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By [Jamie R. Liu](#) in [Food](#) on December 30, 2011 10:00 AM



DCist's Favorite Dishes of 2011

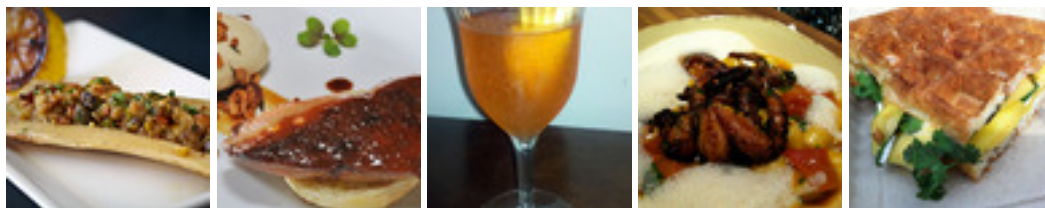
Fiola's smoked potato gnocchi with grilled octopus and crab (*Jamie R. Liu*)

Jamie Liu

Smoked Potato Gnocchi with Octopus and Crab - [Fiola](#)

The smoked potato gnocchi at Fiola was one of my favorite dishes of the year from the first bite. There are some dishes that you eat and thoroughly enjoy, but a month later you can't recall what you ate.

However, the gnocchi at Fiola hit me as one of those signature plates that should always be on the menu in some form. The fine balance of smoke and creaminess from the potatoes, and the acidity of the sauce won me over.



It's crazy to look back on all the things that happened this year in D.C. food. There was more news than we could have ever managed to capture. And we're grateful to be able to cover such a vibrant and dynamic food scene.

This year saw the opening of more restaurants than we could name or afford to visit. But we did manage to get around to a few: [Smith Commons](#), [America Eats Tavern](#), [Bon Mi](#), [Hill Country Barbecue Market](#), [Toki Underground](#), [The Federalist](#), [Elisir](#), [Lost Society](#), [Rogue 24](#), [Jack Rose](#), [Shophouse](#), [District of Pi](#), [Touchdown](#), and [Yola](#). We also saw the start of an underground market for homemade goods with the [D.C. Grey Market](#), while D.C. drinkers saw the launch of the first [D.C. brewery](#) in over 50 years: [DC Brau](#).

We were sad to see some favorites go with the closings of [Ba Bay](#), [Froggy Bottom](#), [Sabor'a Street](#), and [Tenpenh](#). And we gawked at the closing of [Galileo III](#), and were shocked by the extent of Chef

Roberto Donna's tax troubles. We vented our outrage at being called second-tier by our favorite meme heavy chef, Spike Mendelsohn. And then we were also told by some crazy critic in Philly that his city was head and shoulders above us in food.

And we chewed the fat with Dogfish Head's Sam Calagione, The Avett Brothers' Joe Kwon, cookbook author Joan Nathan, Soupergirl's Sara Polon, and Room 11 and Punch Book author Dan Searing.

In 2012, we look forward to more great food, more great booze, and more ridiculousness! So without further ado, our favorite D.C. dishes of 2011. Let us know about some of your favorite bites and drinks from this year in the comments. Bon appétit!

John Fleury

Seared Foie Gras with Peaches - Vidalia

This is a dish where none of the parts speak to me individually, but when plated together, sing to me in a sweet and rich harmony. The seared foie gras had a crispy exterior and a silky melting center with a luxurious flavor to match. The caramelized peaches walk the tightrope hand in hand with the seared meat and traverse the dangerous darker regions of flavor that typically overpower. They were delicate enough to have character but accommodating to the lighter flavors in the accompanying brown sugar ice cream and flaky buttermilk biscuit. I really enjoy the dish because it feels like comfort food fitted in a three-piece suit. Fancy, yet soothing, is a balance that I can always appreciate and will have me coming back for more.

