

# Melting Pot: The George on Washington unifies good food, good friends and good music



Photo credit: Jeremy Mularella

“I’m not only the general manager, I’m also the musical talent,” **Alex Tomasso** says when he checks on our table near the end of our meal. “Not tonight,” he adds when he sees me eyeing the piano, “but on Thursdays, from 7:30 - 10:30pm.”

My best food friend, Jeremy, and I were finishing our last course at the newly opened **The George on Washington**, a piano bar and upscale casual dining restaurant. When you walk into the space — remembered fondly by downtown frequenters as Local 121 — you’ll see why “upscale casual” works.

The main dining room is upscale spacious, with gilded columns, silver and gold curtains, and ivory padded partitions and upholstered chairs. This half of the restaurant was renovated into an elegant dining area, and I rather enjoyed the wide, throne-like chairs. I could have easily sat cross-legged within the chair's girth, making it the stretchy-pants of interior decorating: *Please, eat as much as you'd like ... you have plenty of room to grow.*



Photo credit: Jeremy Mularella

Conversely, the bar space is casual, but it feels as if you are taking a step into history: The mahogany panels and stained glass windows harken to its earlier days, offering a much different vibe from the main dining area. The baby grand Steinway is tucked into the corner, and bright red seating cubes vibrantly pop against the dark backdrop. Opposite the piano corner is an unmistakable mural of George Washington, hand-painted as a mosaic — each square of George's face is placed onto a different wooden panel square — courtesy of an AS220 artist-in-residence. "It's the portrait on the dollar bill," Tomasso said. "It took the artist three weeks. He also painted the 'We the people,'" he added, nodding to the wall above us. I hadn't noticed the calligraphy underneath the trim, written in the original script of our Constitution.

On Friday and Saturday evenings, The George is filled with the sounds of jazz music, and there's even live music to accompany their Sunday brunch with "endless" mimosas. But on this Tuesday night, it was quiet and intimate, with the exception of soft sounds drifting through the speakers, featuring the best of Fleetwood Mac, Journey and Neil Diamond.



Photo credit: Jeremy Mularella

We acquired our menus via QR codes, and the cocktail menu featured several Rhode Island spirits (Sons of Liberty whiskey, Rhodium gin and vodka) and US-history inspired names: the Benjamin Franklin, the Lady Liberty. Jeremy looked no further than the Thomas Jefferson — Rhodium Coffee and Black Walnut

vodka, chocolate liqueur, raspberry and espresso — and I was excited to order the Betsy Ross when our waitress told us about the “Basic Betty”: a pumpkin martini made with vanilla vodka, pumpkin liqueur and walnut liqueur, Portuguese horchata and cinnamon. Basic Betty, it is.

This drink was anything but basic. I’ve done serious research on the different ways to drink a pumpkin, and this was one of my favorites. Pumpkin and horchata are the peanut butter and jelly of a fall martini.

Elevated comfort food fills the dinner menu — *American* comfort food. “We don’t need any more Italian,” Tomasso joked, though their Pasta Bolognese, made with rigatoni and a beef, pork and veal sauce could easily go head-to-head with any spot on Federal Hill.



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In addition to that classic dish, Jeremy and I were feeling spicy, so we went with all the dishes that offered a kick: Roasted Buffalo Cauliflower, Grilled Spicy Sausage and the Buffalo Chicken Pizza. The cauliflower was perfectly tender and came with a smoked chipotle mayo that cooled down the spice-factor while adding its own delicious flavor. I’d classify the pizza as more of a flatbread, due to its stiff,

crispy crust, and the cheddar jack cheese offered a completely different profile from the typical pizza.

The standout dish for me was the Grilled Spicy Sausage, served on slices of garlic crostini, with a black bean puree and creole sauce. I loved this different take on bruschetta, as if it were the dark and mysterious counterpart to the bright and refreshing bruschetta of summer. It's the perfect appetizer for these impending colder months.

After Tomasso checked on our table, he made the rounds, chatting with folks, sitting down at a few tables — clearly he knows his patrons and wants them to feel at home. At a time of unease about the next four years for our country, it's nice to remember the sense of unity the 13 colonies once felt, and The George on Washington reminds us of those days. Moreover, our Founding Father for whom the restaurant is named always spoke well of the hospitality he received while visiting Providence; that same hospitality is what The George wants to share with you — locals and visitors alike.

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