

Seattle Refined



Rum cocktail at Friday Harbor House (Image: Naomi Tomky)

Here's a brand new (& delicious) reason to go to Friday Harbor

JULY 05, 2016
by NAOMI TOMKY

VIEW GALLERY



Chef Jason Aldous, previously of [Camano Island Waterfront Inn](#) and [Willows Inn](#), now helms the kitchen at San Juan Island's [Friday Harbor House](#). With his fine-dining background at restaurants focused on hyper-local, super fresh ingredients, Aldous brings new life to the now remodeled restaurant.

The view – overlooking Friday Harbor and a prime spot to watch the to-ing and fro-ing of the local ferries – remains among the best in the state, but restaurant and décor are new. The room now leans little darker, a bit more polished. The look spills into the foyer now, allowing for more bar-style seating and a lounge area: much needed if the rest of the cocktail list can catch up to the stellar bourbon drink: raw carrot juice and Gentiane Quina give the drink a fresh, bright, herbal flavor deserving of the same superlatives as the view.

As an island stalwart, the food menu retains some old standards, but shines where Aldous gets to infuse his seafood expertise and imaginative touches. For the most impressive meal, look for signs of Aldous's latitude: the grilled octopus, for example, equal parts crisp and tender, comes with a chimichurri sauce, grilled onions, and a schmear of savory chorizo paste. Preserved shishito pepper and charred lime balance the dish with heat and tartness. Wescott Bay mussels similarly shined, their kimchi spiced broth singing a slightly spiced song to the spring garlic. In each case, the fun ingredients were simply a supporting cast for perfectly-cooked seafood, a sure sign of Aldous's strength in the kitchen.

The gnocchi appetizer, however, came out as a rare misstep, the star starch both grainy and full of lumps. The sauce – billed as a vinaigrette with fennel and roasted chicken, came out broken and bland. Potatoes arrived to a much better end in the duck fat French fries: thick, crisp, and pillowy soft within. The grapefruit aioli leaned a tad too sweet, but begs to pair up with the herbs on the fries; Aldous deserves commendation for the creativity.

With the lamb main, the chef comes back to his strengths. The kitchen buys whole lamb from a nearby farm, rotating through whichever cut fits the menu. The saddle - an awkward and boney piece - came with fat melting into the meat, both tempting and requiring diners to pick up the softball-sized chunk. Pickled mustard seed cut through both the fatty richness of the lamb and the sweetness of the accompanying garden figs. On the lighter side, wild salmon fillet again proved Aldous's skill with executing seafood. Dripping with salmon roe, sauced with a cilantro chimichurri, and served along a soft-roasted sweet potato, the entire entrée seemed to invite guests to linger long under the orange umbrellas of the outdoor tables.

The revitalized Friday Harbor House kitchen makes a worthy stop for those planning a weekend in the San Juans, but with continued creativity and a little latitude allowed to the chef, along with some time to fine-tune a few dishes, it holds the potential to be a destination from Seattle in and of itself.