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Best Restaurants

Veritas Tavern maintains the top spot as it departs Delaware, and two newcomers make their 10 Best debuts.

BY G.A. BENTON, ERIN EDWARDS AND CHRIS GAITTEN

PHOTOS BY TIM JOHNSON



Grilled Cucumber,
Labne and Smoked
Salmon Roe at
Veritas Tavern

Veritas Tavern

In a 2014 interview with this magazine, Veritas Tavern owner and chef Josh Dalton mused about someday moving his Delaware restaurant to Columbus. “I’d love to get into a bigger space, a bigger kitchen with room for more toys,” he said at the time. This month, Dalton gets his wish. Known for its modern approach to chef-driven small plates, Veritas and its team of six will serve a last meal at 15 E. Winter St. on Nov. 4 before moving Downtown to the Citizens Building. The new restaurant, Veritas (*Tavern* is being dropped), will be double the size of the Delaware space and feature not one but two bars, plus Dalton’s dream kitchen. It’s been a transition year, so you could expect Veritas to lose a step—it didn’t, and it’s a testament to precision and a stellar staff. From the moment a customer is greeted at the door, the Veritas team looks to guide them through every detail of their dining experience. Precision extends to Tristan Swan’s bar program, which demonstrates true craft behind its cocktails. Inquire about a certain spirit or wine at some restaurants and you *might* get an informed explanation. At Veritas, they’ve done their homework. Care is also taken to source the right ingredients and to develop layers of flavors and textures you won’t soon forget—whether it’s an heirloom tomato “cottage cheese,” a silky and complex carrot soup with chili oil or a melt-in-your-mouth lobster roll. Here’s hoping the magic Veritas conjured in Delaware carries over to the corner of High and Gay streets. Look for the restaurant to open after Thanksgiving.



Lobster Roll; Carrot, Coconut and Curry soup; Crab, Ossetra and Nasturtium; and Broccoli and Burnt Onion



Veritas (COMING SOON)
11 W. Gay St., Downtown
veritastavern.com



Chef Josh Dalton prepares broth for Oxtail Pho.



10 BEST TIP:

Veritas’s Winter Street location in downtown Delaware won’t stay empty for long. Chef-owner Josh Dalton will be opening a rustic Italian restaurant there named **Speck** in early 2018. Expect a very tight menu of pasta, soup and salad that showcases seasonal ingredients.



Chef Josh Dalton at Veritas’s new bar

DIFFERENCE-MAKER:

The Tasting Menu

If you look in a back hallway at Veritas Tavern, you might notice framed tasting menus from some of the country’s best restaurants: Grace, Manresa, Next. They are keepsakes of the culinary team’s research trips over the years, and reminders of Veritas’s aspirations. “You go eat these amazing meals and it’s like a slap in the face ... it’s humbling,” Dalton says. “You’re like, ‘I’ve got to go home and read. We’ve got to go work on techniques; we’ve got to work on precision.’” Veritas started offering a chef’s tasting menu more than four years ago. Below, the chef shares some thoughts on his strategy behind the menu:

Too Much of a Good Thing. When Veritas started running a tasting menu, “It was a big learning curve because we would put out too much food,” Dalton says. “There’s that happy medium,

where I want people to get enough, but at the same time if they ... want to go do something active, they can.”

Magic Number? Dalton says he’s not worried about the course count—six courses versus eight courses, etc. Instead, Dalton wonders: How much food would it be if you put all of that on one plate? A tasting menu might start with a one-bite course, like Veritas’s delightful Shrimp + Grits, but as you work through the two-hour progression, the courses gradually get bigger and then smaller again. “I’m looking at time frame and the overall amount of food,” he says.

Flow. Timing is everything, and it’s an area where Veritas excels. Ideally, the kitchen is looking for two or three minutes between courses, just enough time for picking up

plates, refilling drinks, changing out cutlery and providing a minute to breathe. “There are times that we run longer than we should, but at that point it becomes about service. You really need your servers to change the pace a little bit, change the conversation, keep [customers] informed,” he says.

