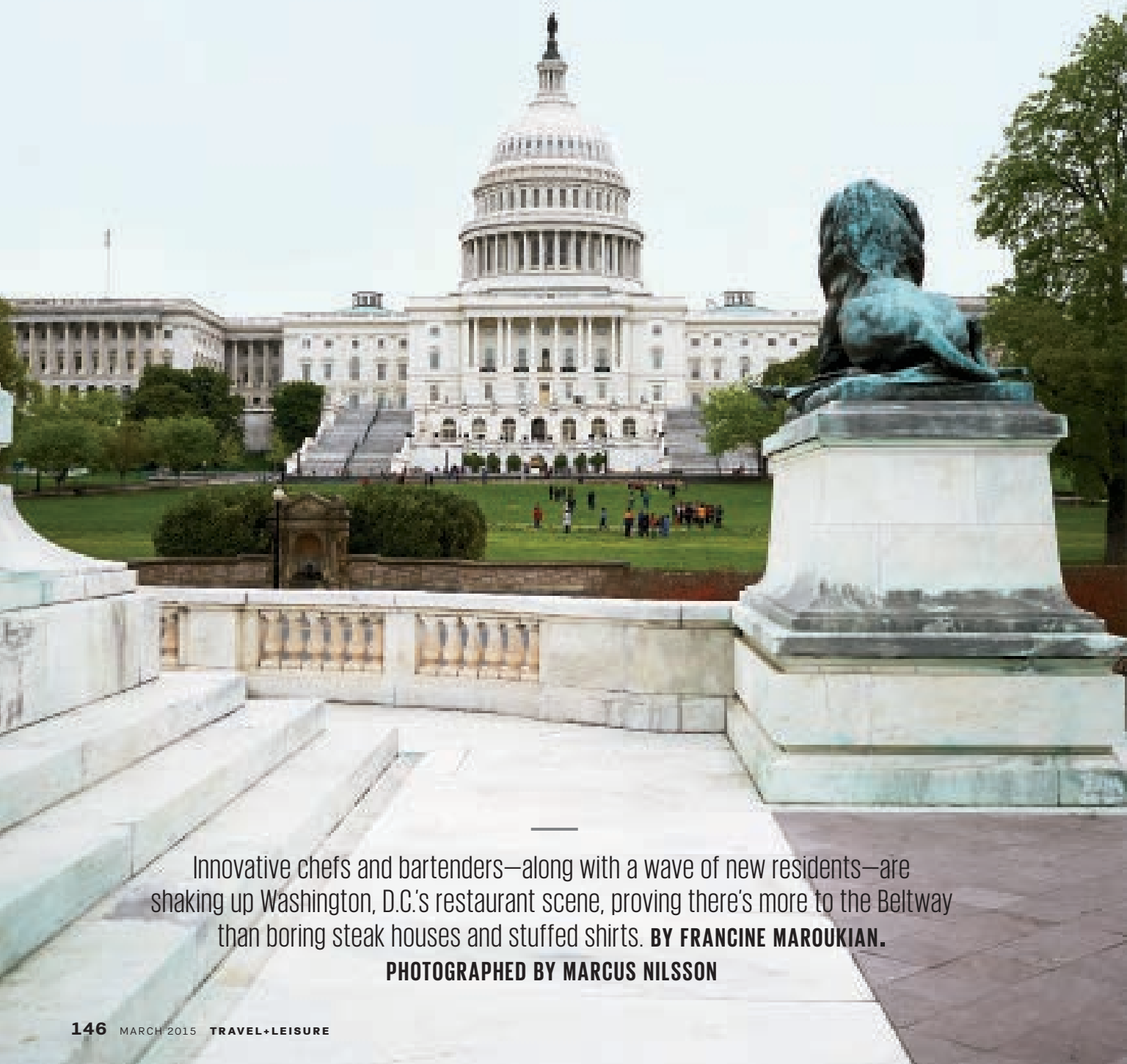


CAPITAL



Innovative chefs and bartenders—along with a wave of new residents—are shaking up Washington, D.C.'s restaurant scene, proving there's more to the Beltway than boring steak houses and stuffed shirts. **BY FRANCINE MAROUKIAN.**

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MARCUS NILSSON

DINING



This page: Grilled octopus with potato-and-caper salad at Estadio, chef Haidar Karoun's Spanish-influenced restaurant.
Opposite: The U.S. Capitol, as seen from the Ulysses S. Grant Memorial.



Clockwise from top left: Chef Michael Friedman of the Red Hen; Estadio, in Logan Circle; pork-belly *bocadillo* at Estadio; Sundeitch, a lunch spot in Shaw; the “Istanbul” sandwich, made with ground beef and lamb, at Sundeitch; Del Campo, near Chinatown.

