



# The Washington Post

## SOUP AND SANDWICH, NOW MORE THAN EVER

Do you remember from your childhood how satisfying it was to pull apart the two triangles of a toasty sandwich and dip each imminent mouthful into a bowl of steam-wafting soup?

Plenty of restaurateurs are capitalizing on the possibility that you might.

The soup-and-sandwich combo, particularly versions of grilled cheese and tomato soup, appears on the menus of reputable eateries all around Washington, and for good reason. It's nostalgic, comforting and a good value, both for the consumer (low menu cost in relation to other menu items) and the merchant (low food cost). And those are attributes that sell, especially in a down economy.

Offering something as humble as a soup and sandwich can send the message to patrons that fine-dining restaurants, and the well-known chefs who helm them, are accessible.

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Pernot illustrates how ordinary foods can be transformed into extraordinary plates by chefs who think things through. At Vermilion in Alexandria, executive chef Tony Chittum drives that point home with the Intern (\$12), a quick lunch offering of a small green salad, half a roasted squash sandwich and a cup of butternut squash soup.

This soup-and-sandwich combination presents butternut squash in a glorious light. The soup is golden yellow, like creme brulee, and Chittum serves it in an oval ramekin one would use to bake that velvety dessert. He tops the soup with crushed amaretti, spiced pumpkin seeds, diced apples and pumpkin seed oil. Textures interplay with sweet, salty and acid tones.

The sandwich is just as cunning. Caramelized half-moons of butternut squash, shaved apples, ricotta cheese and apple butter nestle between toasted ciabatta slices; the effect is so hearty it conveys meatiness.

In addition to this chef-composed plate, diners can put together their own soup-and-sandwich combinations from among menu options such as Jerusalem artichoke soup with pork meatballs and a crispy Amish chicken sandwich with broccoli rabe, sharp provolone cheese and sun-dried tomato aioli.