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**PICKING THE
BEST DISHES**

**20 RESTAURANTS
TO WATCH**



BLUE POINT GRILL

★★★ Alexandria; Expensive

There's something about the Blue Point that's endearing. Maybe it's the cooking that rarely misses or the Coltrane on the sound system. Or perhaps it's the *feng shui* of the place. This is an intimate dining room anchored by an elegant raw bar. Floors are of dark wood, walls of glass, and colors ones Van Gogh might have used. Things can get loud when it's crowded, but that only seems to add to the charm.

While musing over starters, slather some of the earthy artichoke tapenade on the good sourdough. From the raw bar, try a round of oysters; varieties are scrawled on chalkboards around the room. There are clams and mussels, too, and glistening pink shrimp. You might want to get fancy with an oyster shooter or marvelous wood-oven-roasted Blue Points with a crust of smoked bacon and grilled corn. The wood-fired oven is also responsible for smoky cedar-planked salmon, a lemony half chicken, Gorgonzola pizza with caramelized onions, a mixed grill of seafood, and whatever the catch of the day might be. This last is sauced with carrot broth, basil, and *haricots verts*, a low-cholesterol brew that's smashing with striped bass.

Along with regular portions, there are smaller plates of pepper-crusted tuna with lentils, root vegetables, and scallops with fried basil leaves. One disappointment was beautifully crusted crab-and-lobster cakes that weren't as lumpy as they should be. There are all manner of clever dessert fripperies, but why stray from Sutton Place's gooey Dolly Sin fudge cake?

PHOTOGRAPH BY CLAUDIOVAZQUEZ

BLUE
RIBBON
WINNER