



An urban artist sprays graffiti during the International Festival of Graffiti at downtown of Mexico City. — AFP

Michelin gives DC a prestigious vote of culinary confidence



Chef Aaron Silverman, owner of Rose's Luxury and Pineapple and Pearls restaurants, poses inside Pineapple And Pearls' kitchen in Washington, DC.



A kitchen staffer prepares appetizers in the kitchen of the Pineapple and Pearls restaurant. — AFP photos



An eggplant tart is on display at the Pineapple and Pearls restaurant.

It's a Wednesday night and Rose's Luxury won't open for nearly another hour, but a line is already snaking out from under the brightly colored awning of one of Washington's buzziest restaurants. The flock of eager diners is a testament to the capital city's newfound foodie street cred, which grabbed the attention of international culinary tastemakers who are set to publish their first Michelin guide to the city October 13.

"Every time I come here there is something new and exciting," said Sandy Diamond, a perky retiree who with her daughter made a pilgrimage to the storied restaurant from her rural Vermont home. "Everything is always a new experience for your taste buds." The white door trimmed in forest green finally opens and the patient epicures stream in to the spacious dining room with walls of weathered brick, which looks into the open kitchen.

A culinary kingdom

Rose's Luxury opened in late 2013 to grand fanfare, becoming an instant sensation on the city's foodscape. The restaurant opened with just 20 employees, a payroll that quickly jumped to 65. "We had to grow very quickly," said owner Aaron Silverman, 34, who worked in New York and the southern city Charleston before returning home to open his first restaurant. A no-reservations eatery featuring reasonably priced contemporary American cuisine with an international spin, Rose's is known for its 13-dollar plate of spaghetti bathed in a spicy tomato sauce that is tempered by a sweet dose of strawberries.

In feats of endurance many diners wait for hours to snag a seat at one of the honey-stained wood tables-but one hometown celebrity managed to skip the long line. President Barack Obama celebrated his 54th birthday last year at the small-plates restaurant, though the restaurant kept mum on what the commander-in-chief ordered.

Buoyed by the success of his first gastronomic venture, Silverman has begun building a small kingdom of DC restaurants. Next door to Rose's sits its higher-end spinoff Pineapple and Pearls.

Rumor has it the sibling restaurant that opened in April is in the running for a two-star rating from Michelin's arbiters of haute cuisine. The \$250-dollar menu that features more than a dozen courses includes a yogurt-filled bonbon sitting atop a slotted absinthe spoon-balanced over a glass of fennel juice, celery, green apple and absinthe-and a tart featuring the delicate "fairy tale" variety of eggplants.

'Capitol Hill game changer'

Bon Appetit, one of America's leading food magazines, recently dubbed Rose's Luxury a "Capitol Hill game changer"—two years after naming the spot America's top new restaurant, a major boost for Washington's gastronomic notoriety. Long considered a culinary wasteland of power lunches and bland steakhouses, the US capital city has seen its popularity among foodies skyrocket in recent years. "The DC scene is just growing so much," Silverman said, sporting a chef's smock over his tattooed arms. "It's so exciting-everybody is excited about it."

He attributes Washington's evolution of taste to an influx of young people, which is noticeable in the newly bustling Capitol Hill neighborhood, where he opened his restaurants. Thanks to the city's epicurean ambition it will now become the fourth US city-joining New York, Chicago and San Francisco-to currently wear the Michelin badge of honor. "Washington chefs who have left and cooked around the world have come back to Washington," said Michael Ellis, Michelin's international director. "They have been incorporating new types of products, new types of seasonings, new types of cooking techniques." "[They] have really made the Washington din-

ing scene one of the most exciting in the United States today."

Gastronomic fearlessness

Washington's circle of elite eaters welcomed the news that Michelin's team of anonymous inspectors had descended on the city. Among them is Tom Sietsema, The Washington Post newspaper's food critic. "It's great that this revered guide is coming," Sietsema said. "There is this fearlessness in Washington-that one can't have in, say, San

Francisco or New York-where the stakes are so high." He also credits the city's slightly lower rents-in neighborhoods previously considered to be dangerous-as helping to usher in the city's nascent restaurant scene.

"It's not inexpensive to open a restaurant, but it's certainly easier," Sietsema said. Washington culinary veteran Ashok Bajaj opened his first restaurant in 1988, as the city was gearing up to inaugurate President George HW Bush. Since then he has hosted the Clintons, Madeleine Albright and Nelson Mandela at his half-a-dozen

dining establishments. One of Bajaj's restaurants Rasika is among the frontrunners vying for a Michelin star. When he landed in DC, the seasoned restaurateur said that dining establishments in the then-quiet capital were concentrated in the area immediately surrounding the White House. "Now, people are breaking boundaries, they're going to unknown places in the city to open restaurants," he said. "For the Michelin guide to endorse us, to review our restaurants in the city-it means a lot." "We have come a long way." — AFP



Pink umbrellas decorate the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health in the capital Beirut as part of a national campaign for the public awareness of breast cancer. — AFP