to watch the salt and pepper, we have to watch the cooking — every single day.”

The restaurant's spring menu features spring salmon — “the best this time of year coming out of the cold water, with just a little more fat to it, a little more butter flavor,” Bedard said. “We're also featuring morel mushrooms, sweet asparagus, rhubarb — all of our local stuff that's in season now.”

“We have a lot of fantastic feedback,” Bedard said. “Our guests are really great. We also get criticism/feedback too, which is good, because it keeps us in check. We know we're still not perfect. We have to strive for greatness everyday. If we're learning from those mistakes, we're growing still.”

It made me think how lucky we are to have such great restaurants at our fingertips. Even if we can only afford to go to a Stephanie Inn once a month or every six months, such a splurge is good for the soul.

Crossing my fingers for the return of the blue herons

Birds concentrate on three things, eating, procreating and grooming. And depending on what time of year it is, these things may trade places as the number one important thing. This time of year, we all know that producing eggs is number one on most birds' minds.

I have had the pleasure of putting up a variety of nesting opportunities for different species of birds.

My wonderful husband has made it possible to rehab a wood duck house and place it in a tree across the creek and to put up a fabulous purple community living situation. No nesting action yet, but there has been some interest!

I am particularly pleased that the great blue herons look like they are taking up their summer residence across the creek from my house. As I write this the herons are flying all around the neighborhood and landing in trees and the Neawanna!

Last summer, Neal Maine monitored this heron rookery and reported that 11 babies hatched in 7 nests. I am crossing my fingers for that kind of productivity again.

The picture I have sent along with this column is of a dance I caught “on tape” at the Lagoon ponds in February 2016. To see the video, please visit the North Oregon Coast Facebook page.

Watch for baby birds in the next few months. Most fledglings spend several days on the ground before they can fly. They are well attended by their parents, so no need to “safe” them. Please consider keeping your cats indoors for the months of May, June and early July to help keep our bird populations healthy. Thanks.

Join a growing group for birding adventures in the Cannon Beach area. We meet the first Sunday of the month at the Lagoon Trail parking lot on Second Street at 9 a.m. As a group, we decide where the best birding is and bird until about 11. Bring binoculars and wear appropriate clothing. Everyone is welcome! Our next two dates are June 5 and July 3

Susan has spent her life enjoying the great outdoors from the lakes and woods of Northern Minnesota, Mount Adams in Washington and now the Oregon beach environs. After spending many pleasurable hours driving her avid birder parents around, she has taken up birding as a passion, to the mixed emotions of her husband Scott. The Boacs reside on Neawanna Creek in Seaside where their backyard is a birder's paradise.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Thursday, May 26

Cannon Beach Planning Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

Friday, May 27

Cannon Beach Emergency Preparedness Committee, 10 a.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

Monday, May 30

Memorial Day, City Hall closed.

Tuesday, June 7

Cannon Beach City Council, 7 p.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

Monday, June 13

Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District, 6 p.m., Fire-Rescue Main Station, 188 Sunset Blvd.

Tuesday, June 14

Cannon Beach City Council, 5:30 p.m., work session, City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

Monday, June 21

Seaside School District, 6 p.m., 1801 S. Franklin St.

Tuesday, July 5

Cannon Beach City Council, 7 p.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District

6 p.m., Fire-Rescue Main Station, 188 Sunset Ave.

Tuesday, July 12

Cannon Beach City Council, 5:30 p.m., work session, City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

Tuesday, Aug. 2

Cannon Beach City Council, 7 p.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

Monday, Aug. 8

Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District, 6 p.m., Fire-Rescue Main Station, 188 Sunset Ave.

Tuesday, Aug. 9

Cannon Beach City Council, 5:30 p.m., work session, City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

Tuesday, Sept. 6

Cannon Beach City Council, 7 p.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

Publisher
Steve Forrester
Editor
R.J. Marx
Reporter
Lyra Fontaine
Advertising Manager
Betty Smith

Production Manager
John D. Bruijn
Circulation Manager
Heather Ramsdell
Advertising Sales
Laura Kaim

CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

The Cannon Beach Gazette is published every other week by EO Media Group.
1555 N. Roosevelt, Seaside, Oregon 97138
503-738-5561 • Fax 503-738-9285
Web: www.cannonbeachgazette.com
Email: editor@cannonbeachgazette.com

LETTER POLICY

The Seaside Signal welcomes letters to the editor. The deadline is noon Monday prior to publication. Letters must be 400 words or less and must be signed by the author and include a phone number for verification. We also request that submissions be limited to one letter per month. Send to 1555 N. Roosevelt Drive, Seaside, OR 97138, drop them off at 1555 N. Roosevelt Drive or fax to 503-738-9285, or email rmarx@seasidesignal.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Annually: \$40.50 in county, \$58.00 in and out of county.
Postage Paid at: Cannon Beach, OR 97110
POSTMASTER
Send address changes to Cannon Beach Gazette, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103
Copyright 2015 © Cannon Beach Gazette. Nothing can be reprinted or copied without consent of the owners.

THE NATIONAL AWARD-WINNING
CANNON BEACH
GAZETTE

