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Best Bites

BY TODD KLIMAN, ANN LIMPERT,
RINA RAPUANO, AND KATE NERENBERG
PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS LEAMAN

THE LATEST AND BEST IN FOOD, WINE, AND COOKING



Trummer's on Main
aspires to bring
big-time dining to
Clifton.

First Look Grand Ambitions

The people behind Trummer's on Main, a new restaurant in Clifton, have serious foodie credentials: Stefan Trummer—a co-owner with his wife, Victoria—worked at Masa and Bouley, two of Manhattan's best restaurants; executive chef Clayton Miller cooked at California's revered French Laundry and at Daniel in Manhattan; and sommelier Tyler Packwood is a ten-year veteran of the Inn at Little Washington.

So it should come as no surprise that they've put together an ambitious offering: a restaurant with three levels, 210 seats, and a 4,000-bottle wine cellar. If there's anything left of the building's 140-year history—it was once the Clifton Hotel, then the Hermitage Inn—it's the whisper of a farmhouse in the exposed beams of the dining room's vaulted ceilings. The dark first-floor lounge, anchored by a marbled onyx bar, is more modern, just like Miller's food.

His dishes are painterly compositions with striking colors—neon-red rhubarb shares a plate

with a vivid spinach purée—but they sometimes result in a cacophony of textures and flavors. An appetizer of pine-nut-and-ricotta tortellini was complicated by the addition of lamb sausage, rock crab, Bing cherries, and a carrot/white-wine sauce. Offerings with the fewest ingredients—a bowl of spiced potato chips at the bar, a jar of warm brandade, coconut sorbet with a hibiscus foam—are the most rewarding.

No shortcuts here: Miller bakes his own bread and whips his own butter; bartenders crush ice to order for cocktails. If Trummer's can simplify and clarify its vision while retaining its command of detail, it might become more than just an excellent addition to Clifton's scant restaurant scene—it might become a worthy destination for visitors from all over.

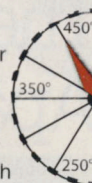
Trummer's on Main, 7134 Main St., Clifton; 703-266-1623. Open Monday through Saturday for dinner, Sunday for brunch. Starters \$9 to \$20, entrées \$19 to \$34.

The Needle

What's hot, what's not

Willow

Much of the fish one late-summer evening at Tracy O'Grady's elegant Ballston lair was excellent—plump, sweet scallops with handmade ravioli, a perfectly balanced ceviche with crunch from fried yuca. The star of the night, though, was a plate of fried chicken. The breast and thigh, with its crunchy, light crust and moist meat, is some of the best fried chicken we've tasted. Two terrific desserts followed: a coconut layer cake that could have been served at a Charleston garden party and an angel-food cake with peaches. 4301 N. Fairfax Dr., Arlington; 703-465-8800.



1789

On a recent Saturday night, the crowd eating off the flowered china at this Georgetown institution was younger than we've ever seen it. The youth movement is due in part to Daniel Giusti, the 25-year-old chef who pushes boundaries without upsetting traditionalists (there's still steak and potatoes). Though the room was buzzing, dinner was erratic: Linguine with geoduck clams left a blazing chili burn; a cold cucumber broth with rockfish was oddly pungent. A tender pork chop worked beautifully with roasted peaches, but the mess of stewed peppers accompanying a cut of flavorful sockeye salmon seemed clumsy. Desserts such as honey-and-vinegar-glazed doughnuts and airy peach-blackberry buckle were fabulous all the way. 1226 36th St., NW; 202-965-1789.



China Jade

This 30-year-old restaurant in a strip mall has gotten a chili-fired blast of energy thanks to its takeover by the owners of Falls Church's excellent Hong Kong Palace. The result: one of the most exciting places to eat in the new Chinatown of northern Rockville, particularly if you order off the authentic Chinese menu. A recent meal turned up no weak dishes and many gems, including a Chengdu-style Kung Pao chicken and a plate of fried fish dusted in cumin and tossed with chilies and onions. 16805 Crabbs Branch Way, Rockville; 301-963-1570.

