

HOME & AWAY

The Wharf D.C.

A new waterfront dining district has launched in nation's capital.

By Katherine Rodeghier



The Wharf stretches a mile along the waterfront and includes 20 restaurants and bars, three hotels and two concert venues along with shops, office buildings and residences.

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Already a hot spot for fine dining, Washington's restaurant scene has heated up with the redevelopment of an old waterfront.

Bon Appetit magazine named the capital its restaurant city of the year in 2016, the same year Zagat proclaimed it the "hottest food city," and Michelin published its first restaurant guide to the district. Then came The Wharf in a grand opening last October with dining as a key component. The largest single development in the

history of the district features 20 restaurants and bars, nearly all ready to greet customers when cherry blossoms bloom this spring.

Old Becomes New Again

The \$2.5 billion mixed-use project stretches a mile along the Washington Channel in southwest D.C., an underused area that served as the capital's commercial waterfront in the 1820s and 1830s. It still houses one of the nation's oldest open-air fish markets, dating from 1805. Beloved by Washingtonians, Municipal Fish Market was spared the wrecking ball after a public outcry. Instead, its historical oyster shed is being restored and new seating and restroom facilities are going up near its vendors hawking raw and cooked fish and seafood.

The Wharf development brings new shops, office and residential buildings, two concert venues and three hotels to the once-neglected neighborhood.

A fourth hotel, the AAA four-diamond Mandarin Oriental, Washington D.C. built a footbridge connecting it to The Wharf. Its Empress Lounge draws Washington power brokers for cocktails and makes a cozy spot for afternoon tea overlooking the garden, especially when its cherry trees are in full flower. Inside, an eight-seat sushi bar opens this year. The bar is an outlet of Chef Minoru Ogawa who oversaw sushi operations at the Mandarin for nearly 20 years before launching his own enterprise.

The InterContinental Washington D.C. –The Wharf brought in 27-year-old Chef Kwame Onwuachi to establish its main dining room, Kith and Kin, when it opened in October. The former Top Chef contestant taps his Nigerian and Caribbean roots to create shareable dishes, such as mushroom forest with eggplant dip and roasted mushrooms, and Ethiopian hot chicken with berbere hot sauce. Eye-catching crudités come atop a bowl of ice with four smaller bowls of peri peri, jerk broccoli, avocado mousse and baby vegetables.



Kith and Kin, one of 20 new restaurants and bars on the capital's redeveloped waterfront, serves Afro-Caribbean fare in the new InterContinental Washington D.C. - The Wharf.
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On the Water

Most restaurants on The Wharf are new concepts by local restaurateurs, including some helmed by award-winning chefs.

Chef Fabio Trabocchi, winner of a James Beard Award, and his wife, Maria, opened their Spanish seafood restaurant Del Mar after bringing craftsmen from Spain to recreate the ambiance of the Mediterranean on the Wharf. Along with tapas, Spanish charcuterie and paellas, the menu features a dramatic seafood tower of tiger prawns, oysters, mussels and clams. A standout among the entrees is a grilled butcher's

cut of Iberico pork served with langoustine tail. An ambitious dessert menu also includes a simple serving of hot churros with warm chocolate sauce. Fashionably dressed diners pack Del Mar most evenings. The Obamas dined there in November.

Mike Isabella, 2016 D.C. restaurateur of the year and a Top Chef competitor, is the brains behind Requin, noted for its contemporary spin on classic French cuisine. Foie gras takes the form of French toast with yam jam, maple glaze and fried pistachios while tuna Nicoise, rather than served as a salad, comes topped on grilled sourdough bread with black-olive crumble. Along with a wine list leaning heavily French, Requin's head bartender puts his cocktail wizardry to work in an imaginative menu of martinis served shaken or stirred. When weather permits, Requin raises its glass walls to bring the outdoors in. A 50-seat patio with fire pits faces the waterfront.

Wharf Avenue, a pedestrian walkway of pavers and cobblestones, runs along the waterfront, where pleasure boats dock in the marina, and the Capital Yacht Club remains in its longtime home. Water taxis run to Georgetown and Old Town Alexandria, Va., with an extension to National Harbor in Maryland.

Diners who snag a communal table at the Brighton, an English-style gastropub, get a front-row seat to waterfront activity, particularly during warm weather when it lifts its garage-style doors onto Wharf Avenue. With concrete floors and an exposed ceiling, the pub's casual ambience makes it a welcoming place for a craft beer or glass of wine with a sandwich or salad.

Hank's Oyster Bar, a roll-up-your-sleeves establishment that specializes in what Chef Jamie Leeds calls "urban beach food," opened its fourth and largest location on the Wharf last fall. It serves its seafood dinners next to the Wharf's recreation pier and boathouse with a children's spray park and wooden swings for kids and kids at heart. Diners can rent kayaks and stand-up paddleboards to work off calories. A fire pit makes a great spot for watching the sunset or the free water jitney making regular runs across the channel to East Potomac Park.

Planning Your Trip

For more information on the Wharf, visit wharfdc.com. To learn more about things to do in Washington, go to washington.org. Contact your AAA Travel agent or visit AAA.com/travel for help planning your next vacation.

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