

Dazzled in the DMV

CHEFS RAISE THE BAR AT A STORIED D.C. HOTEL AND A SENSATIONAL SUBURBAN DESTINATION by Kelly Magyarics, DWS

There's just something special about an evening at The Watergate Hotel. From its curvy free-form architecture to the ultra-sexy, red- and gold-washed Next Whisky Bar off the lobby, it's an evocative place—all the more for such quirky nods to its nefarious past as the Nixon tape excerpts that play for callers on hold and the room key cards that bear the cheeky message, "No need to break in."

Then there's its signature restaurant, Kingbird. In the 1980s and 1990s, the kitchen was helmed by the legendary Jean-Louis Palladin; for the past few months, it's been overseen by Executive Chef Sébastien Giannini, a charming native of the south of France who hopes to lend a Mediterranean air to the restaurant's cuisine. On an evening when it was a bit too chilly for a cocktail at rooftop lounge Top of the Gate, we headed to Kingbird for a drink instead. I sipped a Liddy's

Lemon—a Penicillin riff with Irish whiskey, Cardamaro, lemon, and ginger—while sampling all of the dishes from that magical part of the season when produce from ramps to asparagus abounds.

Under a garden of edible flowers, pine nuts, parsley, garlic, chicory salad, and pecorino, a bed of red peppers resembled tuna carpaccio. Goopy burrata with olive tapenade came topped with plump, tender asparagus tips. Entrees like rib-eye, halibut, and short rib daube, meanwhile, were accompanied by no fewer than a half-dozen sauces to drizzle on top, as Giannini is an accomplished saucier. Did I mention that he's a pastry chef, too? During our visit, he dazzled us with a decadent flourless chocolate cake garnished with gold leaf and a citrus pavlova with crumbled meringue.

Speaking of culinary ambition, restaurateur Jon Krinn just might be the hardest-working chef in the DMV. At Clarity, his acclaimed restaurant in the Virginia suburb of Vienna, he

Goopy burrata at Kingbird is accompanied by tender asparagus tips.



During a recent visit to Clarity, ravioli came filled with shredded lamb and topped with seasonal ramps.

changes the menu *every single day*. When eight of us dined there on a busy Saturday evening, we started with a round of stirred libations from the bar's Manhattans Project; it playfully pairs whiskeys with various vermouths and bitters, as seen in The Master's with Russell's Rye, Carpano Antica, and Aztec chocolate bitters.

We strove not to fall in love with any one dish, knowing it might never appear in the same form again. That said, standouts still emerged, including succulent Gulf shrimp with roasted sun-chokes; ravioli filled with shredded lamb and tossed with ramps; and perfectly seasoned fried chicken over parsnip puree and haricots verts. For dessert, we devoured strawberry shortcake with thyme ice cream as well as a hazelnut-brown butter tart with duck-fat caramel and ras el hanout ice cream. Both were deconstructed on the plate, serving as a visual reminder of Krinn's menu—a perpetual work in progress that's dismantled and rebuilt daily. ■■



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