What About Pairings? A tasting menu presents a unique challenge when it comes to ordering a beverage. Should the pairing complement the delicate lobster in your second course or the sous vide rib-eye with mole in the fifth? Dalton is quick with a solution. “Take a good glass or bottle of champagne and you can start from the front of your tasting, go all the way through the progression and you’ll always be fine,” Dalton advises. Good news: The new Downtown location will add wine pairings to its repertoire. —Erin Edwards



10 BEST TIP: Diners have a chance to tour chef Seth Lassak's creations via a **tasting menu**, added earlier this year. The five-course menu costs \$50, or \$60 with beer pairings.

Chicken liver pâté

No 2

Wolf's Ridge Brewing

You can't blame uninitiated diners for assuming that a restaurant named Wolf's Ridge Brewing might be a beer-first place that serves afterthought food. And, sure, the operation under head brewer Chris Davison produces first-class beers in multiple styles. But this is no ordinary brewpub. It's a chic, long and narrow, "farmhouse-industrial" establishment in a century-old building with white bricks and dramatic golden hour vistas onto Fourth Street. And, as the eye-candy plating of executive chef Seth Lassak's dishes suggests, the output of the kitchen is commensurate with what's drawn from the gleaming fermenters.



Halibut with squash purée



Hudson Valley foie gras

DIFFERENCE-MAKER:

Eye-Popping Plates

Regarding his restaurant's artfully arranged dishes, chef Lassak, a graduate of the prestigious Culinary Institute of America, remarks, "We look at a plate and see a blank canvas to paint with colors and textures." Likening this effort to "creativity with controlled chaos," Lassak says he and his team often seek inspiration from architecture, structures and nature. Such influences play a large part in the root vegetable carpaccio, a rustic yet refined starter gracing the fall menu. On a chilled platter, paper-thin discs of carrots, radishes and gold and ruby beets all drizzled with olive oil are themselves shaped into a disc. Covering them is a white blanket of finely grated Midnight Moon goat cheese, firm yet buttery, interspersed with crushed Marcona almonds. Pea tendrils and nasturtium petals provide finishing touches. The lyrical image conjures a patch of autumn leaves, an early snowfall and the promise of spring. For the visually arresting Hudson Valley foie gras with yin-and-yang flavors and textures, Lassak ladles apple butter onto a plate to form a circle just big enough to contain a squat cylinder of foie torchon placed directly in the middle. Balls of green apple and walnuts alternately dot the plate. Lassak then sprinkles the torchon with fleur de sel, garnishes with a pea tendril and serves with crostini. —G. A. Benton



Wolf's Ridge Brewing
215 N. Fourth St., Downtown
614-429-3936
wolfsridgebrewing.com

The Guild House

Balance is the refrain at The Guild House, and nearly three years into its run, the most interesting of Cameron Mitchell's restaurants has achieved an impressive equilibrium. The décor is stylish and rustic, the scene vibrant without drowning conversations in dining room noise. The servers are knowledgeable but approachable, polished but congenial. The easygoing atmosphere invites a casual cocktail at the bar, yet it's refined enough to make dinner feel like an event. This harmony carries through to the food and drink, like the springtime menu addition of Kampachi. The raw yellowtail with pineapple tomatillo, achiote vinaigrette and pickled poblano is salty, acidic, sweet and thoroughly enjoyable. Or take The Guild House's collaboration with Watershed Distillery to create Guild Series Gin, with delicate flavors of nutmeg and tangerine rather than overpowering juniper. It's smoother and softer than many peers, but it still features classic gin taste. In a word—balanced.

