

Chef Steven Snook brings his style and standard of excellence to the Salish Lodge.

by John Bollinger

memories, mnemonics and the SALISH LODGE



is an intimate affair with no more than 12 guests that have the option to engage with Chef Steven and his staff in conversation, food preparation and plating exercises. I would be remiss if I failed to mention that the guests also get to partake in the food and wine pairings. I have a sneaking suspicion that Chef Steven is looking forward to many fun evenings with multiple audiences yet to be entertained.

We then toured the actual kitchen and were encouraged by our chef guide to snatch a couple samplings of the lightest textured

DINING OUT

LONG BEFORE THE Salish Lodge was rebuilt and subsequently renamed, the lodge was best known for its amazing farm-style breakfast. I would venture to guess that a good percentage of the millions of early morning weekend visitors to Snoqualmie Falls over the years were there as much for the breakfast as for the view. After our mid-week visit to The Dining Room at the Salish Lodge, I have a feeling that the “must visit” reputation might soon extend to dinners as well.

Our dining review crew consisted of my wife, Crystal, photographers Adam and Jennifer Christopherson and yours truly. The evening started with our introduction to executive chef Steven Snook. Chef Steven is an Englishman with an affable and pleasant personality. If you get a chance to meet him, you too will likely be impressed with his infectious smile and youthful confidence. He seemed to effortlessly season his loquaciousness with a perfectly balanced self-effacing sense of humor. Chef Steven didn't hesitate to compliment and credit past mentors and his current staff for their specific talents and professionalism that influences the culinary offerings of Salish Lodge.

We started with a tour of the new Chef's Studio Kitchen that has made a successful debut to rave reviews. The concept

biscotti I have ever tasted! So good, in fact, that management has posted notes discouraging staff from the same larceny we were encouraged to commit. I highly recommend a few biscotti—or a few more than a few. Thank you to pastry chef Lynn Leigh Hall who graciously allowed us to photograph and taste her delicacies and invade her domain.

After the kitchen tour, we exited onto what will soon become a little outdoor patio area that will be incorporated into the Culinary Adventures platform. Adjacent to the studio area are the newly planted gardens on the west facing side of the Lodge. Numerous plantings afford Chef Steven the opportunity to indulge the foraging skills he learned years ago in gardens throughout Kent County, England. Chef Steven said that he places a premium on being able respect and embrace your





Waitperson Jonathan Gardner had a deliberate pace, cadence, and intimate knowledge of the menu.



immediate environment. Being able to source fresh local ingredients right from the property is an added bonus. He also added that he strives to instill that same perspective among his entire staff.

We were also able to see a larger garden and their private collection of honeybees across the road adjacent to an auxiliary parking lot. It is here in this upper garden area where they currently maintain 12 individual hives. We were able to witness up close some very busy bees and I thought for a moment that I heard Jerry Seinfeld's voice, but I could be mistaken. So honestly—what restaurant wouldn't want bee colonies as close as a stone's throw away? The honey has long been a part of the breakfast presentation and has provided guest entertainment with the way wait-staff would drizzle honey from high above the pancakes and waffles. We tasted some of the honey in the Studio Kitchen, but wait until you taste the honey and butter presentation that accompanies three types of artisan sliced bread.

Our waitperson for the evening was Jonathan Gardner and he, like Chef Snook, has only been with the Salish staff a year. His deliberate pace, cadence, and intimate knowledge of the menu seemed to belie his freshman year status. When I asked where he was from, he shared that he had recently moved from Palm Springs. Ever the proud Washingtonian, I asked what inspired his move from the Californian desert to the Cascade foothills and his answer was, "My wife is from Portland." Enough said.

Jonathan asked if we would like to taste the Betz Family's 2013 Curvée Frangin. The blend had a noticeable Cabernet Sauvignon influence with a nice silky texture. After tasting the Betz wine, it was an easy decision to have a bottle brought to the table. Cheers to the master winemaker at the Betz Family Winery.

We began by each ordering an appetizer off the starter menu. First to arrive was the Pistachio Crusted Scallops with poached rhubarb and an avocado purée. How they looked plated was as equally impressive as how they tasted. Next my wife Crystal, an avowed soup lover, opted for the Asparagus Soup over the Walla Walla Sweet Onion Soup. Prepared with chargrilled asparagus, Oregon Morels, and smoked oil she was pleased with the creamy texture and subtle blend of flavors. Had I ordered soup I would likely have chosen the onion but commenting on something with which I am unfamiliar would be like celebrities broadcasting their political views and rants on social media. Superfluous at best!

