

Revitalizing Harrisburg hospitality along with the city

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Marc d'Entremont

From a 19th century power base of the American Industrial Revolution, transportation hub of the Northeast and capital of a vastly wealthy [Pennsylvania, Harrisburg](#) suffered the insults of industrial decline in the post 1970 economic landscape. Yet the halving of its population has not dampened its legacy of hospitality and that legacy is what's responsible for the current revitalization. [In the first decade of the 21st century, the city's population has begun growing and the force is \[young professionals\]\(#\) flooding the city center with a penchant for gathering with friends. That penchant is fueling a revitalization of both residential housing and hospitality businesses.](#)

Farmers who created Pennsylvania's moniker the "American breadbasket" in the late 18th century built [Harrisburg](#). Immigrants fueled 19th century steel mills, railroads, nearby coalfields and assorted industries. Irish, Italian, Polish, German, African-Americans, Eastern European Jews and many more nationalities left their mark on Harrisburg's culinary scene. With the 21st century revitalization of the city, the legacy of this international mix lives on in today's vibrant food scene, especially the cafes, [restaurants](#) and [bars](#) in and around [2nd Street](#).

Disclaimer: the author was a guest of the [Hershey Harrisburg Regional Visitors Bureau](#)



Carley's Restorante & Piano Bar Marc d'Entremont

Carley's Restorante & Piano Bar

On the outside it looks like any unassuming pub in a midtown brick building, but inside [Carley's](#) you'll find upscale Italian inspired fare, an **extensive wine bar and live piano music**. The menu mixes small plates, imaginative salads and entrees that are not slaves to traditional Italian-American recipes. The seared eggplant stuffed with asiago and herbed ricotta cheeses baked with a tomato coulis was topped with mornay sauce. Carley's famous 12-ounce meatball was certainly huge but moist and flavorfully topped with provolone cheese, marinara sauce and basil pesto. A portabella mushroom cap was generously stuffed with crab imperial, spinach, roasted red peppers, provolone cheese and napped with a balsamic reduction. Grilled beef fillet was appropriately medium rare and artfully fanned over roast potatoes, wild mushrooms and baby peas. The roast duck was as good as this dish can be prepared with moist flesh and crisp skin, lightly glazed with a not overly sweet orange plum sauce and topping wilted spinach and goat cheese infused polenta. The wine list is extensive, and the bartender makes a mean dirty martini.



McGraths Irish Pub & Restaurant Marc d'Entremont

McGraths Irish Pub & Restaurant

Conveniently located next to Carley's, [McGraths Irish Pub & Restaurant](#) has an extensive craft beer menu with dozens on tap. A blackboard just inside the entrance lists the daily beer specials. The menu takes liberties with both traditional Irish and Irish American fare, but then so do many places in 21st century Ireland itself. Irish nachos, bacon & blue cheese romaine salad and salmon fish and chips share the menu with very traditional shepherd's pie and Irish meatloaf. Michigan based Bell's brews a tasty 7% Two Fisted Ale which paired well with the perfectly prepared, excellent and traditional reuben sandwich – house made corned beef, sauerkraut, Thousand Island dressing and melted swiss cheese between toasted rye.



Cafe 1500 Marc d'Entremont

Cafe 1500

[Cafe 1500](#) is on the ground floor of 1500 Condominium, Harrisburg's first major new residential building in four decades. Amanda Poindexter, the cafe's General Manager, pointed out that the eclectic menu stays true to the [PA Preferred](#) principals of using Pennsylvania grown and produced products. An attractive assortment of small plates, imaginative salads and select entrees highlight Pennsylvania as a center for farm-to-table dining long before that concept became trendy.

A pizza with a light crust was topped with fresh arugula and rich prosciutto. Strips of salmon tempura arrived in a glass with honey-wasabi sauce. A salad of sweet golden roasted beets paired well with pine nuts, apples, shallots and spicy arugula. Seafood risotto was infused with the deep flavors of seared shrimp and salmon sprinkled with fresh chives.

Wines from [The Vineyard at Hershey](#) continue to challenge the popular perception that Pennsylvania cannot produce quality vintages. Firefly Red – a blend of cabernet sauvignon and merlot with a small amount of cabernet franc – had a nose of berries and coffee beans with hints of blackberries and chocolate. The gewürztraminer is another dry wine surprise in a state that until recently favored inferior sweet varieties. Both nose and mouth experience notes of honeysuckle, lemon and grapefruit zest.



