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GETAWAYS

# WASHINGTONIAN

## 100 Very Best Restaurants

Where to eat  
in DC,  
Maryland, and  
Virginia



FEBRUARY 2023 \$5.95



Tiramisu at  
Caruso's Grocery  
on Capitol Hill



Albi's  
wood-fired  
grill

**A lot has changed** since we last published *Washingtonian's* annual list of the area's 100 Very Best Restaurants, back in the early days of 2020.

We've said goodbye to beloved dining spots such as Bad Saint and Kith/Kin and Rappahannock Oyster Bar. Restaurants have faced seismic challenges. And it's a pretty tough time to be a diner, too. Reservation cancellation fees are frequent and steep. Cocktail prices, menu prices—heck, even sad-desk-salad prices—have shot up, along with gratuity expectations. And some dining rooms remain short-staffed.

Our idea of what a “best” restaurant means has also shifted. While we previously considered only sit-down places, we now put

PREVIOUS SPREAD: PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE DABNEY, ALBI, HAPPY GYRD, INFERNO PIZZERIA, SUSHI TARO, OMAKASE ROKU, SUSHI NAKAZAWA, AND XIQUET BY SCOTT SUCHMAN; CARBONIE AND CAUSA BY REY LOPEZ; PINEAPPLE B PEARLS BY APHRA ADKINS

The  
freshened-  
up dining  
room at the  
Dabney



carryouts, pop-ups, and food trucks in the mix, too.

At the same time, in the shadow of the past three years, special occasions feel as significant as ever. Among our favorite ways to celebrate: the new tasting menu at the Dabney (our pick for Washington's number-one restaurant this year), a round of caviar dumplings with a side of bejeweled handcuffs at Pineapple & Pearls, and a take-home plate of fantasy-inducing mozzarella sticks from Happy Gyro, the Dupont carryout run by former Komi proprietor Johnny Monis.

Whatever the occasion, consider this your road map to the Washington food scene. Here are the 100 places—the top 25 of them ranked—that we're most excited to dine at right now.

**WHAT'S THE PRICE  
BREAKDOWN?**

Based on dinner for two, including tax and a 20-percent tip:

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**Very expensive:** \$300 or more

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**Expensive:** \$201 to \$299

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**Moderate:** \$101 to \$200

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**Inexpensive:** \$100 or less

THIS SPREAD: PHOTOGRAPHS BY SCOTT SUCHMAN

## A&J

1319 ROCKVILLE  
PIKE, ROCKVILLE;  
4316 MARKHAM ST.,  
ANNANDALE

The lengthy northern Chinese dim sum menu might seem overwhelming at first glance. Our strategy: Start with housemade noodles (particularly the wide ribbons in hot-and-sour sauce), and always, always order the pan-fried pork dumplings. From there, it's hard to go wrong with dishes like thousand-layer pancakes, pig ears slicked in chili oil, and garlicky cucumber salad. Plates are affordable enough to sample widely. **Inexpensive.**

## Agni

46005 REGAL PLAZA,  
STERLING

Here's a place to explore spicy South Indian cuisine dish by dish—there isn't a plate over \$20, and most are far less. Where to start? Consider the masala omelet with green chilies; the kothu parotta, a matzo-brei-like fry-up of diced bread, vegetables, and chicken; the mutton sukka, fiery hunks of tender goat; and malli chicken curry with an appealing sour leaf tang. Our favorite of all: smoky shrimp in a shallot-coconut curry. **Inexpensive.**

## All-Purpose

1250 NINTH ST., NW;  
79 POTOMAC AVE., SE

The crisp-bottomed, Jersey-style pizzas, stretched from a dough that ferments for three days and finished in a deck oven, are what these Shaw and Navy Yard restaurants are best known for. Precede

your pie—we like the pepperoni-and-honey Buona and the sausage-and-peppers Duke #7—with a zingy house salad (like the innards of a great Italian sub), a round of fried Brussels sprouts with orange yogurt, or a gooey eggplant parm. The places also host a bang-up happy hour and brunch. **Moderate.**

## Ama Ami

703 EDGEWOOD ST., NE

Sushi Taro alums Zach Ramos and Amy Phan specialize in jewel-box-like chirashi bowls at their takeout-only pop-up in the food incubator Mess Hall. These treasure chests of rice and raw seafood, almost too pretty to eat, are packed with premium specialties like uni, fatty tuna, and Hawaiian black-footed limpets. The duo also prepare “homakase” sushi feasts, which they'll set up at private homes. We're eagerly awaiting their chirashi cafe and omakase counter, Two Nine, coming to Georgetown this year. **Moderate to very expensive.**

