

# THE BALTIMORE | GRILL

## John Shields

He's got a new cookbook—*Coastal Cooking With John Shields*—and a new PBS series that goes with it. But Gertrude's owner John Shields confesses that sometimes he just likes a cozy dinner at the Sip and Bite. Hey, celebrity chefs need comfort food, too, ya know.

### Where did you go to school?

Parkville High. Non-Baltimore natives are always amazed that "Where did you go to school?" means high school, not college. After high school, I tickled the ivories for a bit at Peabody Conservatory and the rest of my JSU (John Shields University) was completed out of state.

### What book or film most changed your life?

The way some people read mystery novels, I read cookbooks. Elizabeth David's classic, *French Country Cooking*, a 1950s cookbook completely written in narrative, got my culinary juices flowing and opened me up to a whole new approach and appreciation for food.

### What's the bravest thing you've ever done?

In my early twenties, I headed for Cape Cod with intentions of becoming a rock star. I had never left Baltimore before and was totally terrified. It was slim pickings up on the Cape for rock stars, but I learned how to cook—funny how things work out.

### What is the greatest problem facing Baltimore today?

Besides all the big city problems with which Baltimore is saddled, I'd say a lack of neighborhood bakeries. I have great memories of éclairs that took two hands to eat, honest-to-God honey dips and crullers, or an only-in-East Baltimore smearcase. And summertime peach cake, with caramelized peaches baked into sweet, yeasted dough. Our small, neighborhood bakeries give us a sense of neighborhood identity and community.

### What are your thoughts on the Block?

Everybody should be lucky enough to grow up in a city that has a Block. The Block embodied a certain mystique, adventure, and off-limits charm. When I was a kid, the older men would sit around smoking cigars and talk about the old days on the Block when Burlesque reigned and the old street had an air of risqué sophistication.

### When were you most tempted to leave Baltimore?

I actually gave into the temptation young, and lived in various coastal communities, ending my tour in San Francisco, where I lived for 17 years. I had a fantastic time cooking my way around America, but always missed my fragrantly humid hometown.

### What is your guilty pleasure?

Éclairs at the Fenwick Bakery on Harford Road. And dinner at the Sip and Bite, but don't tell anyone.

### If you could write Baltimore's motto, what would it be?

Baltimore—City of a Thousand Snowballs

