

TOM HAWTHORN'S BLOG

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Where's the beef? Ask this guy



Victoria blogger Donald Kennedy chomps on a burger. Photograph by Deddeda Stemler.

By Tom Hawthorn
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VICTORIA

Donald Kennedy is a connoisseur. He has trained his palate to recognize the finest of ingredients. With a single bite, he can discern whether meat has been ground in-house, or is a packaged, frozen product as appealing as a hockey puck.

Mr. Kennedy is Victoria's burgomeister, a gastronomic Jughead armed with a ferocious appetite and an iron belly.

The 25-year-old aspiring radio announcer is proprietor of the [Victoria Burger Blog](#), for which he has scarfed dozens of hamburgers.

He is on a quest to find the city's best sandwiches of the ground-meat variety, sampling the offerings from diners, chip wagons, fast-food

joints, strip-mall restaurants, and the occasional fine-dining establishment.

Last week alone, he tried four different hamburgers, including the fare for sale at the Lambrick Park baseball cook shack. "For a ballpark burger," he said, "it was excellent."

For more than a year, he has visited local outlets to investigate their bun-to-burger ratio and keeps alert to what he calls "bunsen burgers" (in his words, "an experiment headed towards inevitable failure").

What does he seek?

"Balance, mostly. Balance of ingredients, so nothing is overpowering. Everything is integrated."

This Zen-like search for a copacetic unity of texture and flavour is captured on a Kodak EasyShare digital camera. Sometimes, the half-eaten burgers look like crime-scene photographs.

Mr. Kennedy, a graduate of Camosun College's applied communication program, is not one to reject even the most ordinary of offerings.

"I'm not a total elitist, or anything," he insists. "I'll go down a couple of Baconators any time."

He will not, however, eat a tomato with his burger, a pattern he has followed since he was five years old and which he does not plan to alter.

His burger blog makes him one of a handful of new restaurant reviewers in a city with more than its share of tourist traps. Perhaps the most useful is Christabel Padmore's critiques posted at TheLittlePiggy.com. She also operates a bakery and catering business of the same name.

Unlike her, Mr. Kennedy is not a trained professional. He is an Everyman with an insatiable hunger for the sandwich that made Wimpy famous. He is joined on his crusade by Guy Alaimo, himself the author of the [Victoria Buffet Blog](#). The pair take turns playing Sancho to the other's Quixote.

Mr. Kennedy has dined on baked, grilled, flame-broiled and even

microwaved burgers.

He eschews politeness in favour of honesty.

He has been underwhelmed by the burgers usually cited in reader's choice polls.

He has made two visits to the popular Fairfield Fish and Chips, yet finds it to be only "fairly decent."

A diss of a burger at Maude Hunter's Pub provoked a running argument with anonymous posters whose tone suggests a familiarity (if not a paycheque) from said business.

A one-pound patty in a "Mountain Burger" in Nanaimo was left unfinished, a bun "the size of the famous Duncan hockey stick" make the fare unpalatable after soaking up an ocean of condiments.

The disappointments are more than offset by the successes. A prime-rib burger at [Glo](#) was blessed by a "killer red pepper aioli." A return visit to [The Pink Bicycle](#), a year-old joint dedicated to the art of the gourmet burger, led to a rave review. The introduction of a burger to the menu at the fancy earned a heap of praise.

After a year of scarfing, one place stood out.

Mr. Kennedy, only recently graduated as a student, is not known as a habitu  of such upscale eateries as the one overlooking the water at the Inn at Laurel Point.

To mark the occasion, he wore an understated black T-shirt and a grey, hooded sweater.

He was on unfamiliar turf.

Firstly, [Aura](#) offers diners cutlery of the metallic variety, not the disposable white plastic to which he is more accustomed. Secondly, the offerings seemed distinctly bourgeois: roasted halibut bouillabaisse and wild mushroom and spring asparagus risotto.

He had learned the restaurant had not only gained an executive chef of Food Network fame in Brad Horen, but that aforesaid talent had introduced a whimsical sandwich to the luncheon fare of the sort more

often preferred by the proletariat. To wit, a hamburger.

The menu promised Alberta beef, aged white cheddar, caramelized onions, bacon, mushrooms, lettuce, tomato on a house-made sesame bun.

Mr. Kennedy removed the tomato.

He hoisted the sandwich in both hands before chomping down.

Hosanna.

The beef was "surprisingly bold" and "delightfully juicy;" the mushrooms "magnificently subtle;" the house mayonnaise, with its Dijon undertones, enhanced the flavour without overpowering the patty.

He pronounced it the best in the city, in his exuberance spraying a handful of common expletives in his online praise.

It cost \$16, the salary (before taxes) a minimum wage worker earns after two hours of labour.

Mr. Kennedy pronounced it worth every penny.

His associate, Mr. Alaimo, concurred.

They shared their discovery on the blog, before returning six months later.

When he ordered what he by now regarded as a "sly little vixen" of a burger, the waiter asked if he had read about the item on a blog.

Oh, the delight of being an unknown author whose work is recognized.

Read it? I wrote it, he said.

"I quote that review all the time," the waiter told him. "I've sold about 200 burgers because of it."

The food arrived. This time, Mr. Kennedy found the toppings "envelope(d) the patty like the warm arms of a first love."

The sous-chef was brought tableside for introductions, which the blogger found to be a surreal experience.

He came to a realization.

"Somehow we've turned an unhealthy alternative to meeting girls into something worthy of respect," he wrote.

He has since returned to a quest without end, perfection in a patty lasting only as long as the final bite.

KENNEDY'S VERDICT @ VICBURGERS.BLOGSPOT.COM

WHO HE HIS

Donald Kennedy's blog offers meaty opinions on the city's best hamburgers.

He's not a pro, just a hungry 25-year-old with a jones for burgers.

It should be noted that Mr. Kennedy's recommendations come with a warning about mature language. Some readers — and most vegetarians — may be offended.

WHAT HE RECOMMENDS

- The [Loghouse Pub](#) in suburban Langford, where the simple Pearl Burger marries bacon and blue cheese to a six-ounce homemade beef patty.
- The [Glo Europub and Grill](#), where the prime rib burger was just "messy enough to let you know you're having a good time."
- [Aura](#) at the Inn at Laurel Point, where the lunchtime-only Point Burger "pretty much blows away everything else in town."

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