

Association News

Washington Restaurants: From Politics to Ethnic Cuisine

Joan Nathan

Editor's Note: This article is reprinted from the Spring 1984 issue of PS. The addresses and phone numbers of the restaurants have been updated.

There are a few rather curious aspects to dining in Washington. Since it is the nation's capital, one would expect that it could boast, like other major American cities during the revival of American food, of being home to a new breed of star-spangled American chefs. But Washington has neither a New Orleans Paul Prudhomme, a San Francisco Brad Ogden, nor a New York Larry Forgione. The White House Executive chef is Swiss, the three best restaurants in town French. The only hotel restaurant purporting to serve strictly American food is the Vista International's **American Harvest Restaurant**, 1400 M St., NW, 429-1700, whose chef is Austrian born (\$\$).

Another curiosity—not unique to Washington, though honed here to a fine art—is that where you dine is often more important than what you eat. Perhaps Paul Prudhomme said it best about another city, "New Orleans is a city where the people eat out all the time and then fight about it. We have our favorite restaurants down here the way other cities talk about sports teams." But in

political Washington, food is more often than not the lesser concern when Washingtonians break bread.

But times are a changing. What Washington lacks in home-grown American chefs is more than made up for by the sheer variety of exotic and different international fare. And in this new breed of restaurants you won't worry about whom you are seen with. They're a bit off the beaten track of K Street and environs where the legal/political/lobbying elite of Washington congregates. What might interest political scientists is the fact that there are more Ethiopian restaurants in Washington than anywhere in the world outside of Ethiopia (at this writing 11) and two Chinese restaurants under contract to the People's Republic of China. El Salvadorian, Afghani, Indian, Lebanese, and Persian restaurants are increasing in numbers. There is a local joke that as each country opens an embassy in Washington the brother of the Ambassador opens a restaurant.

Whatever the reason for the enormous increase in ethnic restaurants, their popularity indicates that it is no longer only the elite who dine out. New immigrants and natives alike are seeking good, exotic fare at reasonable prices. Just ramble up 18th Street to Columbia Road to see an array of small, international restaurants reflecting shifting populations in the nation's capital, a microcosm of what is happening throughout the country.

Like any food writer, I have my preferences. I favor the pleasant, provincial restaurant which tells me more about the ingredients that go into my food than the cost of the rent which I, by mere presence, am supporting. I also like to eat in restaurants that reflect the political and social structure of the city. The following reviews present this point of view.

Joan Nathan, regular contributor to the "Washington Post Magazine" on food and entertaining, is the author of the Tastemaker Award-winning *An American Folklife Cookbook* (Shocken Books, 1984), *The Jewish Holiday Kitchen* (Shocken Books, 1979) and *The Flavor of Jerusalem* (Little Brown, 1975).

266 PS Spring 1986

Several of these restaurants are within walking distance of the Washington Hilton Hotel. Reservations for lunch and dinner are suggested at all but the simplest restaurants.

The Political Scene

For those who want to see the political elite, get invited to the Senate dining room, the Press Club, or the White House. If that is not possible, try the less conspicuous white house across the street, **La Maison Blanche**, the successor to Sans Souci, at 1725 F St., NW, 842-0070. Particularly popular at lunchtime, La Maison Blanche attracts Washington's who's who. Art Buchwald's banquet next to the wall faces the crowd. Included in his lunch bunch are Ben Bradlee, Jack Valenti, Edward Bennett Williams, and Joseph Califano, who flip a coin to see who picks up the tab. This large, open dining room has an extensive French menu. Its pates are particularly good. Otherwise, opt for daily specials such as their "L'assiette de Pecheur," assorted steamed seafood with a saffron butter sauce with oysters wrapped in spinach in a white butter, basil, and saffron sauce. Preheater special, \$16.95 (\$\$ **).

The lobbying crowd sticks to **The Monocle**, 107 D St., NE, 546-4488, with its clublike atmosphere (\$\$) and **209½** on Capitol Hill, 209½ Pennsylvania Ave., SE, 544-6352 (\$\$). 209½ has fresh, innovative, and expensive new American food. Nearer to the Hilton is a 209½ less-expensive spinoff: a politically amusing **Mrs. Simpson's** with decor inspired by Edward the VIII's abdication, 2915 Connecticut Ave., NW, 332-8300 (\$ *). 209½'s sinfully delicious Figs Alice B. Toklas has appropriately become Prunes Noel Coward.

