

FOOD ARTS

AT THE RESTAURANT AND HOTEL FOREFRONT

ART AND SOUL

"The Obamas enjoy my light Southern food at Table 52 and soon at Art and Soul," beams Art Smith, chef/owner of those restaurants in Chicago and Washington, D.C., respectively. "They are my Chicago neighbors, and I've cooked for them for several years," the former chef to Obama supporter Oprah Winfrey elaborates. "I believe Washington needed a new Southern restaurant with a soulful feel."

Compared to its Windy City sibling, Art and Soul is more contemporary and casual, with a bluesy feel. Located in The Liaison Capitol Hill hotel, the restaurant is dominated by a gallery of black-and-white oil portraits by American artist Randy Slack that celebrate world leaders from Gandhi to President Obama—"liaisons in history that helped bring people together."

Encouraging congress at the bar is a list of strikingly original cocktails, as in the Standard Deviant (Pimm's No. 1, Amaretto di Saronno, mint simple syrup, Regan's Orange No. 6 bitters, and Lucien Albrecht Brut Rosé) and The Orchard (Knob Creek Bourbon, unfiltered apple cider reduction, lemon juice, Fee Bros. peach bitters, and apple peel), poured into Bormioli Rocco glassware. Twenty wines by the glass and comprehensive collections of brandies, Ports, grappas, and eaux de vie, and of course, small batch Kentucky Bourbon and other whiskeys, guarantee something for everyone.

To play up the modern space and without competing with the cuisine, general manager Kara Carmichael chose simple geometric china from Sant'Andrea and Oneida flatware and holloware. From the kitchen of executive chef Ryan Morgan, raised in the Chesapeake Bay area, arrive center plate attractions such as grouper with carrot/cider broth poured tableside and pecan crusted chicken with creamed spinach and wassail sauce. Hoecakes (aka cornmeal pizza) variations include Land and Sea, shaved beef rib eye and blue crab topped with Brie, while the Po'Oyster translates as fried oysters with chow-chow rémoulade and romaine. Skillet bread is delivered in a Lodge cast-iron pan. Presented on a wooden board, Baby Cakes come in crowd-pleasing Scarlet O'Hara dessert flavors like fresh coconut lemon curd, Auntie's chocolate, and nut flecked Lady Baltimore.