DIFFERENCE-MAKER:

Bold Breakfasts

Fine dining is typically the evening's domain, accompanied by cocktail dresses and twilight, but morning cuisine gets equal billing at The Guild House, adjacent to The Joseph hotel. While joggers pound the Short North pavement, you can enjoy smoked salmon, lobster and caviar or asparagus covered in egg yolk and Gruyere cream. Yes, asparagus at sunrise. And yes, you should. Executive chef John Paul Iacobucci says he and the tastemakers at Cameron Mitchell Restaurants selected the early-morning lineup, which starts at 6:30 a.m., from 75-100 dishes they created after deciding to offer a daily breakfast menu. (A brunch menu is served Saturdays and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.) The star is the Smoked Chicken Hash. The

chicken alone is salty, but it's delicious when combined with the sweet potatoes, slightly spicy roasted poblano, tangy salsa verde, poached eggs and Gouda. Iacobucci says it's far and away the favorite. The aforementioned asparagus shines in the Truffled Eggs, providing a bitter complement that cuts nicely through the rich Gruyere cream. And don't miss the apple fritters; the mini doughnut spheres are warm and light on the inside, coated in cinnamon and sugar and served with a tantalizing streak of apple butter. The atmosphere, already relaxed, is toned down even more in the morning. Service is friendly and unhurried. Sunlight streams in the windows. The joggers don't know what they're missing. —Chris Gaitten



The Guild House
624 N. High St., Short North
614-280-9780
theguildhousecolumbus.com

10 BEST TIP: For those who want a fine dining spin on turkey and 'taters, The Guild House is open for Thanksgiving. Looking to escape family during the holidays? The restaurant's bar offers happy hour from 3 to 6 p.m., seven days a week.



Top, pancakes with bacon and fresh fruit; bottom left, bloody mary; bottom right, apple fritters



G. Michael's Bistro & Bar

G. Michael's virtues never grow old: a terrific chef with a singular vision, an unstuffy setting that's handsome in a timeless fashion (vintage bricks, spiffy wooden bar, white tablecloths) and a warm, personable staff. At "G. Mike's," regulars are on a first-name basis and newcomers are treated like regulars. Everyone can enjoy a serious wine list and flavor-bomb meals from a low country-leaning menu, written by co-owner and longtime chef David Tetzloff, that features high-quality, seasonal and local ingredients. Bonuses include a hidden-gem patio, an unbeatable happy hour at an upbeat bar and a Monday-blues-killing, three-course meal for \$30.

DIFFERENCE-MAKER:

Reverence for Seasonal Ingredients

"Seasonality is about quality—getting the best ingredients at the height of their flavor," says chef Tetzloff. Additionally, Tetzloff says, "The price is often better because if you're getting local asparagus in season, you don't have to pay to bring it in from far away." This devotion to area purveyors isn't without complications. As Tetzloff explains, "You must constantly reach out to local farmers. And the fickle Ohio weather means you have to be creative. So rather than a planned caprese salad, one night you might be serving fried green tomatoes." Try dishes on G. Michael's new fall menu, like succulent pan-roasted duck (from Maple Leaf Farms, an Indiana-based purveyor that also sources from Ohio). The crisp-edged, rosy duck breast meat is fanned atop garlicky broccolini and an inspired hummus, made with delicate squash (from Hershberger's Farm and Bakery in Millersburg), that harmonizes with an almond gremolata and a tongue-tingling pomegranate-molasses vinaigrette. Another home run is the tender, juicy, broiled bone-in pork chop (from Eversole Run Farm in Powell) with sautéed red cabbage (from Hershberger's), a clever cornbread-pudding cake, Tabasco-maple butter (with maple syrup from Milligan's Maple Products in Athens) plus outstanding red-eye gravy. Vegetarian? Check out the mushroom ravioli (from Cleveland's Ohio City Pasta) with an intense shitake-cream sauce plus contrasting collard greens and pepper-jam (both from Columbus's own Harriet Gardens). —G. A. Benton



G. Michael's Bistro & Bar
595 S. Third St.,
German Village
614-464-0575
gmichaelsbistroandbar.com



Pan-roasted duck breast with winter squash hummus, roasted broccolini and pomegranate-molasses vinaigrette



AN ALANA SIGHTING: Notice something missing? Alana's Food + Wine, a perennial fixture on our list of Columbus's best restaurants, is no more. Chef Alana Shock closed her Old North restaurant earlier this year. The location is now home to Trillium Kitchen & Patio. But that doesn't mean Shock is done cheffing. She just wrapped up a lovely three-part dinner series hosted by Jorgensen Farms in Westerville. Look for more dinners from her in the spring.