Duke Zeibert's, a Washington institution for many years, has reopened in the stun-

ning new Washington Square Building, 1050 Connecticut Ave., NW, 466-3730 (\$ *). Don't go there for the food but for the atmosphere in this mezzanine restaurant with wide open vistas. Duke's former headwaiter, **Mel Krupin**, opened up down the street, 1120 Connecticut Ave., NW, 331-7000 (\$ *), garnering Duke's clientele when the building for the original Duke's was torn down. Now there is an outright competition among Duke's oldest customers, many from nearby ABC and *The New York Times*, who have had brief flirtations with the new Duke's but return to Mel's because they find the food better. At Duke's stick with the fresh broiled fish and cole slaw. Duke's and Mel's are the closest Washington has to good old-time atmospheric New York delicatessens *a la* Ruben's or Lindy's.

Duke's next door neighbor at 1050 Connecticut Ave., NW is **Le Pavillon**, 833-3846 (\$\$ *). A big controversy brewed over this and its two rivals: **Jean Louis** at the Watergate, 2650 Virginia Ave., NW, 298-4488 (\$\$) and **Le Lion d'Or**, 1150 Connecticut Ave., NW, 296-7972 (\$\$ *). *Washington Post's* restaurant critic Phyllis Richman and *Washingtonian Magazine's* Robert Schoffner have locked forks over these three. Both agree that Le Lion d'Or is a seasoned big brother to the other two, but Schoffner seems to have a personal vendetta against Jean Louis Palladin, who is considered by French restaurant critic Christian Millau to be the best French chef outside of France and who, while in France at his restaurant in Condom, was the youngest to receive two stars. Schoffner rates the Pavillon with the best of France but has given Jean Louis scathing reviews, not even including him in his 50 best restaurants of Washington. Richman has been more evenhanded recognizing the extraordinary artistry of both Palladin and of the Pavillon's Yannick Cam. The former *New York Times* restaurant critic Mimi Sheraton got into the fray two years ago, rating Jean Louis as Washington's best all-around French restaurant with the caveat of ultimate praise to Cam's extraordinary desserts. Jean Pierre Goyenvalle, chef-owner of Le Lion d'Or and Washington French chef to be chosen for Julia Child's

Restaurant Key:

- * within walking distance of the Washington Hilton
- ** preheater special
- \$ moderate to relatively expensive
- \$\$ expensive
- ¢ inexpensive

Association News

"Dining Out with Julia" series, is an excellent, seasoned chef. You won't get the surprises you will at the other two restaurants but you'll get fine food and at lower prices. His souffles are city renowned. His many regular customers seem to receive the best treatment; the dining room is crowded, not the best for an intimate conversation. Palladin and Cam are our two best contemporary culinary artists, Palladin the more earthy and robust in his portions, choosing warm colors like oranges, reds, and greens to sauce his dishes and Cam more stylized and tending to the Oriental. If you can afford it, try them both: Jean Louis at Watergate and Le Pavillon.

The Jockey Club, 2100 Massachusetts Ave., NW, 659-8000, never one to have extraordinary food, is still politically popular and its Fairfax bar, the closest Washington has to the Plaza's Oak Room, is a great place to meet someone for drinks (\$\$ *).

A different kind of elite hangs out at my favorite breakfast joint, the **Florida Avenue Grill**, a short cab ride from the Hilton at 1100 Florida Ave., NW, 265-1586. Open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. for the past 40 years, the Grill has the best homemade biscuits and cornbread in town. This is a tiny diner where black political cronies meet with the nation's cab drivers to enjoy down-home soul food in a humming atmosphere (¢).

French Restaurants

Three of Washington's top French restaurants are described under "The Political Scene."

The most underrated French restaurant in this town is **La Maree** at 1919 I St., NW, 659-4447. Chef-owner Jean Bouche's fish dishes are his forte and the pastries some of the best in town. It is a quiet restaurant, one where you can have a good conversation and a good meal without paying exorbitant prices (\$\$ * **).

If you want a good meal before theater or late at night, try the **Bistro Francais** in the heart of Georgetown, 3124-28 M St., NW, 338-3830, still the hang-out for the city's French chefs who, after richly saucing their own dishes all evening, go to the bistro for a simple beefsteak

and honest-to-goodness French fries. The menu always includes provincial French dishes. Thursday night is Couscous night (\$ **).

Another bistrolike restaurant in Georgetown is **La Chaumiere**, 2813 M St., NW, 338-1784, a favorite of State Department types who want to eat formally, yet quietly. Daily specials are quite interesting. Entrees \$8.50-14.95 (\$).

