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KOMI

1509 17TH ST., NW

Ask plenty of industry insiders where they'd splurge and the answer isn't someplace new or trendy—it's this 16-year-old Mediterranean tasting room from omnipresent owners chef Johnny Monis and Anne Marler. We love the serene dining space where you can nerd out with veteran sommelier Kyle Wilson over wild-foraged hard cider, swoon over cheffy bites like *kan-pachi crudo* with bone gelée, and then gorge, Greek farmhouse-style, on savory finales such as crunchy-skinned suckling pig or lamb ribs, *tzatziki*, and just-baked pita. (Bonus: leftovers.) Thrills lean less on luxury ingredients and more on finesse—who knew a squash fritter could ring divine?—and the personal touch (e.g., housemade Greek pastas). While Komi has always eschewed trendiness—even social media—its sporadic new Happy Gyro pop-up, a whimsical monthlong vegetarian ode to the Greek-American diner fare of Monis's childhood, was the most fun eating we had all year. **Very expensive.**

5

ELLE

5221 MOUNT PLEASANT ST., NW

There's a lot of fermentation happening around DC—in the form of pickles and krauts and other acidic delights—but when it comes to creativity, chef Brad Deboy rules them all at this daytime cafe/nighttime hot spot. A glass jar of saffron-scented green beans and mushrooms perks up any lineup of dinner dishes, while earthy kimchee paves slabs of yogurt-covered sourdough. Speaking of, the other move here is to order anything that comes out of the oven: fluffy biscuits with ham and cornichons, lunchtime baguette sandwiches, and morning guava turnovers. **Inexpensive to moderate.**

6

POCA MADRE

777 I ST., NW

Cabbage was not something we ever imagined getting excited about. But that was before we tried the tender, charred leaves painted with rich oxtail jam and *mole verde* at Victor Albisu's mod-Mex dining room. Now we'd come just for that. Albisu creates Technicolor flavors that feel entirely new but never forced. Shrimp and cuttlefish are sliced into ribbons and tossed with a tangy, coconutty marinade. (We mopped up every last drop.) Meanwhile, his family-style meat platters are a more primal thrill. **Expensive.**

7

BRESCA

1906 14TH ST., NW

Tomato with *burrata*? Foie gras with brioche? "Been there, done that," you might think. But at this brass-lined restaurant, Ryan Ratino is turning dining tropes into destination dishes. Take that brioche—it shows up not as toast but as a fluffy steamed bun, accompanying seared slabs of duck liver and dates. Also impressive: Ratino's handle on an array of influences. A recent dinner moved from a lamb ragu that channeled a trip-worthy osteria to a broccoli pierogi that hat-tipped Ratino's native Ohio. Order widely—and expect a surprise around the corner. **Expensive.**

8

BAD SAINT

5226 HTH ST., NW

Teeny-tiny dining room aside, this modern Filipino destination goes big in every way. Robustly flavored plates fly from chef Tom Cunanan's kitchen. We recently feasted on ceviche-like tuna *kinilaw*, sausage-and-crab-fat fried rice, and crackly-skinned duck. Drinks are delightfully varied, especially if you're partial to offbeat bottles and vermouths. And generosity abounds, whether you're swapping menu recommendations with new elbow buddies at the dining counters or being greeted by co-owner/host Genevieve Villamora. Don't let the lack of a line fool you—Bad Saint is better than ever, and thanks to a smart hospitality move, it now takes reservations. **Moderate.**