Washington, D.C., always takes its cues from its Resident in Chief. And since the Obamas have been in town, D.C. has been riding a wave of energy, with millennials, who helped put the administration in office, moving to the metro area in big numbers. Cranes now hover over a boomtown skyline, and gentrification is sweeping through inner-city neighborhoods, bringing with it new businesses—and new restaurants. A host of pioneering chefs, bartenders, and entrepreneurs caters to D.C.’s fresh faces, who refuse to settle for the bland, lobbyist-filled steak houses and diplomat-packed French dining rooms that used to define the city’s cuisine.

DOMESTIC POLICY

As you might expect in the nation’s capital, there are many distinct takes on classic American fare here, with chefs sourcing crops and livestock from across the mid-Atlantic region—and giving traditional techniques a modern spin. Leading the charge is the **Red Hen**. With its leather-topped bar, brick walls, and wood-fired-grill aroma, it has become a fixture in Bloomingdale, a front-stoop neighborhood lined with Victorian row houses. The restaurant updates its menu and wine list seasonally, but chef Michael Friedman always includes throwbacks to the red-sauce joints of his Jersey youth, like house-made rigatoni in a fennel-sausage *ragù* or a chicken *fra diavolo* punched up Sicilian-style



Clockwise from top left: Iron Gate's patio; chicken fra diavolo at the Red Hen; Stephen Starr's French brasserie, Le Diplomate; kimchi ramen at Toki Underground; Eat the Rich, known for its oysters; sumac roasted potatoes at Iron Gate.

with fiery red chiles, preserved lemons, and currants. Sommelier Sebastian Zutant presides over a well-edited wine list heavy on old-world bottles.

Just south in the Penn Quarter is the **Partisan**, restaurateur Michael Babin's haven for carnivores, where the meat comes from farms in places like Virginia and Pennsylvania's Lancaster County. (You can also buy it from the Red Apron, his butcher shop next door.) The expansive charcuterie menu is divided into categories like "bright" (Thai-basil-cured *bresaola* beef) and "herbal and floral" (orange-basil pork rillettes). Nearby, in the historically African American neighborhood of Shaw, award-winning bartender Derek Brown plays off D.C.'s ties to the South at **Southern Efficiency**. More than 50 domestic whiskeys complement a compact menu of lesser-known regional

specialties like Virginia peanut soup and "country captain," a one-pot chicken stew infused with curry—a reference to the British-colonial spice trade. **Eat the Rich**, another Shaw success story from Brown, specializes in hearty seafood dishes like fish chowder with steamed clams and Chesapeake oysters that arrive at just the right temperature to enhance their flavor without a hint of splintered shell (what the pros call "shrapnel"). And to help diners get in touch with their inner longshoreman, Brown sends out 32-ounce pitchers of cocktails (try Drink the Martini, made with local Green Hat Gin).

A few blocks away, **Seasonal Pantry** acts as a neighborhood market by day, and a ticket-only restaurant with a 12-seat communal table by night. Chef-owner Daniel O'Brien draws inspiration from vintage community

The team behind
Toki Underground
(from left): Sous-
chef Howard Chang,
chef-owner Erik
Bruner-Yang, and
beverage director
Colin Sugalski.

THE NEW D.C. ESTABLISHMENT

Del Campo
777 I St. NW;
delcampodc.com. \$\$\$

Eat the Rich
1839 Seventh St. NW;
etrbar.com. \$\$

Estadio
1520 14th St. NW;
estadio-dc.com. \$\$

Iron Gate
1734 N St. NW;
irongaterestaurantdc.com. \$\$\$

Le Diplomate
1601 14th St. NW;
lediplomatedc.com. \$\$\$

Mockingbird Hill
1843 Seventh St. NW;
drinkmoresherry.com. \$\$

The Partisan
709 D St. NW;
thepartisandc.com. \$\$\$

Rasika
633 D St. NW;
rasikarestaurant.com. \$\$\$

Red Hen
1822 First St. NW;
theredhendc.com. \$\$\$

Seasonal Pantry
1314½ Ninth St. NW;
seasonalpantry.com. \$\$\$\$

The Source
575 Pennsylvania Ave. NW;
wolfgangpuck.com. \$\$\$\$

Southern Efficiency
1841 Seventh St. NW;
whiskeyhome.com. \$\$

Sundevich
1314 Ninth St. NW;
sundevich.com. \$\$

Toki Underground
1234 H St. NE;
tokiunderground.com. \$\$

Two Birds One Stone
1800 14th St. NW;
2birds1stonedc.com. \$

cookbooks to create nostalgic dishes that lodge in your memory, like house-made brioche stuffed with bacon, caramelized-onion waffles topped with spiced maple syrup, and duck pot pie served with smoked breast, turnips, and crispy skin on the side. Plan ahead: seats become available one month in advance.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

D.C. entertains people from around the world, and thanks to its role as global host, the ethnic-restaurant scene is both authentic and innovative. This wasn't the case 26 years ago, when New Delhi native Ashok Bajaj opened his first venture, the Bombay Club, and had to distribute cards to get customers in the door. That all changed after a 1993 visit from President Clinton sparked citywide interest; today, Bajaj runs eight restaurants, including the popular **Rasika**, in the Penn Quarter. With its dark-wood floors, tangerine accents, and curtain of hanging Belgian crystals tipped in ruby red, the place glows—and so do the dishes, prepared by 2014 James Beard Award winner Vikram Sunderam, which feature the rich, round flavors of sophisticated Indian cuisine. Don't miss the *palak chaat*, the house specialty of crisp fried baby spinach with yogurt, tamarind, and dates, which is simultaneously earthy and airy.