La Brasserie on Capitol Hill is also a good bet, 293 Massachusetts Ave., NE, 546-6066. Chef Gaby Aubouin is always trying new dishes; eating outside on the terrace is quite a treat (\$).

Considered by many to be the best gastronomic buy in the city is **Le Gaulois**, near the State Department, 2133 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, 466-3232. The food is professionally prepared and reasonably priced. Cuisine minceur dishes are included on the menu. The only problems with this restaurant are its popularity and the closeness of the tables, thwarting any attempt at fine conversation (\$).

Luckily for the conference goers, Georgetown's **Tout Va Bien**, 1063 31st St., NW, 965-1212 (\$) has just opened a spin-off, **La Chandelle**, 1714 Connecticut Ave., NW, 328-6228 (\$). Both restaurants serve similar imaginative French cuisine in bright environments; the columned room of La Chandelle, once a real estate office, breathes of past history in the nation's capital. Dishes like a curried apple soup, extraordinary liver with shallots and avocado, a pretty spinach terrine and an outstanding trifle have earned these Moroccan-owned restaurants a loyal clientele.

The Bread Oven has several locations; the one at 1220 19th St., NW, 466-4264, is within walking distance of the Hilton. It's a natural for breakfast meetings. Talk for hours over cafe au lait, homemade croissants and crusty French bread. Lunchtime is more crowded. Stick to the daily specials and make sure to dab up your sauces with bread (\$ *).

Le Manouche, a few blocks from the Hilton at 1724 Connecticut Ave., NW, 462-8771, is one of those pleasantly dark French restaurants with reasonable prices and good food. Occasionally the Yugoslav owners serve Yugoslav special-

ties (\$ * **).

Continental

For those who like to indulge in afternoon tea, there is no better place than the **Garden Terrace** of the Four Seasons Hotel at the edge of Georgetown, 2800 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, 342-0444. High tea includes Devon cream, scones, tea sandwiches, a variety of (alas) teabagged English tea, and pastries, all set on beautiful china and silver. A pianist plays between 4 p.m. and midnight (\$\$).

Cantina d'Italia, 1214-A 18th St., NW, 659-1830, is a real Washington restaurant, the oldest of the greats. Open weekdays only (it doesn't need the week-end business), Cantina serves imaginative, rich, expensive northern Italian cuisine. Chef-owner Joseph de Assereto's personality is as effusive as his food is creative. Fresh, fresh vegetables and herbs, pastas like his spaghetti, spinach, tomato and golden noodles with hot and mild sausages, garlic cloves and tomato sauces tossed with parmesan cheese, and oh, that Chocolate Espresso Cheesecake! (\$\$ *).

Il Giardino, 1110 21st St., NW, 223-4555, another pricey Italian restaurant, has more space than Cantina and is certainly more attractive. Veal dishes and spinach-stuffed pastas are all excellent (\$\$ *).

Dupont Circle's **Vincenzo**, 1606 20th St., NW, 667-0047, serves fine Italian seafood. The atmosphere is rather bare but is as fresh as the fish. Such hard-to-find dishes as stuffed squid, fresh sardines, or razor claims might be on the menu. Try them preceded by pasta. The water is bottled and the crusty, whole wheat, Italian bread butterless, the better to sop up sauces with (\$\$ *).

Adams-Morgan Spaghetti Garden, a ten-minute walk from the Hilton at 2317 18th St., NW, 265-6665, is just the kind of neighborhood place to which you'll return. A Persian family who came here via Israel decided to open an Italian restaurant. (Why not Persian? Because you can make more money with Italian food!) The rooftop garden has been a hit ever since. Take your kids, set them down

near the fish tank, listen to the piped-in classical music and enjoy large, inexpensive, and delicious portions of spaghetti, veal parmigiana, and lasagna (¢ *).

Chaucer's, 1733 N St., NW, 296-0665, in the Canterbury Hotel, is a quiet, attractive restaurant with wonderfully fresh food (\$ *).

Restaurant Nora, 2132 Florida Ave., NW, 462-5143, has been a favorite Dupont Circle restaurant that makes a point of serving a fresh, eclectic cuisine. When Nora is good, she is very good but when she is bad. . . . Recently the restaurant has been redecorated and the prices have shot way up (\$\$ *).

American

For many years **Clyde's** of Georgetown, 3236 M St., NW, 333-0294 (\$), was the first Washington restaurant to which I would bring visitors from abroad. The atmosphere is pub-like; a glorious garden-like back room atrium reflects in mirrors. Sunday brunch is served here. Now Clyde's owners have bought the **Old Ebbitt Grill** at 675 15th St., NW, 347-4800 (\$), committing itself to good fresh American cuisine. Hamburgers in both places are terrific. The dinner menu at Old Ebbitt is \$\$.