Jennifer ordered the Baby Lettuce Salad and Adam ordered the Wedge Salad. For some reason, he was subjected to playful ribbing from the ladies. When his salad did arrive he demurely divided his order into four equal portions and shared them with us. Grateful for his gesture I was challenged to choose which ingredient was the tastiest. Presented with generously sized smoked bacon bits, crumbles of Maytag Bleu Cheese, and candied pecans this will definitely be part of my next

meal at the Salish Lodge Dining Room. I ordered the Penn Cove Mussels as I have been doing regularly since my days of working at a couple of Shilshoe Bay restaurants some 30 years ago. I have personally experimented with several types of broth over the years but concede I would choose Chef Steven's spring onion, cilantro, green garlic velouté, white wine reduction nine out of ten times.

For our entrée selections, Jennifer was eager to try the Beef Wellington. She was not shy about sharing with us that she

recommendation we also ordered a side of the Aged Black Garlic Farro. Our side dishes seemed extremely fresh and crisp. They provided us with both strong and subtle flavors and added wonderful colors to our table. Especially vibrant were the multiple shades of green.

Dinner is seldom complete without dessert so again we each ordered a selection Lemon Elderflower Curd, Strawberry Rhubarb, Salted Caramel Chocolate Ice Cream Sundae, and the Chocolate Soufflé. Crystal was the first to try the Chocolate Soufflé and exclaimed, "This is to die for!" Each of us had a different favorite. I had a bite of each one and I think I can still taste the flavors, but my favorite can be emphasized with five words and an exclamation mark. SALISH HONEY LEMON THYME ICE CREAM!

You may have noticed that the words memories and mnemonics are in the title of my article and wondered why. Well, indulge me for a moment and I will attempt to explain. For those unfamiliar with the word mnemonics, it is simply another word for a memory tool. Memories are easier to recall when they are positive and associated with vivid imagery. Another mnemonic is to link a person, place or thing to an experience. To better remember my Salish Lodge evening I am going to link it with the Canterbury Tales. The Canterbury Tales were written by Geoffrey Chaucer who is widely considered the father of English Literature and the greatest English poet of the Middle-Ages. The Canterbury Tales are a collection of 20 stories written at the end of the 14th century. Chaucer wrote the Tales about a group of people on a religious pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. The stories portray the pilgrims as participating in a story telling contest along the way. How does help? The Canterbury location and Sainthood are my fist links.

Chef Steven shared with us that he was from Canterbury, Kent and implied that he was no saint as a young lad. This fact led his father to find the 14 year-old Steven a restaurant job in the neighboring town of Faversham. Steven learned his foundational culinary skills from the renowned Read's Restaurant owner and chef, David Pitchford. Faversham was also known for its historical role in the British explosives industry. This fact helps me link Steven to his next employer Chef Gordon Ramsay who on occasion has been known to produce his own fiery explosions. His time with the Three Michelin Star awarded chef provided Steven with an embedded appreciation for a standard of excellence that he now brings to the Salish Lodge.

Another welcome remnant from his time with Chef Ramsay is the relationship he still maintains with a certain pastry chef named Kelly. She is still a pastry chef, but also Steven's lovely wife, mother of their children, 4 year-old son, Joe, and 2 year-old daughter, Beryl, and by Steven's own account the Executive Chef at home.

My final mnemonic link to the Canterbury Tales is the pilgrimage and storytelling contest. Chef Steven and his team are poetically providing daily storytelling worthy culinary inspirations. Perhaps a pilgrimage to Snoqualmie Falls and The Dining Room at the Salish Lodge is a new favorite memory awaiting your arrival! 

has tried a few times to replicate how Chef Gordon Ramsay prepares the popular meat dish. The menu describes the dish as compatible for two and Jennifer had no trouble finding a willing entrée partner in Crystal. The tableside presentation of this dish for two was in and of itself memorable. Jonathan wheeled a cart with what looked to be a perfectly glazed loaf of artisan bread. As he cut into Beef Wellington, the glazed bread loaf revealed its inner self much to the delight of our table and a few neighboring tables as well. Crystal was effusive with her praise said, "The beautifully glazed shell was cut open to reveal layers of a light yet crispy pastry. Different layers offered a depth of tastes and flavors and, accompanied by a Madeira wine sauce, each bite was rich and luxurious. A must order decadent dish."

After earlier hearing Chef Steven specifically mention the Rib Eye as noteworthy, I ordered the 28 oz. Bone-In Rib Eye. I asked Jonathan for a medium rare leaning towards the rare side and was thrilled to receive a steak that thick cooked exactly to my specific request. No easy feat I know. The natural flavor of my tender steak lingered on my palate, meeting my highest hopes and expectations. The only thing wrong with the Rib Eye was that the portion I intentionally left uneaten was inadvertently left at the restaurant. Farewell to the steak sandwich I didn't get to enjoy the next day.

For our side dishes we ordered the Swiss Chard, the Chargrilled Asparagus, and the English Peas. Upon Jonathan's