NATAS - DC Brau

An unaggressive Belgianification of an American porter was not what I expected from the minds at DC Brau. But when you combine the brewing skills of Brandon Skall and Jeff Hancock with Brian Strumke of Stillwater Ales, anything is possible. This collaboration beer creates a beautiful balance between complexity and accessibility that speaks to all kinds of drinkers. As black as the Dark Lord's soul, the rich cocoa and roasted flavors come on strong but quickly make room for candied sugar sweetness and yeast-driven nuances. With all the talk of these bold flavors, what makes this beer really shine is how they truly work together to create a beer that can satiate the beer nerd's quest for new and different and still be accessible to those who may be intimidated by beers that look to be made by Penzoil rather than D.C.'s first production brewery in over 50 years.

Alyse Kraus

Sherry-Glazed Black Cod with Smoky Romesco - Estadio

Estadio's menu is full of winning dishes but the sherry glazed black cod (offered in the spring and summer with halibut) is a true epiphany. The buttery black cod is seared perfectly and the subtle hint of sherry pairs well with the mild flavor of the fish. The romesco sauce is vibrant and sweet with hints of a charred and smoky flavor that is offset by bursts of tartness from dried cherries and a tangle of greens providing needed notes of bitterness and minerality. The combination of buttery, sweet, tart, bitter, and smoky flavors can become addictive and just might require ordering a second plate of this small dish with big flavor.

Nutty Sweet Potato Soup with Harissa - Soupergirl

It's easy to forget when you're eating the intensely flavorful soups at this new Takoma storefront that it's also vegan and healthy. Every soup is packed with layers of flavor that make the bottom of your bowl a sad sight. It's hard to pick a favorite among the vast and ever-changing array of soups offered but the nutty sweet potato soup is almost impossible to resist. A velvety puree of sweet potato enhanced with Soupergirl's homemade peanut butter is a winning combination in and of itself but it's the traces of fiery harissa that put it over the top. Every smooth spoonful leaves a tingle of spice on your tongue that will make you wish you'd gotten a bigger bowl. The fact that it's vegan and made with local produce is the icing on a seriously tasty cake.

Mid-Summer Crush - The Columbia Room

Anyone who has been to the Columbia Room will know that you're unlikely to get a bad drink at the tiny bar-in-a-bar that lives in the back of The Passenger. The staff is so focused and attentive when trying to

learn what each patron likes, doesn't like, and might like that each drink has a level of care and attention bordering on obsession. That obsessive desire to please your palate leads to some pretty fabulous drinks though. Head bartender Katie Nelson came up with the Mid-Summer Crush to serve as the perfect refreshing libation for patrons beat down by the oppressive summer heat this year. A mix of Aperol, Domaine de Canton, fresh grapefruit juice, and sparkling wine, this pretty cocktail charms you with hints of bitter citrus and sweet ginger and just enough effervescence to put you in festive spirits.

The Good Doctor Breakfast Sandwich - [Granville Moore's](#)

Vegan sausage is not any food that I would ever anticipate being on my best of list. But the Good Doctor Breakfast sandwich featuring the sausage, scrambled eggs, cheddar cheese, chipotle mayo, and avocado on potato kaiser roll was good enough to stick out in my mind. The house made veggie sausage has the great firm texture you get with meat, as well as perfect sausage seasoning without the high sodium levels of those processed blocks you find at the grocery store. And Teddy Folkman takes the classic breakfast sandwich and spices it up with the chipotle mayo and gives it a little more creaminess from the avocado. Since I visited, they now make it even better by allowing diners to accessorize their sandwich further with smoked salmon or applewood bacon. Even better? It's served with Granville's awesome home frites. (And yes, vegans can order the sausage as a side.)

Thai Tea Latte - [Shilla Bakery](#)

I frequently find myself craving the Thai Tea Latte from Shilla Bakery in Annandale. It takes a typical hot Thai tea, and elevates it into an unusually coconutty, sweet, foaming mass with hints of vanilla. The slightly tannic black tea washes away the grease of earlier Korean BBQ indulgences at one of the many joints along Little River Turnpike, while it provides a sweet dessert-like ending.

