

A toasted potato bun  
tops off the Kickin'  
Boot's Smokestack

The epic meat lineup  
begins with a chilli  
-cheddar sausage

Brisket isn't a flashy  
beef cut, but it's  
loaded with flavour

Pulled pork is a US  
BBQ staple, and the  
bottom of the stack

Horseradish slaw  
gives a kick before  
the tower of meat



# GRAZE ANATOMY

West coast Seattle is starting a food  
revolution, where diners move from  
restaurant to restaurant all in a single  
night. A hungry **Neil Davey** joins in

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# >>IN BALLARD YOU CAN SNACK & DRINK ALL THE WAY UP THE STREET

**T**hink LA and you think Hollywood. Think New York and you think THAT skyline. But think Seattle, and what springs to mind? Coffee? Being Sleepless In? A pompous radio psychiatrist? A soapy medical drama? Rain?

All of the above do apply – although, as three natives of this big Washington state city explained about the weather, it's not actually that damp: "We just tell people that to stop them moving here." Give it another couple of years, however, and the first thing to spring to mind won't be Tom Hanks' insomnia but Seattle's impressive food scene. West coast 'neighbour' Portland currently has the international reputation as the innovative food city but, just a few hours' drive north, Seattle is rapidly closing the gastronomic gap.

'Local and seasonal' has become something of a cliché across the western world, but Seattle's restaurants have been doing it that way for years because, well... as chef Bo Maisano points out, when you can, why wouldn't you?

"The Washington 'larder' is really impressive," says Bo. "We're surrounded by a whole lot of people who are doing everything. We're lucky as heck to live out here and have access to this local bounty, this explosion of new crops and new products, which isn't the case in other parts of the States – you don't get all those avenues of purveyors that we have. Here everybody's into the food. They're doing it

## HOT CAKES

5427 Ballard Ave;  
getyourhotcakes.com

Hot Cakes, according to the sign, is a Molten Chocolate Cakery, selling made-to-order, fondant-like cakes with a variety of fillings and toppings. They also do warm chocolate cookies, butter beer, and boozy (and regular) milkshakes, including Laphroaig and Smoked Chocolate. Need I say more? No wonder all of Ballard seems to finish off its evening here.



new life coming in. Kickin' Boot was part of that trend and there's a lot of nice places opening up, and food trucks, every style, different ethnicities. Ballard's in a good place. We've got a whole bunch of inventive cooks coming into this community."

One delightful outcome of this boom is that many locals tend not to go to just one location for dinner and instead graze through Ballard's various eating options. "From where we are, from one end to the other you can hit about a dozen really well-known destination restaurants," Bo says, "so you can go and snack and drink all the way up the street".

Which is exactly what I do, initially solo, to tackle the Smokestack sandwich – a triple stack of brisket, pulled pork and jalapeno and cheddar sausage which Bo describes, with no little understatement, as being "quite big" – but then with local friends to discover what the rest of the neighbourhood has to offer.

Some of this, it transpires, is borderline *Portlandia* – a bike shop that sells coffee and beer, a card and board games store with a bar and restaurant attached – but both Dutch Bike Co and Café Mox have their charms, particularly the latter, where I was introduced to rumaki: deep-fried bacon stuffed with water chestnuts. Yeah. Exactly. Had there been time we could also have helped ourselves to a game from the >>

their way and different, but it's all local."

Louisiana-born and raised, it wasn't the food that attracted Bo to the region. "I was in Los Angeles," he says, "cooking in a hotel. The LA hotel scene is big restaurants, big operations and I was toast, I needed a break.

"My sister was living in Seattle at the time. I came up here to visit and I packed my bags that month and moved here. That was in 1998, and I've been here ever since. We're surrounded by the mountains and the oceans, so every weekend I get away to the Cascades or the Olympics, checking out the scenery."

After stints in various kitchens – as well as running a series of acclaimed ramen pop-ups last year – Bo has been executive chef at Kickin' Boot Whiskey Kitchen since July 2012. As well as offering some of the finest barbecue found anywhere, and celebrating the myriad joys of the ever-expanding US whiskey scene, Kickin' Boot has helped turn its neighbourhood, Ballard, into arguably Seattle's finest area for eating.

"Seattle has a whole bunch of different neighbourhoods that are all unique in their own way," explains Bo of the city's diverse makeup. "You've got college kids over there, yuppies over here, the hipsters somewhere else, the families in another..."

"I've been in Seattle for 15 years and, as with any city, different areas get popular and others go out of fashion; they evolve, and Ballard's spent the last couple of years just blowing up with restaurants. It's a family neighbourhood, so there are all these older buildings and

## KICKIN' BOOT WHISKEY KITCHEN

5309 22nd Ave; kickinboot.com

Cavernous, well lit, wood-heavy, the Boot is a temple to barbecue and American whiskies, and it's damn near impossible not to come out a convert. The whiskey flights – three shots, around \$20 – are a good deal, and the knowledgeable staff will talk you through them and the rest of the impressive list. The barbecue is the sort of thing that would leave Guy Fieri moaning in pleasure and declaring it "off the hook".



