



BUN YUM: A Phat Burger patty with cheese hot off the grill, sided by fries, before it gets dressed to the nines at the well-stocked condiment bar. Photo by Nic Coury
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Phat Burger

Totally Stacked: Seaside's Phat Burger puts together a great thing with good beef and glorious condiments.

By [Mark C. Anderson](#)

The *Weekly* policy is to wait at least three months to review a new restaurant. The philosophy is simple: Starting up a restaurant is damn hard, and it's only fair that we give owners of new restaurants those weeks to iron out service and recipe wrinkles.

Not this time.

We broke that rule here because still-infant Phatburger in Seaside has it figured out. Their formula is two-step simple, surprisingly uncommon and just about genius: **1)** Present sturdy burgers from a good source cooked to order. **2)** Offer a variety of quality condiments, unleashing people to customize their way to completion (and to find only one perpetrator to prosecute for a poorly put together patty wagon: themselves).

The foundation here is quality never-frozen ground beef from Sierra Meat Co. and attentive temperature treatment. Medium is standard unless otherwise specified; though the cooks started off with a tendency to overcook, they're on their game these days, and they get the chicken sandwich just-right juicy, too. The medium-rare blue cheese burger with bacon I had the other day was a beautiful thing— with a perfect spot of pink in the middle, thick high-grade bacon, and lots of blue cheese bonding nicely with the blackened patty.

The condiments, meanwhile, are glorious. The menu offers things that simply make the world tastier: sautéed mushrooms, fried eggs, bacon, chili, sautéed onions, Ortega chilies, avocado. And the condiment bar, meanwhile, is an exhibition of a sadly departed art.

Tubs, seemingly constantly stocked, hold red onions and black olives, leaf romaine and shredded iceberg, snap-crisp pickles, pepperoncinis and jalapeños, ranch dressing, thousand island, barbecue sauce and a good amount more. I've heard one colleague describe it with terms she usually reserves for really cute and strappy shoes; another couldn't resist announcing to the newsroom that she had made her own salad straight from the toppings.

For the two local families behind the operation – **the Newtons, who brought you arguably the best breakfast joint in Seaside, The Breakfast Club**, partnered with their relatives Rob Barb, Marykay Riparetti and Doug Riparetti– it makes great business sense. People get everything they want, and in so doing, run up a healthy bill for a gloriously gut-busting burger that they remember for weeks. Phat burger with bacon, avocado, some sautéed onions and swiss? \$8, the easy way.

Other supporting role items are well executed, too. I really liked the chicken sandwich I regaled with bacon, pepper jack and sautéed mushrooms– though I'd caution against the mushrooms because they are blander than the other hot toppings.

The BBQ Pulled Pork Sandwich (\$5; \$8/combo), with pork from Sysco, piles big torn pieces of pig in sufficiently messy amounts of tasty, if unspicy, sauce. The onion rings (\$3 à la carte) are respectable; the sweet potato fries (\$3) have been at turns perfect, other times chewy; the standard fries (\$2.50) have been the most reliably rewarding. I tried a bite of the fish from a friend's fish and chips dish (\$8.75; I didn't have the nerve to order fish at a spot surnamed "Burger"), and it was good once I got through its fried armor. They've even added a chili cheese dog.

The pleasing ingredients extend beyond the edible. The racetrack theme of the place (Marykay's design) is fun and aesthetically pleasing. They deal well with the ever-increasing crowds by sending a second attendant into the line to take orders. Multiple patios have good seats in shade and sun. Milkshakes (\$3.50) are about to become a rare reality– where can a guy get a milkshake in Seaside these days?– the machine just arrived. And the burgers come out quickly, with the aid of a helpful employee positioned at the counter to streamline and distribute.

My beefs are very brief: The creativity department deserves a little lame-name spanking on the sesame-seed buns for nibbling on the proud tradition that is Southern California's Fat Burger. They could also conjure a way to offer silverware that isn't plastic.

Finally, as we've reported in these pages, red meat really should be a luxury– a certain disengagement with guilt, on the health and the global warming front, is necessary to eat there as frequently as the flavor encourages. To that end, the veggie Boca burger is bland– though all the toppings help take care of that. I did try a work around: I ordered a bunch of the savory sides on a bun– sautéed onions and mushrooms, Ortega chillies, fried egg and pepper jack. It was awesome. In fact, that's my token advice: They should craft a few of these for the menu. Beyond that, they've got pretty much everything else figured out.

PHAT BURGER 1520 Del Monte Blvd., Seaside • 11am-8daily; until 9pm Fri/Sat. • 394-7428, [Link](#)