## Anafre

3704 14TH ST., NW

Seafood tops everything from guacamole to nachos at this coastal Mexican restaurant from chef Alfredo Solís, also behind nearby Mezcale and the Logan Circle taco destination El Sol. But the go-to here is Sinaloa-style *vuelve a la vida* (translation: “return to life”), a bountiful mix of crab, shrimp, octopus, lobster, and avocado

in spicy citrus broth. Mexican pizzas are another intriguing surprise, especially those topped with chicken and mole poblano or with chiles rellenos. **Inexpensive.**

## Aracosia McLean and Bistro Aracosia

1381 BEVERLY RD., McLEAN;  
5100 MacARTHUR BLVD., NW

For us, the big question when we're eating Afghan is: Aushak or mantu? These laid-back spots don't make you choose, thanks to a platter featuring the garlicky yogurt-slayered dumplings with both scallion-and-leek and beef fillings. (If you ask, they may also add a pumpkin version to the array.) A pileup of charbroiled lamb shoulder, rib chops, and tenderloin is another combo plate we dig. You could call it a meal, but what about the sabzi, fried triangles of dough filled with greens? Or the roasted eggplant with garlic yogurt? We always over-order just to rack up a few days' worth of leftovers. **Moderate.**

## Baan Siam

425 I ST., NW

Fire- and flavor-seekers fretted when chef Jeeraporn “P’Boom” Poksupthong swapped her tiny Baan Thai in Logan Circle for much roomier Mount Vernon Triangle quarters. Thankfully, her punchy Northern Thai dishes aren't diluted (plus there's a patio and lychee-martini-ready bar). We can't visit without ordering garlicky vermicelli cloaked in peanut sauce, pork belly over chili-fried rice, or the best khao soi in town—but the lengthy

menu is worth exploration, including specials like crispy flying-fish salad and long-simmered soups. **Moderate.**

## Bammy's

301 WATER ST., SE

Navy Yard's Caribbean destination is better than ever thanks to new chef/partner Peter Prime (formerly behind Cane), who's pushing the menu beyond rum drinks and jerk chicken. Prime channels his Trinidadian roots in delicious, heaping platters of Madras duck curry, snapper escovitch blanketed in herbs, and a humble yet memorable bowl of coconut-simmered pigeon peas. For festive feasts, there's a paella-like “cook-up” of crispy rice and accompaniments or a family-style tasting for \$75. **Moderate.**

## Bantam King, Daikaya, Haikan, and Hatoba

501 G ST., NW;  
705 SIXTH ST., NW;  
805 V ST., NW;  
300 TINGEY ST., SE

Daisuke Utagawa and chef Katsuya Fukushima's quartet of ramen shops are some of the best places to slurp in DC, whether you're tucking into classic Sapporo-style broths at Daikaya and Haikan, chicken ramen and crispy birds at Bantam King, or Asian pub fare at Hatoba. Springy Hokkaido-made noodles and soulful stocks are key throughout. We also love hiding away in Daikaya's

slinky upstairs izakaya for Japanese whiskeys and playful plates such as Wagyu donburi or okonomiyaki-style pork. **Inexpensive to moderate.**

## Bar Spero

250 MASSACHUSETTS AVE., NW

At this Capitol Crossing newcomer, Reverie chef/owner Johnny Spero turns his focus to Spain's Basque Country. We come to the sleek, pale-wood dining room for his takes on vegetables, such as a whole potato cooked in kombu butter and accented with botarga or a giant koginut squash, and all manner of seafood, whether grilled oysters with buttery cider sauce or fire-licked lobster. Spring for the crusty sourdough from Manifest Bread—it's delicious with butter laced with La Tur cheese, but you'll want it to sop up every bit of the kitchen's sauces and broths. **Expensive.**

## Bas Rouge

19 FEDERAL ST., EASTON

Is it worth crossing the Bay Bridge for dinner? Yes, if your target is entrepreneur Paul Prager's chic fleet of Easton restaurants, particularly the crown jewel, Bas Rouge. The 54-seat gem—all Old World style with parlor chandeliers and a Champagne trolley—is a haven for genteel service and continental European cuisine. Dinner is a tasting menu, but we're equally enticed by a leisurely à la carte lunch of chestnut velouté and destination-worthy Wiener schnitzel. **Very expensive.**