

THE BEST OF COASTAL WASHINGTON

By Andrew Harper Staff

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The lush archipelagoes between **Seattle** and Victoria, Canada, are relentlessly picturesque, replete with splendidly scenic state parks and colorful coastal towns. The calm seas between the islands shelter wildlife ranging from sea otters to orca whales. And in recent years, the food scene has become world-class. It never takes much to convince me to return.

This time we drove up to the islands from Portland, Oregon. At Olympia, we forked west onto U.S. 101, weaving a path between the forested mountains of Olympic National Park and the Hood Canal, which is dotted with small towns and old fishing piers. The magnificent scenery made the four-hour drive to the old blufftop city of Port Townsend feel all too short. A 20-minute car ferry ride deposited us on Whidbey Island, a landmass shaped rather like an ear. On the north side of the lobe is Langley, a delightful town of art galleries and seafood restaurants.

FRIDAY HARBOR HOUSE

Friday Harbor, Washington



Outdoor seating at the restaurant at Friday Harbor House in Friday Harbor, Washington

Friday Harbor House

On San Juan Island itself, the town of Friday Harbor has become quite touristy, perhaps because of its direct connection by high-speed catamaran with Seattle. Langley has a better selection of boutiques and art galleries. Nevertheless, **Friday Harbor House**, perched on a hill overlooking the marina and ferry dock, is a delightful base from which to explore the rest of the island. I stopped recommending the 23-room property a few years ago, but after a change in ownership in 2015 and a thorough renovation last year, I decided it merited a second look.

The friendly young woman at the front desk offered to help with our luggage and showed us to our Harbor View room, the only category I recommend besides the Partial View Suite. Request a high floor — and not just for the views. Most rooms overlook the popular restaurant's patio, and higher floors offer more privacy. When enjoying the vistas from the Juliet balcony of our second-floor room, we stood perhaps just 15 feet above the people at the nearest table and could hear every word of their conversation quite clearly.

Inside, the room looked fresh and stylish, done in a palette of white, yellow and charcoal. Curvy gray armchairs added some midcentury modern chic, and a headboard of gold-toned plywood panels provided an edgy touch. The gas fireplace facing the bed was attractive, but it threw out too much heat for us to comfortably use on a summer evening. A jetted tub divided the bedroom from the granite vanity, next to a pristine shower stall clad in oversize white subway tiles.

After sundowners on the patio, we moved to the restaurant's lively interior for dinner. Our waiter offered articulate wine recommendations, likely because he had once managed a winery in the Willamette Valley. I loved the Iris Vineyards Pinot Noir, full of fruit and refined spice, with a mocha note on the finish. It paired well with both a grilled-corn salad with arugula, tomatoes, cilantro and peaches, as well as some perfectly prepared wild salmon with slightly bitter baby turnips, savory charred red-leaf lettuce and briny capers. A simple dessert of butterscotch-glazed doughnuts with bourbon whipped cream was most satisfying. We also tried dinner at the well-regarded *Coho Restaurant* a short walk away, but both of us wished we'd dined again at Friday Harbor House instead.

Friday Harbor House 92

LIKE

The mesmerizing harbor and marina views; the warm and helpful staff; the commendable restaurant; the fresh room décor.

DISLIKE

The proximity of our balcony to the restaurant patio.

GOOD TO KNOW

Rather than dining at *Coho Restaurant*, consider instead ***Duck Soup Inn*** (open Thursday through Sunday), which the new owners recently revamped.

Rates: Harbor View Room, \$350; Partial View Suite, \$400

Address: 130 West Street, Friday Harbor, Washington

Telephone: (360) 378-8455