A variety of sharable plates and cocktails at Watershed Kitchen & Bar

No 5

Watershed Kitchen & Bar

Most rookies don't make the all-star team, but most new restaurants don't field a strong and consistent kitchen crew like Watershed Kitchen & Bar. The business wasn't exactly embryonic—as a pioneering Columbus distiller, Watershed has been creating excellent spirits for about six years. Now, the company's booze brightens a lineup of sophisticated cocktails shaken at the copper-topped bar inside a dark, fashionable space where plants, distillery tanks and pew-like banquettes offset black walls and a low ceiling. It's routinely packed, thanks to the shareable plates and lusty yet stylish cuisine of executive chef Jack Moore, a veteran of top Cleveland restaurants like The Black Pig and Greenhouse Tavern.



Watershed Kitchen & Bar
1145 Chesapeake Ave., Ste. D,
Fifth by Northwest
614-357-1936
watersheddistillery.com



Chef Jack Moore with the Hay-Smoked Baby Backs

DIFFERENCE-MAKER: Sharables Worth Sharing

Explaining Watershed's embrace of the popular small plates trend, chef Moore says, "Dining doesn't have to be a prim and proper, elbows-off-the-table ritual. Food is fun." To this end, Moore eighty-sixed the menu structure of appetizers, entrées and desserts. Instead, as Moore puts it, "We run ones, twos and threes—each number corresponding to a larger portion." Watershed also offers diner-designed tasting menus (the shareable meals are deals at \$47) that include a snack-sized one; hefty-appetizer-like two; entrée-ish three; plus dessert. "We want guests to feel in control," Moore says. "Order however you want, try a bite of everything, or not. It isn't about the start and finish, but what happens at the table in the meantime." Smiles will appear at the table when the herby, garlic-kissed, crispy fingerling potatoes arrive with a lush aioli playing off lemon zest and feathery shaved Parmesan. Fans of Nashville-style hot chicken—and aren't we all—will love the buttermilk fried chicken, a Moore favorite. It's a crackly battered leg and thigh capped with tangy, chili-flecked "whipped pig butter" (think spicy lardo) melting like a scoop of ice cream; sweet pickles and a terrific hot sauce come on the side. But there's also a corned beef-style treatment of sweetbreads (a staff favorite), dressed-to-kill fried Brussels sprouts, baby back ribs and other dishes Moore accurately describes as homey yet new. —G. A. Benton



10 BEST TIP: Watershed owners Greg Lehman and Dave Rigo have an online conversation series worth checking out, titled *I'll Have What I'm Having*. The storytelling series celebrates local entrepreneurs like the owners of Butcher & Grocer, Igloo Letterpress, Stump and others at watersheddistillery.com.

PHOTO: TESSA BERG

The Refectory Restaurant & Wine Shop

The death of traditional fine dining has been widely proclaimed, and yet The Refectory Restaurant & Wine Shop has managed to not only persevere but to continue delighting diners. More than two decades into his tenure, chef Richard Blondin continues delicately spinning French classics into clever creations that dazzle on the plate and on the palate. The Roasted Gazpacho Ragout with avocado and shrimp was a summertime standout—simple, seasonal and packed with flavor. But the restaurant has also made efforts to stay relevant and connect with broader clientele in recent years. There are regular 10 for \$10 wine tastings, a popular dinner and music series and a more affordable bistro menu. This summer, The Refectory's lobby debuted a retail wine shop with more than 100 labels available across a spectrum of prices, building on the restaurant's unparalleled reputation for wine in a way that all can enjoy.

