

100 VERY BEST RESTAURANTS

OUR GUIDE TO THE FINEST DINING
IN DC, MARYLAND, AND VIRGINIA

Before you begin paging through our annual guide to Washington's best dining, here's what you will and won't see.

The product of our year-long survey of restaurants in DC, Maryland, and Virginia is this list of the 100 places we think are the very best right now—including a ranking of the top 40 standouts. Omitted are more than 200 others we visited, many of which were capable of very good meals. The question was whether they perform at a consistently high level.

In many cases, the problem wasn't consistency—it was too little of the energy and passion that all good restaurants possess, whether it's a newcomer such as Estadio in DC's Logan Circle or the venerable Inn at Little Washington in the Virginia countryside.

Some of those 200-plus restaurants didn't strike us as good values. Not that we were hunting for bargains—a \$300 meal that seduces you from start to finish can be as good a value as a delicious meal from a low-key restaurant down the street.

In the end, it comes down to the cooking. As much as a sumptuous setting or top-notch service can elevate an experience, ambience and service are ultimately complementary. They can't make up for indifferent cooking—just as shavings of white truffle can't elevate a dish that's flawed from the start.

Plenty of restaurants provide well-prepared meals in comfortable settings with good service. But will you be thinking about those dishes two hours—or two weeks—later? Ultimately, we were seeking experiences that might move you to text a friend on the spot, as one of our reviewers did in the midst of dinner at one of DC's top tables: "Unbelievable fig tart at Adour tonight!"

If we ask a lot from the restaurants that make our list, it's because we know you're demanding, too. We hope you find these places as memorable as we do.

—TODD KLIMAN

5 **ADOUR** ★★★½

St. Regis, 923 16th St., NW;
202-509-8000

When it launched two years ago, this outpost of the Alain Ducasse empire dazzled in every way but one: its cooking. The dining room, designed by architectural icon David Rockwell, is both slickly modern and inviting. Service is first-rate. The wine list, full of unexpected gems, is among the best in the area. The little gifts to diners—*gougères* to start, *macarons* to finish—are exquisite. And the food? Unfailingly correct—carefully carved vegetables, rigorously strained sauces—and often bland.

No longer. Seafood has been masterful, from a filet of John Dory atop an elegant clam chowder to perfectly cooked turbot. Testament to the complexity of these fish dishes is that a red wine—say, a Pinot Noir—pairs as well as a Sauvignon Blanc. Dessert remains as good as ever: There's no more decadent ending in town than the fig tart, hazelnut soufflé, or baba au rhum finished with a pour of top-shelf Armagnac.

Also good: Marinated hamachi with grapefruit and chives; butternut-squash-and-lobster soup; seared foie gras with apple butter; tasting of Ibérico ham; pan-seared sweetbreads; lobster with penne and coral butter.

Open Sunday and Monday for breakfast, Tuesday through Saturday for breakfast and dinner. Very expensive.