



José Andrés and his Minibar team

## Stand Small

When José Andrés debuted Minibar, he created the “must-get” power seat of DC dining.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREG POWERS

WITH RESERVATIONS filling up about a month in advance, most diners at Minibar have plotted and planned for weeks, desiring the one-of-a-kind experience that only a 25- to 30-course meal can (and, let's be honest, should) provide. With just two seatings per night, one-on-one service from three skilled chefs, delectable preparations of bite-size gourmet goodness and the latest and greatest in gastronomy, there's plenty to be excited about.

The downside? There are only six seats. “Six seats was plenty for me,” says José Andrés, who in 2003 carved out the upstairs bar section of Café Atlantico in order to try new ideas, recipes and techniques. “It was a place to let my imagination run wild. How big does a place have to be to do something really big? It was a chance to explore that idea. That compression, that abbreviation, is also very important.”

Launched amid much fanfare, Minibar continues to be one of the most coveted seats in the city. Dishes are works of art: Some items foam, some “smoke,” others chill and explode. Everyday concepts come alive with reinvention. For Andrés, whose restaurants transformed the Washington dining landscape, sitting at one of Minibar's tall bar stools involves far more than just grabbing a good bite to eat. “The food at Minibar is about communication, about telling stories,” he says. “Who we are, where we come from, where we have traveled.”

The experience begins before your seating, when

you are asked to select which (if any) wines to pair with your meal. An optional walk-through of an exhaustive wine list follows—newbies need not fear, suggestions are ample. After you're taken upstairs to find your seat, three of Andrés' protégés helm your Minibar experience: Jorge Luis Hernandez, 28, who has been there since 2009; Justin Olsen, 27, a Minibar veteran of a year; and Charisse Dickens, 30, the rookie, with about six months under her belt. All are able guides, whose cooking displays and consultations unfold seamlessly, with the utmost concentration and not a sign of disarray. It's an impressive feat when you consider the number of courses and the detail applied to each.

Andrés' influence reigns supreme; these are his interpretations of food broken down and repurposed. Minibar, after all, is his big dream. “Creativity most often happens when you are working,” he says. “So Minibar is a story of working, of trying, of talking over ideas and refining.” 405 Eighth St. NW, 202-393-0812; [cafeatlantico.com](http://cafeatlantico.com)



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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Ferrero-Rocher, fried hazelnut, hazelnut-butter mousse and golden isomalt shell; Blue Cheese and Almond Tart, a tartlette of almond cream with blue cheese, passion-fruit reduction and toasted almond dust; Bloody Mary (an edible cocktail), vodka-flavored celery, Tabasco, fresh wasabi, tomato and celery leaf; Organic Baby Carrots with Coconut, a carrot purée in coconut sauce with curry, lime, black sesame, mint and basil; Tierra [Misu], a dessert of amaretto and espresso with marscapone in a chocolate shell; Chicken and Eggs—crispy baked chicken skin with yogurt-tarama mousse and citrus-coriander blossoms

