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Too Cool to Fail: Why Trump Can't Kill D.C.'s Mojo

Even a government full of government-haters won't crush the nightlife created under Obama

When President Trump moved to Washington, D.C., earlier this year, he inherited from his predecessor six years of job growth and a city that was, for the first time in its history, actually kind of cool. We knew what he was planning to do to Obamacare, but what would Trump mean for the city?

Not a lot. (Not yet, at least.)

Two hotel openings, this year and last, are proof of a slow and fundamental shift. (No, neither place is owned by Trump.)

First, The Watergate—yes, that one—threw open its doors after a three-year renovation. Then the geniuses behind The Line, the quirky Koreatown hotel that helped re-center L.A.'s nightlife, set their sights on the Adams Morgan neighborhood. The gutted church, now the hotel's second outpost, was designed to be as porous to the community as possible: A functioning radio station holds court in the corner of the lobby, surrounded by a handful of places to eat, chill, or get hammered in. On the higher floors, views stretch straight out to the Washington Monument.

And then there are the restaurants—those little neighborhood joints that annually make appearances on Best New lists (including ours). Just around the corner from The Line, Tail Up Goat is doing the city's best nouveau Mediterranean menu. (Nouveau Mediterranean? It's when a place has cannoli but the cannoli comes with Chartreuse.)

Weeknights here are loud and filled with regulars—the somm works the room as if he were running into old friends. The onslaught of spicy dishes that head out into the tiny dining room at Bad Saint makes you feel as though the kitchen is staffed with Filipina grandmas who don't think you're eating enough. And then there's Pineapple and Pears, a purveyor of super-high-and-tasting menus hidden in a long, bright room behind a small, seatless café. Come in the morning for espresso; at night, show up (with a hard-earned reservation) for a dozen courses of mind-boggling creativity, like a broth steeped tableside in a Japanese siphon-style coffee brewer.

Maybe a handful of American restaurants are as impressive. Barmini and Service Bar represent different poles of the bar-tenders—liquid-nitrogen trend—Barmini in a clean-lined, lab-like space, Service Bar in an eccentric den on buzzy U Street. Room 11, right up the block from Bad Saint, updates classics with deftness and wit (and occasionally thyme). It's as if the energy of the Obama years were still intact. Maybe that's because the first-ever eater-in-chief still lives here, while his successor commutes back and forth from Florida.

—Mark Byrne