Seattle's iconic  
Space Needle has 25  
lightning rods

## ETTA'S

2020 Western Ave;  
tomdouglas.com

Tom Douglas has probably done more than anyone for Seattle's dining reputation, having founded several thriving restaurants in the city. Etta's is probably the stand-out and the most Seattle-y of the lot, with its water views, Pike Place Market location and seafood menu. You'll be told that the Dungeness Crab Cakes are award-winning and legendary, and discover there's a very good reason for this.

## LOWELL'S / SKYCITY RESTAURANT

1519 Pike Pl; eatatlowells.com  
Broad St; spaceneedle.com

Pike Place and the restaurant at the top of the Space Needle? Aren't they a bit touristy? Yes. But guess what? You're tourists. And the food is excellent at both locations. Brunch at SkyCity is a great meal and a great start to the day, and comes with great views over this great city. It's, er, great. Lowell's has existed at the market for around a century – since 1957 in its present form – and generally does crowd-pleasing things all day with extremely fresh seafood. And there's not a morning that couldn't be improved by a Dungeness Crab Benedict.

## RESTAURANT ZOE

1318 E Union Street;  
restaurantzoe.com

Capitol Hill is another thriving Seattle suburb, named by Wikipedia as "the centre of the city's gay and counterculture communities". So it must be true, right? It's certainly seeing a rise in interesting restaurants and bars, such as Restaurant Zoe, where an "imaginative take on American food" sees Flat Iron steaks sit alongside chicken-fried tofu.

## foodism

## LOCAL 360

2234 1st Ave; local360.org

The name says it all: very little on the menu is sourced further than 360 miles of the restaurant. And that includes most of the spirits. Think comfort eating – steak frites, roasted salmon, poutine, pasta – with an ethical twist and a pretty good carbon footprint. It tastes pretty good too.

## BISCUIT BITCH / THE CRUMPET SHOP

1909 1st Ave;  
biscuitbitch.com  
1503 1st Ave,  
thecrumpet-shop.com

There are more comfort classics – from both sides of the Atlantic – at these two low-key local cafes. Biscuit Bitch (at Caffè Lieto) has kicked the American Southern staple – think a lighter scone – into the 21st Century, with toppings ranging from the classics (bacon, sausage gravy, Louisiana hot links etc) to the more creative, like black-eyed-pea hummus. Just down the road, The Crumpet Shop has been making organic crumpets fresh on site for 36 years, and topping them with things such as almond butter, or lemon curd and ricotta. *Downton Abbey* seems very far away...





# >> I'M MORE OF A FOOD TRUCK KIND OF GUY...

>> shop and played the night away while sipping on some generally enormously strong beers from Seattle's thriving craft brewing scene. However, we had other places to visit, particularly The Walrus & The Carpenter.

Declared one of America's Top 20 Most Important Restaurants in 2013 by *Bon Appetit* magazine, The Walrus is an utter gem, heaving with all the current restaurant clichés – nudge nudge wink wink cocktails (“who ordered the Moustache Ride?”), small plate dining, no bookings, tattooed and extravagantly facial-haired staff, that whole local and seasonal thing – but somehow remains charming and utterly genuine. *Bon Appetit* describes it as “less like a night out and more like eating at a friend's place”. Me, I just liked the fact that they don't make you queue for hours but take your phone number and call you about 30 minutes before your table's ready “so you've got time to finish your drink and make it back here.” I also liked the deep-fried oysters. And the fresh oysters. And the mussels. And the steak tartare...

Bo won't be drawn on a favourite local spot, explaining that he often cooks at home instead of eating out. Besides, the Seattle restaurant scene is constantly expanding and it's impossible to keep up: “There are a tremendous amount of places that I haven't tried,” he admits.

When it comes to eating out, Bo's not looking for finery. “I'm more a middle-of-the-road, food truck kind of guy,” he says. “That's what makes me happy.” In Ballard, and Seattle as a whole, it would appear that the Louisiana-born chef has found his spiritual home... [downtownseattle.com](http://downtownseattle.com)

Photograph (main) by Will Thompson

## CANON

928 12th Ave; [canonseattle.com](http://canonseattle.com)

A whiskey and bitters emporium serving just a few bar snacks (albeit things like foie gras panna cotta, oysters and pork-belly buns) this is the odd one out on this list. But when a place claims – and appears – to have “the western hemisphere's largest spirit collection” you have to take notice. The drinks list has 46 pages of whiskeys and nine pages of expensive rarities – anyone fancy the 1880's Westover Maryland Rye at \$1,225 a shot? – which is impressive. The barman made five people a different bespoke cocktail based on choice of spirit and personal preference. All five of us liked our own drink best. That's even more impressive.



## BITTERROOT

5239 Ballard Ave; [bitterrootbbq.com](http://bitterrootbbq.com)

While it feels wrong to recommend another Ballard barbecue, here are four words to consider: buffalo, fried, chicken, livers. I can confirm two things: a) they might be the best way to spend \$8 in Seattle; and b) they probably shouldn't be eaten as a second dessert after visiting Hot Cakes.



## THE BARKING FROG

Willows Lodge, 14580 NE 145th St, Woodinville; [willowslodge.com](http://willowslodge.com)

A short drive north of Seattle, this suburb is home to most of the local wine production and the charming Willows Lodge Hotel. Chef Bobby Moore – and there's a name you've got to love – takes crowd-pleasing regional favourites to a new level, thanks to cooking that's frequently innovative but mostly lets the ingredients – yep, the local and seasonal ingredients – shine through.

