

9. Grazie Grazie

By the time the owners of Taylor Gourmet cried uncle last year, refusing to sink more money into their lost cause, the hoagie chain was already on cruise control. You could still rely on the place for a decent lunchtime bite, which I frequently did on deadline, but its best days were behind it. Despite Taylor's unceremonious exit, co-founder Casey Patten never lost his passion for the concept. Patten, in fact, tried to buy Taylor Gourmet's assets at a bankruptcy auction. When he lost, he simply charged ahead with Grazie Grazie, a Philly-style sandwich shop with more than a passing resemblance to Taylor Gourmet. There is much to love about Patten's return: the Italian hoagies, the risotto balls, the cheesesteaks (with rib-eye from grass-fed steers). Man, I didn't realize how much I missed Patten's Italian hoagies until I tried them again, as if for the first time.

85 District Square SW.
202-216-2999. graziegrazie.com.

8. Smoking Kow BBQ

Aside from a few obvious partisans — I'm eyeballing you, Hill Country — most Washington pitmasters take an egalitarian approach to barbecue in a market where diners could be from anywhere in the country: Texas, Alabama, Tennessee or the Carolinas. Smoking Kow founder Dylan Kough, a Bethesda native, apparently didn't get the memo. He's deeply in the pocket of Kansas City barbecue, though it might not be clear at first glance. Or first bite. Kough's original sauce bows in the direction of Kansas City with its careful balance of molasses/brown sugar, vinegar and heat. Yet sauce is often an afterthought when you dig into the meats pulled from Smoking Kow's Ole Hickory smoker: the chopped brisket, the pulled chicken, the burnt ends, the pulled pork, they're often smoked and seasoned to the point where sauce is wholly unnecessary.

3250 Duke St., Alexandria.
703-888-2649.
smokingkowbbq.com.

7. Stellina Pizzeria

Tino's, Sonny's and Andy's. They sound like red-sauce houses in a dying New Jersey town, their awnings frayed and faded, but their dishes still vibrant. In reality, they're the names of three sweet pizzerias that debuted this year. As good as they are, though, the trio pale next to Stellina, a joint project between restaurateur Antonio Matarazzo and chef Matteo Venini. A large part of Stellina's appeal lies in its ambition. The pies — their crusts flavored with a touch of biga, the slightly fermented starter — are worth a visit to Stellina all by themselves. But Venini has other attractions, too: the Roman-style fried artichokes, the mouthwatering paccheri all'Avellinese (with its melting layer of aged sheep's milk cheese) and the two-fisted porchetta panini. Stellina is a superb pizzeria where you can enjoy the place without ever ordering a pie.

399 Morse St. NE. 202-851-3995.
stellinapizzeria.com.



DAYNA SMITH FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The Abruzzese cheese spread at Grazie Grazie a Philly-style sandwich shop at the Wharf.



DEB LINDSEY FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The pizzas are the stars at Stellina, but other dishes, like fried artichokes, are worth a try.

The chopped Asian brisket