



# Powerhouses

STEAK OR SUSHI? TWO WASHINGTON, D.C., HOT SPOTS OFFER GUESTS THE FINER THINGS IN LIFE

**For better or worse**, Washington, D.C.'s dining scene may always be intrinsically linked with the "power steakhouse": dining rooms where political deals are brokered and guests can play guess-who's-that-Senator-or-Secretary amid the crowd seated at neighboring tables. While the city's cuisine has evolved well beyond wedge salads and wagyu chops to represent a vibrant array of global flavors, carnivores can still feed their passion for protein at the many stellar and expense account-friendly spots dotting the District.

Among them is BLT Steak D.C., a contemporary version of the modern American steakhouse, which reopened March 5 at its location mere steps from the White House after undergoing a complete renovation last winter. D.C.- and L.A.-based firm Studio Saint is responsible for the new design, which balances the dark, "masculine" elements associated with the restaurant genre with lighter touches of slate gray and natural fabrics. (Unfortunately, warping from an ill-timed flood, occurring right after the hardwood-floor installation, is noticeable even if you're already two Martinis in.)

Before tucking into BLT's massively inflated and light-as-air signature popovers, known to elicit squeals of delight from regulars, my companion and I started with cocktails: The Hendrick's Gin-based Bee's Knees was fragrant and balanced, the Brugal 1888 Rum-based Old Fashioned got its sweet notes from vanilla simple syrup, and the seasonal Sangria was layered and enticingly tart. A platter of East and West Coast oysters and a generously garnished wedge were divine with a mineral Sancerre, while the meaty "cowboy rib-eye" found its match in a Crianza Rioja—a welcome departure from the typical Cabernet.

Meanwhile, in Midtown Center, a buzzy new spot is garnering accolades for its ridiculously sexy interior—so

BLT Steak's seasonal Sangria. ▶



PHOTO: KELLY MAGYARICS



PHOTO: REY LOPEZ

▲ The interior at SHŌTŌ features a circular "constellation" of hundreds of hanging rocks sourced from an active volcano in Japan.

over the top it attracts pedestrian passersby eager to snap a pic. SHŌTŌ, the modern Japanese restaurant and izakaya launched in February by London-born and Bethesda, Maryland-raised founder Arman Naqi, is one of the hardest-to-snap reservations in town. It proved to be a fitting spot to ring in my sushi-adoring firstborn child's 18th birthday.

Our party was seated under the circular "constellation" of hundreds of hanging rocks sourced from an active volcano in Japan; on the far "living" wall, cutouts display faux fires, and the ceiling serves as an ode to the Japanese art of basket weaving. It's all the work of Tokyo designer Noriyoshi Muramatsu, and the effect is jaw-dropping. So is the food. The smartest way to experience it is by indulging in the five-course omakase menu; what arrives at the table is sure to be a fun

surprise. We battled chopsticks over slices of sesame-crusting, ponzu-bathed salmon sashimi; fried baby squid with serrano chiles; and chicken and pork-belly skewers from the robata, fueled in part by binchotan, a Japanese charcoal renowned for its high heat and clean flavor.

Japanese ingredients also pepper the cocktail list, yielding libations like a Manhattan with walnut- and pumpkin seed-infused Toki Whisky, umeshu, and cold brew coffee and a Suika Martini with Roku Gin, watermelon, yuzu, and Aperol. Our only complaints on that auspicious occasion were the takeout-quality chopsticks presented to us (really?) and service that felt a bit rushed, especially considering the price point: Staff would do well to let guests linger and savor their surroundings—and that uber-fresh sashimi—a little bit longer. **VZ**

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