Bar hopping Marc d'Entremont

Bar hopping

A growing population of young professionals is fueling midtown **Harrisburg's booming cafe and bar scene especially on 2nd Street and adjacent streets.** The city even has a signature drink, the Moscow Mule, made with ginger beer, vodka and lemon juice served in an ice-cold copper mug.

[Sturges Speakeasy](#) is a local, family-run American restaurant and tavern established in 2012 in what had been a long established saloon that continued during Prohibition days as a speakeasy. Their bartenders can mix over 200 classic cocktails and are continually inventing new concoctions. Their extensive craft beer selection includes a rotating list of 16 on tap. They serve food as well with a menu of upscale tavern fare.

[Shady McGrady's](#) is a no-nonsense, friendly, smoke filled neighborhood bar. But they're fully committed to the craft beer revolution offering 48 on tap challenging even the most knowledgably beer aficionado with some really obscure regional brews. Packaged snacks are available but no menu, although they don't mind patrons bringing in their own food. Not serving food is the reason why Shady's can allow smoking.

[Brick City Bar & Grille](#) is a 2nd street upscale sports bar with 18 beers on tap and even more televisions capturing all the action for any sporting event taking place seemingly on the planet. The menu has a wide-ranging American fare menu.

[Buddha Buddha](#) martini and cocktail lounge has an interior inspired by Philadelphia's restaurant mogul Stephen Starr's Buddhakan restaurant. But Buddha Buddha puts their energy into cocktails, especially martinis. Using premium spirits, fresh ingredients and infused simple syrups, the cucumber martini was surprisingly fresh and unfussy. Small plate appetizers generous enough to share are available, but Buddha Buddha, which has outdoor seating, is the place to enjoy a sophisticated cocktail on a "beer budget."



Hilton Harrisburg Hotel Marc d'Entremont

Hilton Harrisburg Hotel

Opened in 1990 with **Mr. William Kohn as GM** – now a principal in the Greenwood Group that owns the franchise – the [Harrisburg Hilton](#) played a significant role in the revitalization of what was then a depressed and unsavory Harrisburg downtown. The investment paid off as the downtown/midtown Capital district attracted the young professionals that continue to flood the city nearly 25 years later. Currently more than halfway through a massive two-year renovation – although as a guest one would never notice the work – the Hilton still is, as **Mr. Kohn says, "true to its original concept that it must lead with excellence in food and beverage."**

Bricco, their freestanding upscale Italian restaurant on Market Street is a Wine Spectator choice and awarded 5 Diamond status by Sante Magazine.

In the current renovation both of the original interior hotel restaurants will become entirely new concepts with Market Street as well as lobby entrances and still maintain a wine emphasis with 750 listed. Concept #1 will be a 75-seat upscale steakhouse – their own brand – offering different styles depending on the cut. Seafood will be featured on the menu as well. Concept #2 will be a 165-seat modern interpretation of an American tavern with communal tables. It'll be a casual space serving small plates designed for sharing and featuring Pennsylvania/Mid-Atlantic food products, craft cocktails and custom flavor-infused ice.

The current executive chefs at Hilton Harrisburg have been with the company for 24 years and 18 years respectively. Even the sous chefs have 6+ years experience with the Hilton. This dedication speaks well of the **Greenwood Group**, which is dedicated to loyalty and education. The Hilton partners with the [Harrisburg Area Community College culinary program](#) by providing space and expertise for two required lab courses.

Of course, the rooms, conference space and amenities are true to Hilton's exceptional standards.



Broad Street Market Marc d'Entremont

Broad Street Market

Founded in 1860, [Harrisburg's Broad Street Market](#) has the distinction of being the oldest continuously operated market house in the United States, trumping Philadelphia's venerable Reading Terminal Market by nearly 40 years. Spread over two adjacent brick buildings, the [Broad Street Market](#) thrives today as a rich culinary venue to experience a broad diversity of fresh food and prepared cuisines.

With nearly 40 vendors, the market has something for everyone including organic produce, meats, baked goods and freshly prepared meals. In the Stone Market Building, breakfast at [Tep's Fresh Seafood](#) of cornmeal crusted fish fillets and creamy cheese grits was perfect for this lover of non-traditional breakfast foods. Cuisine ranging from Vietnamese pho at [The Golden Gate](#) to the [Polish Vegetarian Deli](#) will tantalize all tastes.

Foodstuffs from picture perfect [Peach Ridge Produce](#), delectable smoked items from [Hummers Meats](#) to old fashioned "penny candy" at [Candy Scramble](#) will occupy your food decision making for hours.