

GOING COMPLETELY BLANC

Acid, Nuts and Minerals, Oh My!

Kelly Magyarics has a thing for bold whites.

"Some may criticize New Zealand sauvignon blanc for acting like a one-trick pony—all lean and mean and lacking the complexity that the grape shows in other regions like the Loire and Bordeaux—but other acid junkies [myself included] crave its zesty, bright acidity and freshness," she argues.

She got her latest fix from the **2008 Spy Valley Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc [\$12]**, a whip-smart refresher with "intense gooseberry and passion fruit" and "wet stone-like minerality."

While putting away one of PassionFish's fried oyster po'boy, Jake Parrott found himself reaching for the **2008 Chateau les Arromans Entre-Deux-Mers [\$14]**—a stand-up sipper packed "with loads of Granny Smith apple and lime" and a "grapefruit finish [that] invites the next sip."

Magyarics returned to the New Zealand well during a visit to Tallula, pitching the **2007 Spy Valley Pinot Noir [\$24]** as the perfect accompaniment to a mushroom-goat cheese medley.

"It's got juicy blueberries and red fruits ... a touch of floridity [violet specifically], and a firm enough backbone to stand alongside a variety of dishes," Magyarics says of the versatile red.

Meanwhile, Parrott's trek across the PassionFish carte eventually led him to the **Marc Tomio Junmai Daiginjo Sake [\$55]**, a rice wine eliciting "dry melon," "chalky" and "dried pear" sensations. "Like a great fino sherry, the finish cranks up the nuttiness and saline depth," he says of the Japanese stunner.



OUR
WINE PROS



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the wings. Elsewhere, shaved beef takes comfort in the company of tahini and pureed garlic. **5900 Washington Blvd., Arlington; 703-241-8681. L, D daily** 🍷🍴🍴

★ THE LIBERTY TAVERN \$\$

Liberty Tavern executive chef Liam LaCivita executes pizzas and bar snacks with the same aplomb that guides his signature entrees, which makes for happy eating at any spot/hour within this Clarendon nightlife magnet. Grilled squid and bulbous caper berries—pickled pods that shower the palate in a mustard-vinegar burn—reign supreme atop a gourmet pie further embellished with torn arugula and roasted garlic (adds zesty oomph). Homemade gnocchi glide down the gullet astride a magic carpet of fava beans, mushrooms and chevre, the ruffled dumplings enrobed in extra virgin olive oil and concupiscent goat cheese (encore!). Lemony skate swims in a sea of crushed hazelnut-lemon-brown butter sauce, all anchored by a remarkable roasted potatoes, beets and smoked bacon hash (bravo). **3195 Wilson Blvd., Arlington; 703-465-9360. L Tue-Sat, D daily, LN Mon-Sat, Br Sun** 🍷🍴🍴🍴

★ RAY'S THE STEAKS \$\$\$

The more spacious layout (two dining rooms; one accepts reservations, the other remains walk-in friendly) means there's more room for commingling of the carnivorous masses, whether they be gourmet beer-draining businessmen or mohawked youths studiously examining sommelier Mark Slater's burgeoning wine collection (100-plus well-traveled bottles, most very easy on the wallet). Deviled eggs heaped with steak tartare and hollandaise pro-

vide a clever play on picnic fare. A roast beef-like slab of picahna plays possum until plunged into a scorching salsa verde (much more satisfying than the pabulum served at many Latin American establishments). Luscious strips of hanger steak are all-natural juices and unadulterated might (absolutely mouthwatering). A generous scoop of roasted bone marrow (surreally fatty intro, livery finish) and garlicky persillade propel regular steak into another dimension. **2300 Wilson Blvd., Courthouse; 703-841-7297. D daily** 🍷

★ SETTE BELLO \$\$

This place is no culinary temple; it's more like a gastronomic fun park. Floor-to-ceiling windows ensure that those who come to be seen are—leaving passersby to gaze in longingly at the feasting and frivolity taking place within. Sunken sofas opposite the bar are ideal thrones for oversized personalities come to play. A snack-sized portion of polpetta reveals a cluster of mini meatballs rolled in breadcrumbs, a spicy tomato sauce at their feet. Coils of shaved fennel and leafy tufts of arugula partner up for a bitter-fresh promenade across the palate, while a sheet of shaved Parmesan ensures salt receptors don't feel left out. Freshly torn basil, pearls of smoked mozzarella (a little goes a long way), diced tomatoes and a confident tomato ragout drive a bowl of herb-laced fettuccine. **3101 Wilson Blvd., Arlington; 703-351-1004. L, D, LN daily Br Sun** 🍷🍴🍴🍴

★ THIRSTY BERNIE SPORTS BAR & GRILL \$\$

Strip-mall sports bars aren't usually known for their rilletes, saucisson sec or homemade bratwurst.

Then again, most sports bars didn't snag wandering chef-cum-charcuterie merchant Jamie Stachowski to help launch their concept. Meanwhile, chef Andy Cieslowski continues to put his own stamp on the menu. Whenever available, jump on the charcuterie, as Stachowski is a whiz when it comes to kielbasa (seared bulbs of Polish sausage are sublime), country pate (herb-spiked liver sporting the faintest ring of fat possible) and everything in between. Their hot pastrami sandwich sports pickled red onions, piles of pepper-cured brisket (fantastic) and melted Swiss pressed between nutty, whole-grain pumpernickel. Plain old pierogies go gourmet via a tangy farmer's cheese filling, and seductive riesling-brown butter sauce pleasantly goosed by golden raisins (well played). **2163 N. Glebe Road, Arlington; 703-248-9300. L Tue-Fri, D, LN daily, Br Sat-Sun** 🍷🍴🍴🍴🍴🍴

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★ FOTI'S \$\$\$

"Foti's continues to walk a fine line between quaint exurban gem and commuter-luring dining haunt. The scene can be as serene as a night in your own study—assuming you have access to a gourmet chef and coveted wine library. Or as lively as the evening owner Frank Maragos entertained patrons with yarns about Greece and his barrel-chested, meat-carving pater familias (a man Maragos fondly describes as "a humble butcher"). Cornmeal-crust ed okra and grilled shrimp are buoyed by a seductive sweet corn-tomato-cream medley. Brie smothered