A Clyde-like atmosphere and one as easily crowded is **Houston's** in Georgetown, 1065 Wisconsin Ave., NW, 338-7760, which serves similar food—great hamburgers, prime rib, and ersatz American regional food. Keep away from here on weekends—it is crowded (\$).

Washingtonians have their favorites and for many it is **The Palm**, 1225 19th St., NW, 293-9091, a brother to its New York counterpart. The Palm is a businessman's restaurant, expensive yet casual, with caricatures of political personalities on the walls. Steaks, prime ribs, good hamburgers, roast beef hash are all Palm specialties (\$\$ *).

Morton's of Chicago, 3251 Prospect St., NW, 342-6258, is today the best steakhouse in town (\$\$). Beefeaters try Morton's or the sophisticated **Prime Rib**, 2020 K St., NW, 466-8811 (\$\$). Steer clear of Ruth's Chris' down the street from the Hilton.

Association News

Suzanne's, 1735 Connecticut Ave., NW, 483-4633, is the type of casual upstairs wine bar-restaurant where you can discuss the issues of the world with a friend you haven't seen for ages. You can have a trendy pasta dish or a cheese and fruit tray. For those with a sweet tooth try their chocolate chestnut torte (\$ *).

The New Orleans Cafe at Columbia Road and 18th St., NW, 234-5111 (¢ *), is a treat at any hour. Start with beignets and coffee for breakfast and have their daily gumbos, jambalayas, etc. The Cafe and its counterpart, **The New Orleans Oyster Bar and Seafood Restaurant**, 2477 18th St., NW, 328-3421 (\$ *) are serving authentic American southern regional foods.

For Washington's closest version of a good Eastern shore seafood hang-out take Metro's Red Line to Silver Spring and **Crisfield's Seafood**, 8012 Georgia Ave., Silver Spring, 589-1306. The nonsense restaurant serves fresh, fresh seafood with cole slaw and fries—that's it. You won't regret those softshell crabs or the crabcakes, but go elsewhere for dessert (\$).

El Torrito, 3222 M St., 342-2290 (¢), in Georgetown Park is great fun for Tex Mex and it will give you a chance to ramble around Washington's choicest mall. **Stetson's Tex-Mex Saloon** at 1610 U St., NW, 667-6295 (¢), is another Texan Tex Mex favorite.

If you are planning to visit the newly renovated U.S. Post Office, 10th and Pennsylvania Ave., NW (Pavillion at the Old Post Office), try one of the Indian, Chinese, or Greek food booths (¢).

Oriental

Sichuan Garden, 1220 19th St., NW, 296-4550, is my choice for a very elegant Chinese dinner, the "in" expensive cuisine in Washington. The food at this People's-Republic-sanctioned restaurant is a treat to your palate and the painter in you (\$\$ *).

Charlie Chiang, 1912 I St., NW, 293-6000 (\$ *) and **The House of Hunan** at 19th and I, NW (\$ *) are moderately priced downtown restaurants.

For the real flavor of Chinese food in Washington head to Chinatown and sample dimsum at **Kowloon**, 807 7th St., NE, 396-2217, or the **Golden Palace**, 726 7th St., NW, 783-1225, and Cantonese crab at **Tai Tung**, 622 H St., NW, 737-1462. Up until seven years ago the Chinese population was Cantonese. The first Szechuan restaurant in Chinatown and still one of the best in town is the **Szechuan**, 615 I St., NW, 393-0130. Hunan cuisine is now served at **Hunan Chinatown**, 624 H St., NW, 783-5858. The latest and closest to the best of New York's Chinatown Cantonese restaurants is the **Big Wong**, 610 H St., NW, 638-0116. **China Inn**, 631 H St., NW, 789-9445, has a little bit of all the different cuisines (¢ to \$).

Germaine's Asian Deli, 2400 Wisconsin Ave., NW, 965-1185, has a cross section of food from traditional corned beef to Szechuan-spiced corned beef to Sajo and Indian sates. Run by Germaine Swanson, it is an offshoot of her highly successful Georgetown **Germaine's Restaurant** (\$).

