

# Town & Country TRAVEL

SPRING 2007

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# SAVORING SEATTLE

Twelve restaurants—six upscale, six casual—reveal just how seriously this Northwestern city takes its culinary scene.

**BY R. W. APPLE JR.**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MAURA MCEVOY



Local oysters are served with a piquant mignonette sauce at Canlis. OPPOSITE: Built for the 1962 World's Fair, the Space Needle is still the most distinctive feature on the Seattle skyline.

*Welcome to misty Seattle,  
In the kingdom of Moneybags Gates,  
Where they wash their hair with espresso  
And stack salmon and crab on their plates.*

THE METROPOLIS IN THE UPPER-LEFT-HAND CORNER of the United States enjoys one of the country's most varied and appealing restaurant cultures, sustained by a small army of prosperous cosmopolitan eaters and an abundance of choice raw materials (on display daily at the celebrated Pike Place Market). Washington wines have come into their own, and "the annual arrival of Copper River salmon," as the *Seattle Times* remarked not long ago, "is treated like a holiday." Loganberries and blackberries, world-class oysters, apples and pears, hazelnuts and wild mushrooms come readily to the chef's hand.

For many of the same reasons the Seahawks football team and the Mariners baseball team have labored in relative obscurity, chief among them remoteness from the principal centers of population and communication, Seattle may lack the national cachet of, say, Chicago or Boston as a food town. But you can choose with the utmost confidence among restaurants large and small, dressy and casual, costly and cheap, Asian, European and American, as my wife, Betsey, and I have done with pleasure on several extended visits during the past decade or so. Here are a dozen spots that have tooted our particular whistles, beginning with some big deals and proceeding to less grand establishments.

## CANLIS

IN AT LEAST ONE RESTAURANT IN every large American city, you sense what the social historian Frederick Lewis Allen called "the tingle of metropolitan success." In Seattle that restaurant is Canlis. Founded in 1950, it has been frequented by local movers and shakers ever since and has been managed by three successive generations of a single family. Chris and Alice Canlis mind the store today, along with their sons Mark, who worked for several years for Danny Meyer, the New York restaurateur, and Brian.

Few culinary edges are honed here. The goal is to perfect and reassure, not to invent and dazzle. Prime steaks and lamb chops,

troll-caught salmon and dewy Alaskan halibut (currently served with caramelized *honshimeji* mushrooms) have held their places on the menu for decades, as has the iconic Canlis salad, enlivened by mint and oregano. Change comes slowly. Peter Canlis prawns, named for the founder, have always been cooked with garlic in vermouth, for example, and they still are, but the present chef, Aaron Wright, has added a welcome bit of zing with lime juice and chilies.

The setting for all this good eating is simply magnificent: with cedar beams and stone interior walls, the building is poised above Lake Union, with Japanese pines prettily arrayed outside sloping floor-to-ceiling plate-glass windows. The service, attentive but never pompous, is near flawless. And the wines! More than 20,000

bottles doze in the cellar, awaiting the call of the wine director, Shayn Bjornholm, one of only 124 certified master sommeliers in the world. From his stock of Washington bottlings, Bjornholm chose a Rhone-style white, DeLille Roussanne, for us. Few restaurants in Seattle stock even one bottle of the coveted Leonetti Merlot from Walla Walla; Canlis pours it for \$30 a glass. 2576 Aurora Ave. N.; 206-283-3313. Dinner Monday through Saturday.

## UNION

ETHAN STOWELL'S MINIMALIST street-corner operation in downtown Seattle sputters a little more than the well-