DIFFERENCE-MAKER:

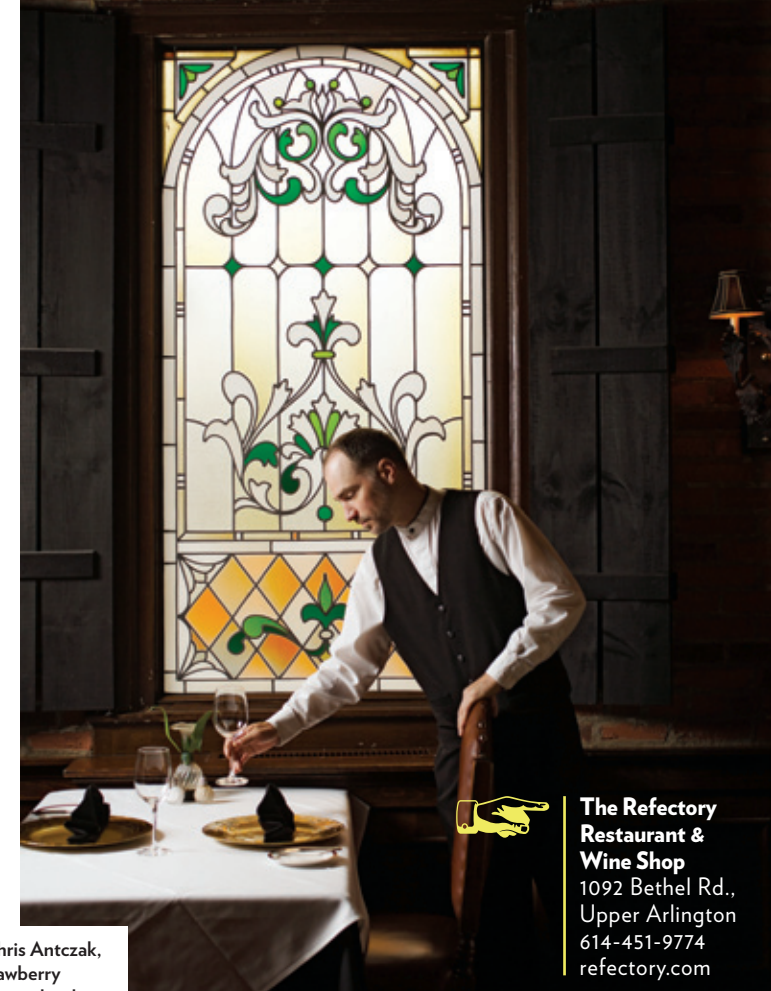
Dedication to Service

Food will always be the star of great restaurants, and The Refectory is no exception. But this bastion of French cuisine further separates itself with consummate service. Servers are quick to recommend the perfect dish, suggest a wine pairing that elevates the meal's flavors or even to perform small touches of hospitality, like refolding napkins when guests step away from the table. Dedication to the craft of service isn't built overnight; for more than two months, new servers get schooled in the restaurant's layout, guidelines and standards, says Chris Antczak, the lead trainer and a server at The Refectory for 15 years. They also work with the kitchen to learn about the ingredients, the menus

and chef Blondin's meticulous style until they understand every dish. Perhaps most daunting, servers must become acquainted with the vast wine cellar of more than 600 bottles. That knowledge is passed down through generations at the 41-year-old establishment. Antczak himself was trained by server John Saunders, still with the restaurant after 36 years. Longevity is common among the tight-knit staff—four years ago, our Best Restaurants story featured a dozen employees, 11 of whom had been with The Refectory for at least one decade. "A lot of people stick around because of that family attitude," Antczak says, "and most of all, we strive to get better every single day." —Chris Gaitten



Top, server Chris Antczak, with Wild Strawberry Charlotte dessert, has been working at The Refectory for about 15 years; bottom, duck agnolotti at La Tavola



The Refectory Restaurant & Wine Shop
1092 Bethel Rd.,
Upper Arlington
614-451-9774
refectory.com

La Tavola

Sophisticated yet casual, traditional yet contemporary, La Tavola manages a rare feat: It's a fine dining establishment with the soul of a mom-and-pop eatery. In this bright and peppy place with a busy open kitchen, fanciful green-and-yellow wallpaper plays off handmade wooden booths, and ingredients and techniques meet at stellar heights. Give credit for this aesthetic to chef Rick Lopez and wife/baker Krista, whose creations—from entrées to appetizers, breads to desserts—are made from scratch daily. Other distinguishing attributes include a terrific Italian wine selection, two-course, \$15, "Sunday Supper" bargains and fantastic chalkboard specials, like bruschetta, actually worth ordering, plus outstanding seafood dishes.

