



Rocket to Venus

Yes, there is a back story to explain the name of the new Hampden watering hole and restaurant Rocket to Venus, but it's too complicated to get into here. What you'll find inside the walls of what was once Showalter's Saloon is a spacious, cleanly designed neighborhood grille, albeit one with a higher-than-usual hipster quotient. The central bar is ringed by comfy semi-circular banquettes for dining, all done with a faintly retro/mod touch. The kitchen, though, is the real surprise. The menu is chock-full of tempting small plates that can be combined to make a meal. Start with a plate of pirogis or Szechuan noodles, move on to potato leek soup or Brussels sprouts roasted in balsamic vinegar and olive oil (they're addictive) and follow up with a grilled three-cheese sandwich or a plate of "wimpies" (mini-burgers with fried onions and American cheese). Larger plates include Thai mussels, cornmeal-fried oysters and steak frites. The digital jukebox in the corner is a gem, too. Open seven days a week. *3360 Chestnut Ave., 410-235-7887*

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Editor's Notes

ALL YOU CAN EAT

"WHAT' S THE HOT NEW RESTAURANT?" I get that one a lot. Partly because I eat out a lot, partly because I write about new restaurants for this magazine.

Aside from my role as editor-in-chief, I've been writing about new restaurants and clubs for *Style* for the last six years. Undeniably, it's a fun part of the job. And nothing is more exciting than being one of the first to discover something genuinely new and refreshing on the Baltimore dining scene.

I have vivid memories of my first times dining at then-revolutionary establishments such as Vespa and The Bicycle. Baltimore was just awakening from its long infatuation with oldschool, heavy and, dare I say uncreative, culinary palaces. Seeing newer places like these take a lighter, more casual, pan-cultural approach was invigorating. Many similar kinds of restaurants have since opened around town (Tapas Teatro and The Wine Market come to mind).

Now, we're starting to see another, newer trend. I call it sophisticated bar food. Sure, we have plenty of bars here in Baltimore. And most of them offer an almost identical repertoire of pub grub— burgers, crab cakes, cheese fries and wings. You know the drill. Now we're starting to see bar-style restaurants that are upping the ante in terms of creativity, ingredients and presentation. Witness the opening of

Salt last year. In this issue's '[Epicure](#)' pages, we visit two of the newest: **Jack's Bistro** in Canton and **Rocket to Venus** in Hampden.

These are not expense-account establishments. Nor are they typical taverns. They're walking a fine line in between, and share some welcome commonalities: Inventive ingredients. Small plates rather than large entrees. A nice balance between comfort and sophistication. Attention to detail. And their menus are clearly created by folks who share a joy of food and drink. I welcome this trend, and see it as the next wave in casual dining here in the city.

You'll note that a good portion of this springtime issue is dedicated to "green living." Here, you'll meet some of the people who are making a difference in Baltimore's environment— from raising awareness, to establishing green-friendly businesses, to designing and building homes that are simultaneously stunning and environmentally correct. If you take a look, you'll be surprised— "green" is all around you.

Brian Michael Lawrence
Editor