

Move over burgers and fish and chips, pubs are going beyond grub as their chefs are

raising the bar

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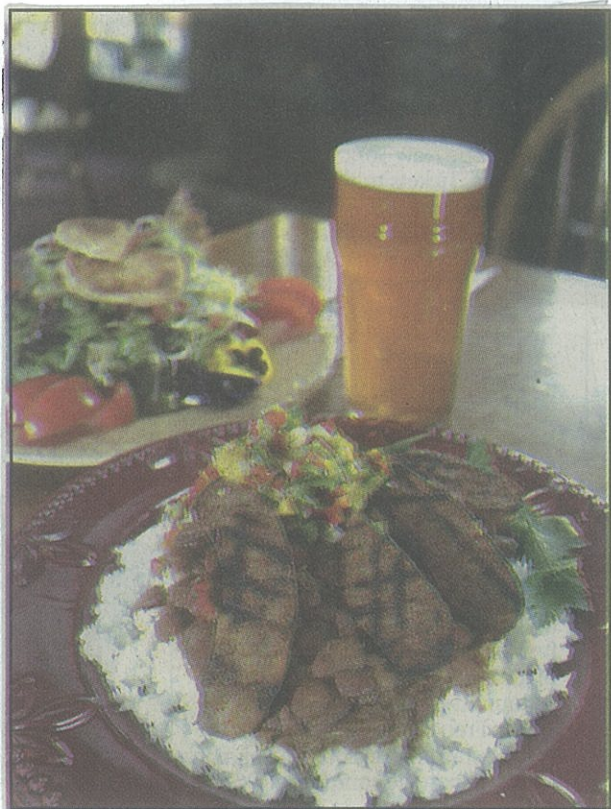
The tea-smoked duck Napoleon is the first item on the dinner menu at the Jolly Roger Taproom in Ballard. It is followed by a selection of entrees that include a roasted Moroccan chicken roulade, a pan-seared halibut fillet that's been dusted with pulverized dried morels, and a chef's special pasta served with a Gorgonzola-Portage Bay pilsener cream sauce.

At the new Barking Dog Alehouse, the specialties skew ethnic: wasabi and pork shumai, lemongrass chicken satay, sesame ahi salad, tofu fries, Vietnamese sandwich. There are all the usual suspects, of course, such as fish and chips, pizza and burgers. But everything is made in house and the ingredients, which include bread from Tall Grass Bakery or Macrina and ground beef from Misty Isles Farm on Vashon Island, are premium.

If these menus are any indication, pub food has gone beyond grub and evolved into pub dining. It's not a surprising trend considering beer is not just beer and cooks have become "executive chefs."

In Seattle, a higher standard of cooking in

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At Hilltop Ale House it's red beans and rice with andouille sausage and an organic goat cheese salad served with Snoqualmie Wildcat IPA.

pubs or alehouses has been a slow trend over the past decade. But the Hops on Equinox spring beer festival this weekend has helped renew the conviction among pub owners and chefs to raise awareness about the quality of food coming from their kitchens. The event, which takes place Friday and Saturday at Seattle Center's Fisher Pavilion, will feature

74th Street Ale House
7401 Greenwood Ave. N.
206-784-2955
www.seattlealehouses.com

Hilltop Ale House
2129 Queen Anne Ave. N.
206-285-3877
www.seattlealehouses.com

Columbia City Ale House
4914 Rainier Ave. S.
206-723-5123
www.seattlealehouses.com

Miller loves to make sauces and condiments, and everything the Jolly Roger serves is made in an 8-by-20-foot kitchen. Two of his creations, Shanghai Sauce and Jolly Juice, are staples at the table. Shanghai has a rice wine vinegar base and contains cilantro and sambal (hot sauce). The Jolly Juice is Mexican-style, with a blend of four chilies and tomatoes. The sauces are so good that customers often steal the 22-ounce beer bottles the chef uses as decanters.

George Hancock, the founder of Maritime Pacific Brewing and Jolly Roger, says his goal is "to give people value and to keep them coming back."

As a result, even the fried food isn't average. The Smokers are fried onion rings that have been smoked out back over apple wood and beer-soaked hops, then double-dipped in a beer batter and coated with panko (bread crumbs). A jalapeño tartar sauce accompanies a pile of rings. These onion rings are sweet, smoky and crispy, and perfect with the zingy tartar.

At a recent beer and food tasting at Barking Dog in Ballard, several brewers gathered to discuss the new age of pub culture.

"At Hale's, it used to be that fish and chips did the job," said Mike Hale, who owns Hale's Ales Brewery in Fremont. "Now, we have natural beef and wild salmon. I think that beer is equally fun, if not more, than

wowed everyone with his chicken satay skewered with lemongrass stalks and a spicy Thai peanut sauce, the recipe for which he refused to divulge. The dish was paired with a delightful Manny's IPA from Georgetown Brewery.

Nelson soon will have a garden outside the kitchen at the Barking Dog for herbs and edible flowers, which are used in salads and as garnish.

Kurt Meachum, co-owner of Barking Dog, says his goal is to achieve a "hybrid of what you'd find in a fine dining restaurant mixed with a laid-back atmosphere where if you come in with a group of people you can move the chairs around, and there's good value."

Barking Dog carries over a tradition of serving game meats from its older sibling, Fred's Rivertown Alehouse in Snohomish, so it's not unusual to see elk, antelope steak, even kangaroo on the menu. It also serves breakfast on weekends, a relatively undiscovered feature.

Any talk of pub dining eventually will lead back to 74th Street Ale House, Hilltop Ale House and Columbia City Ale House, which are owned by Jeff Reich and Jeff Eagan. Both 13-year-old 74th Street and 10-year-old Hilltop are considered "pioneers" in pub dining.

Last week, the specials sheet at Hilltop featured gnocchi with chicken in a brown butter sauce, curried halibut pita sandwich, and red beans and rice with grilled andouille sausage. The fish tacos and the gumbo are signature dishes that are mentioned in the same breath as 74th Street.

Reich comes from a family of cooks and cooked professionally before opening the alehouses. Quality food has always been a priority to him in his personal life and that sensibility shaped the philosophies of 74th Street, Hilltop and the youngest member of the family, Columbia City Ale House. It is a point of pride that none of the kitchens has a deep fryer or microwave, and that there are no processed foods used.

Kathy Christopher, executive chef of the three businesses, says that other alehouses have modeled their menus on 74th Street.

"We get tons of calls all the time for advice, from people here and out of state," says Christopher, who has been the chef for 12 years.

Eagan thinks the alehouse experience has influenced dining in general because it fits in a niche between the cafe and a fancier restaurant. It's the kind of dining that families can afford to enjoy without resorting to fast food.

"The idea of the pub is that it's a local place for neighbors to congregate," Eagan says. "You always met at the pub. All we've done is add quality food."

a sampling of signature dishes from 10 area pubs and alehouses.

David Miller, executive chef at Jolly Roger, which has only seven tables plus bar seating, would argue that his cooking is "beer fusion."

"I want to open up people's eyes," Miller says. "It's not just about pairing food with beer but cooking with beer. I can take raw beer to make reductions and syrup (for example)."