

Food & Dining

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● BEST OF BALTIMORE 2004
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Brunch Behold the perfect Sunday morning: You are eating a delicate crab eggs benedict in a lovely, airy setting overlooking a courtyard filled with sculpture, sipping a Chesapeake-flavored Bloody Mary as a subtle jazz combo serenades you. Your waiter is ultra-kind and accommodating, and you look forward to a day spent with Matisse and Renoir. Such is the experience at John Shields' indispensable **Gertrude's**, 10 Art Museum Drive, 410-889-3399.

Acquisition We've long adored the atmosphere at **The Brewer's Art**, 1106 N. Charles Street, 410-547-6925, but now that Chef Ravi Narayanan is in the kitchen, we adore the food, too. Narayanan, a relentless experimenter, changes his

menus six times a year, pairing local produce with fresh meats and fish in edifyingly inventive ways—say, a batch of seared sea scallops in fennel broth garnished with caramelized endive, goat cheese, and a luscious raisin tart.

Appetizers It's such good news that our favorite secret neighborhood haunt, Simon's, found new owners and reopened this year as **Simon's of Butcher's Hill**, 2031 E. Fairmount Avenue, 410-534-7100. We're doubly pleased that

the menu is now New Orleans-inflected and filled with small plates so that choices are easier—you can just order one of everything (standouts include the supremely delicate beer-battered tiger shrimp with Tabasco aioli and the briny-sweet oysters fried in cornmeal crust).

Bargain If you can't afford a big splurge at your favorite upscale French restaurant, look no further than **Café de Paris**, 8808 Centre Park Drive, Columbia, 410-997-3560. At \$33.95, the dinner *formule* lets you choose three courses from the restaurant's long list of offerings. Start with a lush smoked duck breast with crispy Brie, indulge in an entrée of rich Burgundy venison stew with chestnuts, and top it off with the over-the-top crusty chocolate fondant. You may not feel lighter when it's all over, but neither will your wallet.

Breakfast Decisions, decisions. When we hit the **Golden West Cafe**, 1105 W. 36th Street, 410-889-8891, how to choose between the luscious French toast or the decadent Bismark, a blueberry pastry made with clarified butter? Or, should we ignore our sweet tooth and dive into the addictive Huevos Montuleños, a kitchen-sink-style dish that features tortillas, fried eggs, beans, feta cheese, corn cakes, and green chiles? Heck, who needs to decide when we can just come back for lunch and dinner? (Golden West serves breakfast all day.)

BYOB Most restaurants will jump through the highest of

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