DIFFERENCE-MAKER:

Pasta Made by Hand

Like a magician who's practiced a card trick for years in the dark to master it, La Tavola chef-owner Rick Lopez flicks his wrist over a gnocchi roller, and in a half-second flash of nimble fingers, he transforms a dough blob into a beautiful piece of ridged, potato-based pasta. This is no illusion, though, as a nibble of the delicious and supple dumpling immediately proves. "The key to great gnocchi—I need them light as clouds—is less flour," Lopez says. To achieve this texture, he roasts a load of spuds, rices them and dries them out for about 24 hours. Then he adds local eggs, salt and imported Italian "00" flour—how much depends on factors like humidity because, as Lopez explains, "You do handmade pasta by feel."

After cooking just until they bob to the surface of boiling water, Lopez immediately marries the gnocchi to house tomato sauce or European-style butter and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. In the rich Gnocchi al Forno, he bakes them with artichokes and herbs in a wine-cream-cheese sauce. In addition to lovely gnocchi, Lopez—a gadget geek—makes several other great pastas, like duck-filled agnolotti; fat ribbons of saffron-pappardelle sliced with "the Ferrari" of pasta-cutters (it's brass-wheeled) for a charred octopus dish; and semolina-fortified dough passed through a device with guitar strings to create delectable prosciutto-wrapped fettuccine "alla chitarra" with black pepper, garlic and cream. —G. A. Benton



La Tavola
1664 W. First Ave.,
Grandview
614-914-5455
latavolagrandview.com



10 BEST TIP: Rick and Krista Lopez are opening **Lupo**, a tapas and oyster bar, this month in Upper Arlington at 2124 Arlington Ave. La Tavola's chef de cuisine Todd Elder will move over to run the Spanish-meets-Italian restaurant.



Beer pairings for Rockmill Tavern's Monday Beer Dinner series

NO

8

Rockmill Tavern

In its first year of operation, Rockmill Tavern did a couple of things really well: It bottled some of the magic from Rockmill Brewery's farmhouse in Lancaster and brought it to the Brewery District, and it captured how we're eating right now. Rockmill owner-brewer Matthew Barbee likes to say his Belgian-style beers were designed with food pairings in mind. He's found a muse in chef Andrew Smith, who brings experience from The Rossi and Philco and seems a perfect fit for Rockmill's rustic yet refined aesthetic. The tavern's weekend brunch is already one of the best in the city (oh, those chilaquiles), complemented by an impressive coffee program. (The tavern opens at 7 a.m. weekdays for coffee service and breakfast.) Smith's small dinner menu offers crowd favorites like the Tavern Burger and Spicy Chicken Sandwich, plus simple stunners like a burrata with oil verde, rotating veggie toast and perfectly cooked Arctic char. But one of Rockmill's best contributions to the dining scene is its multicourse beer pairing events, when Smith really gets to show that he's no one-trick pony in this barnwood-walled tavern.



Rockmill Tavern
503 S. Front St.,
Brewery District
614-732-4364
rockmilltavern.com



10 BEST TIP: Rockmill released its first sour beer this year, the **Cerise Cherry Sour**, described as a farmhouse ale with Montmorency cherries. As a sour beer it's subtle, refreshing and capable of winning over sour skeptics. It's now available in bottles, on draft at area bars and at Rockmill Brewery's tasting room. Keep an eye out for Rockmill's second sour—currently fermenting in the tavern's foudre.