Kat Lucero

Mango and Brie Wafflewich - [Wicked Waffle](#)

Thierry Jugnet became a genius to me when he combined my favorite fruit, favorite cheese, favorite herb and favorite breakfast food together into a sandwich at his new waffle-themed casual eatery in Farragut Square. I know, mangoes aren't in season yet and far from being a local food, but this is perhaps the reason why this particular treat to me is wicked. Nevertheless, the mangoes are tangy, sweet and ample and the brie adds the right creaminess, while spicy berry jam and cilantro together enliven the main features. Sandwich all of them together with crispy waffle slices and you'll get an amazing array of textures dancing on your palate.

Pho dogs - [U Street Music Hall](#)

"Pho-what?" is usually the reaction I get when I tell people about U Street Music Hall's favorite menu item. But I insist it does exist and continues to be the best bar snack ever. Although it's not a novelty this year, the Vietnamese soup-flavored *pho* dog (topped with hoisin and Sriracha sauce on a toasted bun) has survived an [end-of-the-year menu overhaul](#) and has even multiplied to six variations. That means night owls can enjoy more of these bar bites in different flavors such as a spicy half smoked, spicy chicken sausage and grilled tofu. Trying out these new menu items at U Street Music Hall is a New Year's resolution that I will likely not break.

Alicia Mazzara

Roasted Bone Marrow - [Graffiato](#)

As a bit of a disclaimer, I've never met an odd or underused cut of meat that I didn't like, so I was delighted to see bone marrow on the menu at Graffiato. Although the idea of eating the squishy stuff in the center of animal bones does not hold universal appeal, it's well worth putting aside any squeamishness to enjoy Graffiato's take on this simple pleasure. Roasted bone marrow is typically rather soft, fatty, and gelatinous, making it a hard sell for some diners. However, Mike Isabella's rendition mixes the rich, unctuous marrow with bits of bread crumb, pistachio, and bacon for crunch and a burst of salt. A squeeze of roasted lemon helps lighten the meaty flavors and highlight the sweetness of the pistachio. The only disappointment? That there's only one bone per order. Trust me, you'll be left wanting more.

Josh Novikoff

Pan Seared North Carolina Shrimp with Shishito Peppers and House Made Chorizo - The Inn at Little Washington

A special occasion dinner took me to the Inn at Little Washington for the first time. It's certainly possible to find food as good as Patrick O'Connell's a little closer to home. But it's the art of presentation at the Inn--on the plate, in the service, the luxe decor, and the aura that surrounds the place that is unrivaled. The bite I'll most remember is the Pan Seared North Carolina Shrimp with Shishito Peppers and House Made Chorizo. The shrimp in a mild tomato sauce with blistered peppers makes for a snappy fresh bite.

Sweet Corn Agnolotti - Graffiato

Mike Isabella's homemade pastas are out of this world. I love the straightforward simplicity of the handcut spaghetti with cherry tomatoes and basil. But the Sweet Corn Agnolotti were pillows of summer, the sweet fresh corn almost walking the line of *primi* and dessert. A chestnut version with butternut squash and brown butter has replaced them on the winter menu.

Kitfo - Meaza

Work (of the non-DCist variety) took me to Ethiopia each of the last two Novembers. I sought out kitfo, the country's national dish of spiced, buttered, minced raw beef at one of Addis Ababa's most renowned kitfo houses. The place serves nothing else. Call me a homer, but it didn't hold a candle to the good stuff I get at Meaza in Falls Church. The Ethiopian tartare is mixed with spices and butter, jalapenos, and onions, an assertively spiced and primal pleasure. And you can get it served atop a copper-colored pancake of all-teff, and thus gluten-free, injera is regularly available (it's usually mixed with flour).