

## Marathon Man

It takes endurance, but someone has to stay the course and sample the city's finest new restaurants—even if it means trekking all over town.

By David Hagedorn

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Now that summer is here and the days are longer, it's easy to indulge my proclivity for running—from one restaurant to another, that is. It takes the endurance of a track star from Kenya (my staying power is usually closer to Dustin Hoffman's) to fit in all the new places opening in and around town, so, to see if I was fit enough, I gave myself two weeks to hit all the spots I wanted to cover for this issue.

The grueling course started on Pennsylvania Avenue at Café du Parc, then wound its way to Brasserie Beck at 11th and K, back to Mio on Vermont Avenue and on to Hook in Georgetown. From there, I panted over to Arlington's EatBar, then trailed the George Washington Parkway to Old Town Alexandria (by then I was so winded I had to rest up at three spots: the reborn **Majestic Cafe**, Vermilion and Rustico), and, finally, back to D.C. , ending in a heap of exhaustion in the lounge at Firefly with a Campari and soda in my hands. (*Hmmm ... Maybe this sports stuff isn't so bad, after all ...*)

### Leading the Pack-The Majestic

Local moguls Meshelle Armstrong and her chef/husband (these days in that order) Cathal have taken over Old Town Alexandria's beleaguered **Majestic Café** (911 King St., Alexandria, Va.; 703/837-9117; [www.majesticcafe.com](http://www.majesticcafe.com); \$57 per person, all inclusive) and made everything that was wrong about the place right.

They tout the new version as “casually swank,” and that hits the nail on the head. The cold, diner-like feel is gone, replaced by sexy lighting, cozy upholstered booths and a smattering of swag and passementerie. But the food remains as noble, humble, updated and clever as it was when former chefs Susan Lindeborg and Joe Raffa headed the kitchen. Shannon Overmiller shines from the tutelage of chef Armstrong; everything on the menu satisfies, from the classic Caesar prepared tableside to the lumpy crabcake remoulade, chunky pork terrine, and “big bowl of mussels” swimming in white wine, garlic and shallots. Even the meat loaf and calf's liver (under slices of house-cured bacon) sing siren songs, and the New York strip with french fries and Majestic butter, priced diner-friendly at \$23, is just what you want it to be.

There is a real family energy emanating from the staff and it shows in the service. They are all happy to be there, and you will be, too.