* Third World

Ethiopian cab drivers frequently debate which Ethiopian restaurant is the best. It seems to be a toss-up between the **Red Sea**, 2463 18th St., NW (¢ *) and **Asmara** at 1725 Columbia Rd., NW, 332-2211 (¢ *). Ethiopian food is a dipping cuisine, starting with large flat pieces of bread, injera, dipped in hot sauces. My favorite chicken dish is Wat, cooked in lemon sauce.

El Caribe, 288 M St., NW, 338-3121, is a misnomer for this Latin American restaurant, one of the best of the lot. Try their zarzuela, seafood stew, and paella (\$ *).

At **Bacchus**, 1827 Jefferson Place, NW, 785-0734, start with the wonderful Lebanese maza. This is a sophisticated, attractive Middle Eastern restaurant with a wonderfully creative menu (\$ *).

The garden at the **Iron Gate Inn** at 1734 N St., NW, 737-1371, is just the place to dip warm pita bread into hummus and baba ghanouj (\$ *).

For Afghani food, the appetizers especially are recommended at **Bamiyan**, 3320 M St., NW, 338-1896 (\$) and **Khyber Pass**, 2309 Calvert St., NW, 234-4632 (\$ *), two of the new Afghani restaurants in town these days. They are wonderful: eggplant, yogurt and mint-based dipping sauces.

Paru's Indian Vegetarian Restaurant, 2010 S St., NW, 483-5133, is a tiny and extremely informal eating place. First timers to this cafeteria-style restaurant would do well to watch regular customers order. Choose what they suggest. Eggplant curry, masala dosa, lentils in several forms are deliciously spicy (¢ *).

Probably the best in town for Tandoor chicken is Georgetown's **Tandoor**, 3316 M St., NW, 333-3376 (\$) and don't forget the beautiful **Shezan** at 913 19th St., NW, 659-5555 (\$\$).

Popular with World Bank diners is the Peruvian **El Chalan** at 1924 I St., NW, 293-2765. Eschabeche, seviche, papas a la huancaína, and wonderful fish stews are available seven days a week (\$).

In addition, here are some other moderately priced restaurants within walking distance of the hotel:

Anna Maria's (Italian), 1737 Connecticut Ave., NW, 667-1444.

Bootsie, Winkey & Miss Maude (American), 2026 P St., NW, 887-0900.

Cafe Splendide (Austrian), 1521 Connecticut Ave., NW, 328-1503.

David Lee's Empress (Chinese), 1875 Connecticut Ave., NW, 462-8110.

Dupont Garden (Chinese), 1333 New Hampshire Ave., NW, 296-6500.

La Fonda (Mexican), 1639 R St., NW, 232-6965.

Omega (Cuban), 1856-58 Columbia Rd., NW, 745-9158.

Tabard Inn (American), 1739 N St., NW.

The Child Harold (American Pub), 1610 20th St., NW, 483-6702.



APSA

DEPARTMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

announces a

Roundtable for Department Chairs

on

**Administrative Risk and Sexual
Harassment: Legal and Ethical
Responsibilities on Campus**

Friday, August 29

10:45 am-12:00 pm

Association News

Taj Mahal (Indian), 1327 Connecticut Ave., NW, 659-1544.

Timberlake's (American Pub), 1726 Connecticut Ave., NW, 483-2266.

Trattu's (Italian), 1823 Jefferson Place, NW, 466-4570. □

Job Clinic Offered for Nonacademic Market

The Association will offer an intensive three-day job clinic as part of the professional development services offered at the 1986 Annual Meeting. The clinic will be directed by Richard Irish, author of the best-selling *Go Hire Yourself an Employer* and *If Things Don't Improve Soon, I May Ask You to Fire Me*. Mr. Irish is also co-founder and vice-president of Trans-Century Corporation, a Washington-based management and consulting firm specializing in international development and technical assistance. Mr. Irish has

conducted similar clinics at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association, the American Sociological Association, and the Modern Language Association, as well as at Johns Hopkins University, MIT, and Georgetown University.

The Job Clinic will cover several themes: (1) how to determine what you want to do; (2) how to identify job goals and delineate skills; (3) how to produce a resume, and plan and implement an effective job campaign; (4) how to conduct job interviews; and (5) how to negotiate salaries.

Participants will also meet with Mr. Irish for one hour of personal consultation and, after they return home, will receive written comments from him on the final drafts of their resumes.

The Job Clinic will require work and critical self-evaluation by participants. Prior to the start of the clinic, participants will be mailed an assignment on which they should spend five to ten hours.



APSA SHORT COURSE

Inside the Budget Process

Allen Schick

School of Public Affairs
University of Maryland

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 27

9:00 am - 4:00 pm