At the minimalist **Del Campo** a few blocks north, near Chinatown, chef Victor Albusu's passion for asado, Argentina's answer to barbecue, transforms the standard steak house into a personal statement. Albusu, who at the age of 10 was already working the butcher's saw in his mother's Latin American market in Virginia, has incredible control over his meat, cooking it rare while getting crisp edges. With vegetables, he grills one side beyond caramelization—burnt, not burned.

Due east in the still-gritty H Street corridor, chef Erik Bruner-Yang looked to his family's heritage in creating **Toki Underground**, a Taiwanese noodle shop perched 32 steps above street level. Locals queue up to get into the tiny, quirky dining room, where the counter footrests are fashioned from discarded skateboard decks. The menu is equally economical: five ramen bowls with add-ons for freestylers, plus Yang's cross-cultural dessert of warm chocolate-chip cookies on a bed of red-miso buttercream—velvety sweet with just the right touch of weird.

A few miles west at **Estadio**, a standout on the 14th Street restaurant strip in Logan Circle, chef Haidar Karoum serves twists on traditional Spanish dishes, like a deceptively simple *tortilla española* of creamy layered eggs and potatoes set off by sherry-vinegar-doused roasted peppers, and *bacalao crudo* with jalapeño, avocado, orange, and olive oil.

On weekends, the **Source**, adjacent to the Newseum, just off the National Mall, is the place to go for brunch. The stars of chef Scott Drewno's inventive dim sum menu are the delicate chive-and-*kurobuta*-pork dumplings and puffy *bao* buns wrapped around lacquered Pennsylvania-

farmed duck, served hot and fresh at the table—no more waiting until the carts roll by.

Sundevich, a casual spot north on Naylor Court, has a similar cult following. The sandwiches are named for the cities their flavors represent: you can travel from “Seoul” (*bulgogi* beef, kimchi, greens, garlic mayo) to “Buenos Aires” (grilled steak, *chimichurri*, sautéed onions) in the course of a single meal.

VISITING DIGNITARY

No other out-of-towner has been welcomed into the fold quite like Philadelphia restaurateur Stephen Starr, who rolled into D.C. in 2013 with his French brasserie, **Le Diplomate**. Starr reportedly spent more than \$6 million to renovate a defunct dry cleaner and wound up with an instant institution. Soon after the doors opened in Logan Circle, city councilman Jack Evans launched his mayoral campaign here, saying it symbolized the revitalization of the city. It also represents the new Washington in its thoroughly democratic approach. No matter who's at the table—whether the First Lady, Vice President Biden, or Secretary Kerry—there's something for everyone. From perfectly crusted baguettes and Gruyère omelettes to onion soup, it's a menu of crowd favorites.

THE COCKTAIL CAUCUS

In this town, political debates grow more spirited when the drinks are well crafted. At the subterranean bar **Two Birds One Stone**, over on the U Street corridor, whitewashed walls and splashes of cool lighting conjure up an Aegean nightspot—a welcome change from the city's ubiquitous dark speakeasies. Weekly drink menus (with ink and pencil cartoons drawn by bar director Adam Bernbach) include a punch of the day and a grappa cocktail with bitters, lemon juice, and honey, served in mismatched vintage glasses. In Shaw, Derek Brown has another hit on his hands with **Mockingbird Hill**, which serves 80 different sherries alongside cured hams like Surryano, a local version of Spain's famous *jamón serrano* from third-generation Virginia cure master Sam Edwards. During the day, the bar turns into a coffeehouse offering seasonal brews and tasting flights consisting of three beans or blends.

Housed in historic Spanish-style stables in Dupont Circle, Michael Babin's **Iron Gate** is dramatically set off by a path of lanterns leading from the sidewalk to the enclosed carriage way bar. Inside, you'll find craft cocktails and a taverna-style menu from chef Anthony Chittum, whose love of Mediterranean coastal cooking shows up in dishes like peppery roasted Sicilian olives and baked Chincoteague oysters with a spanakopita-style topping. With its long zinc counter and low lighting, the bar has become one of D.C.'s most atmospheric destinations for drinks—before, after, or instead of dinner. +