Apples and pears marinated in bacon fat with Cloverton cheese

DIFFERENCE-MAKER:

Beer Pairing 101

If you're curious about beer pairings and want a chance to see Rockmill stretch its culinary legs, then check out the tavern's Monday Beer Dinner series. You get six courses and six beer samples (with generous pours), plus explanations about the pairings from the brewer and chef. I showed up solo to a beer dinner this fall, sat with strangers, and what transpired was one of the most enjoyable (and educational) dining experiences I can remember. For one course featuring a crispy chicken thigh in chicken jus gras (or pan sauce) with golden figs and caramelized pumpkin, Barbee paired a smoky Saison Noir to balance the fattiness of the sauce and complement the caramel flavor components. Rockmill usually takes the opportunity to highlight a particular purveyor at these dinners. On this night,

it was Laurel Valley Creamery of Gallipolis. Laurel Valley's Cloverton cheese made a star turn in one course, topping a dish of apples and pears marinated in bacon fat, which Barbee paired with Rockmill's Petite Saison. Cheese and beer are "a match made in heaven," Barbee says. "I was introduced to the pairing by the Trappist monk tradition." Part of the beauty is that the two are of the same farm cycle, Barbee explains. The largest waste product of a brew day is spent grain, which the monks fed to their cows. In turn, those cows produced milk from that diet of spent brewers' grain that the monks used to make cheese, which was then paired with their beer, thus completing the cycle. Beer dinners run around \$50-\$65, a good value given the offerings and a sure way to beat a case of the Mondays. —Erin Edwards

NO

9

Basi Italia

What first won you over at Basi Italia? Maybe it was the warmth of owners John Dornback and Trish Gentile. Maybe it was the Rigatoni Salumeria, the adorable patio, the effortless service or the Butterscotch Budino. Basi's menu is not trendy or earth-shattering, but instead built on its hallmark of consistency and freshness. Take, for example, this summer's outstanding risotto with sweet corn, smoky bacon and crab, a dish not overburdened with cream and cheese. Or the Eggplant Parmesan, one of Basi's signature dishes. "The thing he's most excited about right now is he got a new guy for the eggplant," Gentile says about her chef-husband, whose eyes light up. "There's nothing like a fresh eggplant. I get geeked out about it," Dornback says. He isn't in the kitchen every night anymore, relying on his team to do the heavy lifting during dinner service. It means Dornback is able to spend more time tweaking the menu, re-establishing relationships with local purveyors and playing Mr. DIY. Basi is not about to reinvent the wheel, he says, but heading into its 15th year, this Victorian Village stalwart continues to charm.



10 BEST TIP: Basi Italia has teamed up with Quinn Fallon, owner of Little Rock Bar, for **Beggars Banquet**, a pop-up inside Fallon's Italian Village watering hole. Chef John Dornback isn't going to serve "Basi food"—save for Sunday spaghetti suppers—but you can expect a tight menu of bar food that's Basi in spirit: creative and fresh.



Basi Italia owners
John Dornback and
Trish Gentile

DIFFERENCE-MAKER:

Cozy Conversation

When it opened 14 years ago, this little, green Italian spot on Highland Street was on the neighborhood's outskirts, and now it is surrounded by booming development on all sides. It means more people are within walking distance (or Uber range) of the restaurant. It still feels like a secret, even if Basi added a few more seats this year to the famous patio. "We're a legitimate 100-seater seven months out of the year. Which is pretty crazy for us having started out with only 28 and thinking that was as busy as I could handle," says Dornback. While Basi may get lively, it's no competition for the new generation of warehouse-y restaurants filled with hard surfaces and noise. Basi is still one of the best places in town to go if you want an intimate dinner with warm service. "We sort of modeled it on our house. We'd have a dinner party and it got up to where we had 12, 14 or 16 people on Sundays, and it would be loud and fun, but it would still be intimate." Inside (remember: Basi has an interior!), paintings on the ceiling help to baffle noise, along with drapes. Meanwhile, one of Dornback's DIY projects this year was to add more drama to the patio bar and kitchen with a new coat of paint. "I'm in a big black phase ... it sort of looks like theater," he says, noting that the glow of the kitchen against the black backdrop creates the impression of a stage. And come chilly weather, the back patio gets zipped up, transforming the bar from a backyard garden party to an après ski scene complete with blankets. "It was sort of garage chic over the last couple years," Dornback says. "So we tried to warm it up and put some different lamps out there. It's going to be a little different than just hanging out in the garage." —Erin Edwards



