

D.C.'s Most Valuable Restaurants

A guide to eateries that are worth the drive, worth the wait, and worth the cost

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Many years ago, when *Washington City Paper* first added food coverage, it was a divisive move. To naysayers, dining was a superficial bourgeois pastime, and writing up restaurants was not so different than, say, reviewing golf pros at some snooty country club. That was then. By now, it's pretty clear that when you pay attention to what kind of food a city is eating, you wind up catching the major currents of the contemporary moment: The restaurants that open can tell you a lot about the demographic change sweeping Washington; the dishes they serve say a lot about the immigration patterns, health crazes, and cultural habits shaping the city.

And that's not just geeky food-journalist stuff. For you, dear reader, dining out is not just about food, either. Your own choices on a given night involve such subjective matters as comfort (just how do you define relaxation after a day of work?), adventure (a trip to that obscure suburban ethnic joint can feel like a red-eye to Bangkok) or just how to stay culturally relevant ("Have you tried Little Serow yet?"). All these—and more—represent reasons an eater might consider a restaurant valuable.

In assigning this year's Most Valuable Restaurants issue, we tasked writers with coming up with their own answers to the question of what makes an eatery valuable. The goal wasn't to come up with a "best restaurants" list, but rather a survey of places where you'll feel your money and time are well spent. For some, that meant a good deal. For others, a perfect meal. For others still, the value lived in the very fact that they were willing to trek out to Wheaton or endure an hour-long wait for a table. The point is: In eating, as in life, value is what you decide it is. Here's our set of answers—visit us online to share your own.

PARTHENON RESTAURANT

5510 Connecticut Ave. NW; (202) 966-7600; parthenon-restaurant.com

VALUABLE FOR: Making everyone feel like a longtime regular

In a city of transplants, visiting this Upper Northwest Greek restaurant makes me feel like I've lived here for ages. A sign hanging from the Parthenon's blue awning declares, "Celebrating our 22nd year of Serving You," and the restaurant is as much of a fixture on its strip as the Avalon Theater. Regulars and staff greet each other with familiar warmth and make newcomers feel like routine visitors, too. It's a place where the waiters not only dote on your kid, they show you pictures of their own. The food is the fare you'd see at Greek restaurants in any city, but it's executed well. The Greek salad is elevated to a standout item thanks to its zingy dressing with fresh-snipped dill. A topping of spiced gyro meat and a side of creamy tzatziki sauce were enough to make me a regular. —**Kathryn Masterson**



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Photograph by Darrow Montgomery