

Cashion's

EAT PLACE

From
Mississippi Roots
to Greek Flavors



A salad of tomatoes, feta cheese, basil, and watermelon, is spritzed with aged balsamic vinegar. Photo: Andrew Lightman

Cashion's Eat Place,
1819 Columbia Rd. NW
202-797-1819,
www.cashionseatplace.com

Hours: Tues; 5:30 to 10 p.m. Wed–Sat;
5:30 to 11 p.m.
Sunday brunch: 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Sunday dinner: 5:30 to 10 p.m.
“After dark” bar menu: midnight to 2
a.m. Friday and Saturday.
Closed Monday.

BY CELESTE MCCALL

There's a lot to like about Cashion's Eat place, the casual yet sophisticated restaurant in Adams Morgan. In recent years, that otherwise lively neighborhood has suffered from a dearth of serious dining. But for 14 years, Cashion's has held fast -- first with founder Ann Cashion, and now with a pair of talented Greek-Americans and a savvy manager.

The eponymous Cashion's Eat Place was created in 1995 by renowned Washington chef Ann Cashion, presently the co-owner of Johnny's Half Shell on Capitol Hill. Cashion is a Harvard grad who studied extensively in France before wielding her whisk at top Washington restaurants. She also co-founded Austin Grill, now a local Tex-Mex chain. In July 2007, Cashion and partner John Fulchino sold their Eat Place to their friends and long-time employees, John and George Manolatos. John is a highly recognized sous-chef, while George has presided over top-notch bars. Together, the brothers teamed up with general manager Jus-

tin Abad, who oversees the wine list, trendy cocktails and late-night bar fare, as well as making sure everything runs smoothly.

The Manolatos' Washington roots span three generations. Their father Telemachos Manolatos, who now lives in Maryland's Montgomery Village, was born at 18th and C Streets, NE. Their mother comes from Highlandtown, Baltimore's Greek neighborhood. Their grandfather and great uncle, who immigrated from the island of Kalamos, operated a diner in the 1940s called the Penn B, at the corner of Pennsylvania and what is now Independence Ave. SE.

John Manolatos' eclectic menu changes regularly, based on fresh ingredients from nearby farms and other sustainable sources. For dinner on a late summer evening, our party of three sat at an outdoor table, watching the neighborhood foot traffic. We munched on crusty bread (baked in-house), dipping it into rich green, extra virgin olive oil, and ordered a bottle (\$38) of refreshing Fontaleon white wine from San Gimignano, Italy, which complemented our shared appetizers: Veal sweetbreads were gently sauteed with Catalan-style spinach and studded with pine nuts. The crisply-fried morsels were creamy inside and (forgive the cliché) they really melted in

my mouth. Grilled calamari—three whole squid bodies Mediterranean-style—were artfully arranged with baby vegetables and arugula. Their herb vinaigrette had a subtle hint of what tasted like tarragon.

We considered the Maryland crab soup, a local item and the tomato-feta-watermelon salad. But ribolitta—a meal-in-itself Tuscan soup—seemed an ideal choice for early fall. The robust montage of kale, cannellini (Tuscan white beans) and other vegetables was thickened with bread, drizzled with olive oil and dusted with a rain of Parmesan cheese. Chef Manolatos' savory rendition compared favorably with a soup I savored in Montalcino, Italy a few years ago.

As if we needed them, main courses arrived: Medallions of Muscovy duck breast were paired with poached rhubarb. The tart rhubarb counteracted its gently-sweetened sauce, and the dollop of foie gras provided pure decadence. However, we found the medium-rare duck medallions far too chewy.

Barbecued Georgia shrimp arrived heads-on, glistening on husband Peter's plate with basmati rice and a half ear of locally-grown corn. The shrimp were quite spicy, but the rice soaked up the fiery sauce nicely. We were amused at the reaction of a young woman at a nearby table when her shrimp arrived with heads intact. We assured her the crustaceans would be delicious, and she seemed convinced and plowed right in. Well, she could have ordered the whole dorade (a mild Mediterranean fish) eyeballs and all.

Back at our own table: Roasted rabbit white meat was ringed with a wine reduction and arranged with homemade potato gnocchi and an assortment of vegetables.

The chef displays his Hellenic culinary roots with his dessert menu. Actually, the dishes are created by 24-year-old pastry chef Lauren Bonfiglio, a Durham North Carolina native who studied at the New England Culinary Institute, in Montpelier, Vermont. Bonfiglio also bakes the yummy bread.. Her loukamades (similar to



Rabbit confit snuggles with pureed leeks in a veal demi-glace. Photo: Andrew Lightman.

tiny beignets) were lightly dusted with powdered sugar and placed on a swirl of yogurt drizzled with rosemary honey. Sublime. Poised atop lemon frozen yogurt, a raspberry poached pear was almost too pretty to eat. Almost. Other finales include the usual selection of artisan cheeses and a down-to-earth ice cream sundae.

Again, the menu changes almost weekly, and diners might not find everything described here. Moreover, such superb cooking will cost you; dinner for three came to about \$200. As most Washingtonians know, parking in Adams Morgan is a nightmare, that is if you can park at all. Peter drove around for 15 minutes before caving in and availing himself of Cashion's valet parking. At \$10, it was a bargain compared to getting a \$50 ticket.

A different (and cheaper) Cashions experience was Sunday brunch in late August. For one thing, we found a legal parking space nearby. Warm, sunny weather suggested sidewalk seating yet again, but Cashion's revamped decor lured us inside. We gazed up at newly exposed pipes, a roughly hewn circular skylight and low hanging chandeliers. The raised circular bar area tempted



Cashion's chef/co-owner John Manolatos prepares onions and shallots, ready to add to a signature dish. Photo: Andrew Lightman.



Loukoumathes, honey puffs, betray Manolatos' Greek heritage. Photo: Andrew Lightman.

us, but we remained in our cozy window seats. Walls are lined with photos from the Manolatos extensive family album. Cashion's homespun touch remains with a framed, vintage menu from Penn's, an old fashioned eatery in Mississippi, Cashion's home state.

Art lovers will note the reproduction of Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres' 1814 "Le Grande Odalisque" reclining over the back bar.

Bluefish raised its scaly head, but not at me, unfortunately. The kitchen had run out of this once-disdained fish, so I opted instead for the bison burger, which turned out to be a good choice. Topped with a barely-poached egg, the bovine burger—cooked rare as requested—arrived sans the usual bun. The patty was joined instead

by a single tomato slice, a rich sauce Bearnaise and crunchy, flavorful "breakfast" potatoes, sort of like hash browns. (Bison—from New Frontier in Madison, Virginia, also appears on the dinner menu in the form of an herb-marinated ribeye steak.) Peter had the pork hash—nibbles of pork tossed with sauteed onions, green chilis, red bell pepper strips and enlivened by cilantro. Only complaint: the dish was skimpy on the pork.

Brunch, with a bloody Mary apiece, came to a reasonable \$42.90 including tax and before tip. Our waiter, Andrew, was knowledgeable and professional. Overall, this is a dining experience worthy of the price and the inconvenience of its location. ★