Basi Italia
811 Highland St.,
Victorian Village
614-294-7383
basi-italia.com



No **10**

Gallerie Bar & Bistro

When the Hilton Columbus Downtown opened in 2012, its restaurant was billed as French-inspired. You know: onion soup, mussels and steak au poivre. Since then, Gallerie has expanded beyond the confines of “French bistro,” instead offering an imaginative, Ohio-inspired motif from the minds of executive chef Bill Glover and chef de cuisine Josh Kayser. Boasting a stylish space with eye-popping white banquets and soaring ceilings, Gallerie is one of the city’s biggest supporters of Ohio products and purveyors—quality Anderson Farms pork, RL Valley Ranch beef and Watershed spirits are menu mainstays. Seafood is also a highlight; the Fish Ribs and Rare Tuna dishes remain standouts. And creativity is evident throughout. Instead of a typical hotel appetizer, you get a spectacular foie gras torchon with scallops, pineapple marmalade and macadamia nut shortbread. Creative flourishes don’t always pan out—a deconstruction of shrimp and grits didn’t translate—but rather than playing it safe, Gallerie takes risks and honors quality ingredients. The local dining scene is better for it.

DIFFERENCE-MAKER:

Dessert as Art

Forget crème brûlée and massive hunks of chocolate cake. Gallerie’s creative streak is never more obvious than on the restaurant’s dessert menu, where the work of pastry chef Aaron Clouse made an impression this year. Clouse, who hails from Tiffin, Ohio, joined the team in March, bringing a degree from The French Pastry School in Chicago and pastry experience from The Refectory, L Brands and his own cake business. As Hilton employees, he and pastry cook Ashley Owens manage the dessert program for the hotel’s events, banquets, restaurant and in-room dining. The 24-year-old’s approach as a pastry chef is perfectly suited to a hotel filled with art. “I used to be a music major and have done abstract paintings and a lot of art, so for me it’s very colorful, very artistic,” he says, describing his style. In one of Gallerie’s biggest sellers, Vanilla & Honey, Clouse uses a glass to create a terrarium filled with a vanilla bean crème, orange marmalade, roasted almond soil and a white chocolate honeycomb “beehive.” He dreamed it up after learning that Hilton Columbus Downtown has its own honeybee colony. “During the season, we harvest the honey from the roof and then we can actually use it in the restaurant. So it’s natural, organic and local. I think it’s the extreme of local,” he says. To create chocolate branches for the dessert, he pipes the chocolate under water (a pastry school no-no), causing it to immediately seize up. The result is a knotty branch from which he hangs a marshmallow beehive sprinkled with sesame seeds to mimic bees (he’s allergic to their stings, by the way). It’s a whimsical and memorable dessert—share at your own risk. —Erin Edwards



Chocolate
& Sesame



IN LIMBO: We’re withholding one of this magazine’s perennial favorites from this year’s 10 Best list. Kihachi Japanese Restaurant remains one of a kind, the most authentic example of Japanese cuisine offered in Columbus. Chef Ryuji “Mike” Kimura, a master of precision and a role model of dogged hard work, is headed toward retirement. With the restaurant up for sale, we decided to give others a chance. But, by all means, go experience an omakase dinner curated by chef Mike while you still can.

10 BEST TIP: What dessert trends can we expect to see in 2018? Chef Aaron Clouse hints at three:

- **Metallics**—think rustic white cakes with gold and rose gold accents
- **Vegetables** in desserts, combining the sweet and savory
- **Doughnuts** are back big-time

Pastry chef Aaron Clouse prepares Vanilla & Honey



Gallerie Bar & Bistro
401 N. High St., Short North
614-484-5287
galleriebarandbistro.com