



# Two Left Forks

Dana Point is your new destination

By Andrew Reed

Dana Point seems to be evolving from a sleepy, coastal community into more of a destination. I always wondered why Laguna Beach and San Clemente got all the attention, while Dana Point flew under the radar between the two of them. Sure, there's an iconic harbor that supplanted an iconic surf break, but Dana Point seemed to be more about a locals-only scene unless you were going whale watching or your 5th grade class was on a field trip to see the tall ship Pilgrim.

That is all changing rapidly and the town now boasts upgraded pedestrian areas, an improved flow for PCH, and a bevy of new restaurants. Leading the charge is Two Left Forks, a comfortable coastal gathering place where you can enjoy a range of satisfying comfort foods.

The physical location of Two Left Forks is within Dana Point's Lantern District, an area defined by the series of street names with the word "lantern" in them that feed into PCH. With a warm décor that adds a level of comfort to clean, European styling, TLF feels very accessible. No pretention and a warm greeting from the staff got the evening meal off on the right foot. We opted for a table on the relatively small outdoor patio. As the evening air cooled, you knew you were near the ocean, as the marine layer started rolling in. But outdoor heaters and a fireplace added both heat and ambience.





As many know, I am a craft beer nut, so I always like to see a few options on tap. TLF comes through with around a dozen solid options. Kudos, as well, for having a couple of ciders on tap! The wine list is also very credible and I was delighted to find a few of my favorites that I don't often see at restaurants. All wines are available by the glass, a source of pride for the restaurant. The menu also provided a substantial list of specialty cocktails and I wanted to check out their chops behind the bar to get things started. I went with a Maple Orange Old Fashion while my dining companion opted for the Blood Orange Cosmopolitan. I was going to say something about the Old Fashion being boozy, but I'm pretty sure that's the point! Both drinks featured fresh fruit juices and the flavors reflected it. A touch of maple syrup was a nice complement to the rye whiskey in my drink, and the Cosmo was bright with fresh fruit flavors to go along with the slight sting of alcohol. There were a number of other interesting concoctions listed, and I look forward to trying a couple of others on my next visit.

The menu at Two Left Forks emphasizes fresh ingredients across a variety of dishes – American-style with more than a few nods to European and Asian cuisines. Always looking out for our readership, we ordered a variety of appetizers in order to get a comprehensive sense of what the kitchen can do. Bacon Wrapped Shrimp, Tuna Nicoise Salad, Goat Cheese Croquettes, Crab Stack, Prosciutto Wrapped Asparagus, and a Short Rib Poutine all riffed across the multiple cuisine styles effortlessly and to great effect. The Poutine, a French Canadian dish combining french fries and gravy, was a standout for me, though some of the other dishes were vying fiercely for top honors.

Having gone a little overboard on the appetizers, we decided to keep the entrée count to three. Again, the choices here reflect the different cultural muses channeled by the chef and his crew and include a diverse set of accompaniments such as English Pea Puree, Forest Mushrooms, and Kaffir Coconut Cream. The Chilean Sea Bass came with mashed potatoes and green beans,

my New York Strip had fingerling potatoes and brussels sprouts, and the TLF Burger (research for when we come back for lunch) had parmesan fries. With a glass of d'Arenberg The Footbolt Shiraz in hand, we dug in with gusto, and everything lived up to the high expectations set by the appetizer round. I thoroughly enjoyed the brandy shallot glaze on my steak and the simple flavors of Beurre Blanc and a tomato chutney were a nice complement to the delicate flavors of the sea bass. The burger is a blend of ground sirloin and brisket and the use of two cheeses and caramelized onions raised it from delicious to decadent.

Speaking of decadent, everyone knows that a proper review of a restaurant requires dessert. I have carried this burden for many reviews and this one would be no exception. The traditional-style Crème Brulee was excellent, but two other items took the cake, so to speak. The Banana Butterscotch touts white chocolate, white chocolate mousse, banana brulee, flourless chocolate cake, and chocolate butterscotch mousse. That would normally serve as an effective mic drop, but the TLF Espresso Chocolate Tart came in over the top with a magical mixture of a cocoa cookie dough tart, espresso Crème Brulee, and chocolate cream accompanied by a shot of warm orange brandy espresso and hot chocolate. Mic drop...

Dana Point appears to be waking up from its seaside slumber and it's time to give it another visit. Go whale watching, take a stroll around the harbor or along the Bluff Top Trail, take a short hike at the Dana Point Headlands, or see what's popping up in the new pedestrian areas. Then go to Two Left Forks and reward yourself for your renewed sense of adventure! Richard Henry Dana would be proud.

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