

Down at The Wharf

Redevelopment adds a new nightlife district to Southwest D.C. BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER

"I WAS BLOWN AWAY," said Sunny Seng as he used tweezers to garnish one of his Prohibition-style cocktails. Home for a visit from his job in New York City, he found Washington, D.C.'s food and beverage scene booming and moved back to join it.

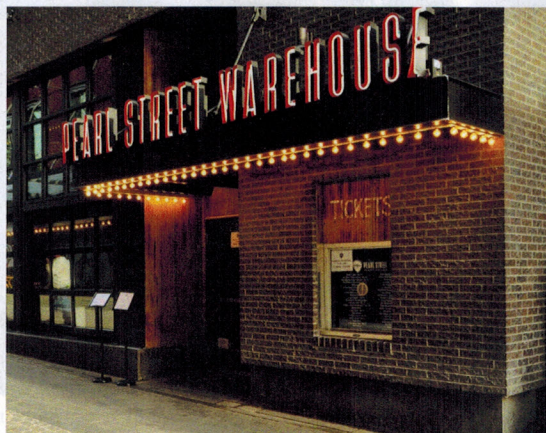
As head bartender at upscale Requin, one of 20 new restaurants and bars in District Wharf, Seng operates at the center of the single-largest development in the history of the capital. Stretching for a mile along the waterfront in once-downtrodden Southwest D.C., the \$2.5 billion mixed-use project officially opened last October.

Live music makes The Wharf an important nightlife district, with three new stages. The Foo Fighters launched The Anthem, a 6,000-capacity concert hall. Pearl Street Warehouse patrons are never more than 25 feet from the stage where rock, country, folk, soul and blues acts perform. Union Stage came along at the end of December with a 450-capacity music venue. Adding to the entertainment mix is the nearby Mead Center, the second-largest performing arts space after the Kennedy Center. Its Arena Stage specializes in American theater.

A lively bar scene adds to the energy level in The Wharf's restaurants and hotels. Requin is known for its modern take on classic French cuisine as well as Seng's cocktail wizardry. Fire pits draw patrons to the patio on chilly nights. The Spanish seafood restaurant Del Mar features a classic cocktail program with Spanish influences and opens three outdoor seating spaces this spring. Garage-style doors raise onto the waterfront promenade at The Brighton, an English-style gastropub. Kith/Kin's 27-year-old chef brings Afro-Caribbean fare to the InterContinental Washington D.C. — The Wharf, one of three new hotels in the development. They join the Mandarin Oriental, Washington D.C., which helped kick-start the redevelopment of Southwest D.C. when it opened in 2004. Its Empress Lounge remains a gathering place for Washington power brokers.

While The Wharf welcomes the LGBTQ community, it's too soon to tell whether it will match the popularity of the capital's other gay-friendly districts such as Adams Morgan, home of the Duplex Diner and Songbyrd Record Café and Music House; Dupont Circle, where Cobalt and JR.'s do business; and the U Street Corridor, with the Town Danceboutique nightclub and Nellie's Sports Bar.

The popular D.C. bookstore Politics and Prose has an outlet on The Wharf that hosts author events in the evenings.



NIGHT SCENE: The Empress Lounge and Terrace at the Mandarin Oriental, Washington D.C. (top), Pearl Street Warehouse (bottom left), and bartender Dimitre Darroca at Kith/Kin restaurant in the new InterContinental Washington D.C. (bottom right)

PHOTOS: © KATHERINE RODEGHIER