



Like a diamond in the sky, this little gem keeps watch over the gleaming city lights.

PHOTO BY LAURA PETRILLA

The Good Life in a Fish Bowl

Monterey Bay Fish Grotto serves up fish fresh from the sea and a view that makes your head swim.

To get to the fish at Monterey Bay Fish Grotto on Mount Washington, you have to go up. And you may have to wait a while to ascend the modern tower that houses some of the most splendid seafood in Pittsburgh, since there's only one tiny elevator. But when the doors open and spill you out into the lively, colorful aquariumlike restaurant, skip the main room and take your meal at the bar. Though most palates already know the fish at Monterey Bay is practically still flipping, the very cool lounge area might be overlooked.

The "Grotto" of the restaurant's name, it's in a sort of subfloor under the hustle and bustle, and this floor-to-ceiling glass-walled beauty is teeming with life. The little tables for two or four are lighted with votives, and they flicker against the reflection of a postcard view of the city. Laughter floats in the air between convivial colleagues and what appear to be illicit lovers in a corner. Suits and skirts burn cigarettes from the waiter as he adjusts his bow tie and shares an enormous wine list. The place gets packed, and lingering is a luxury on a weekend night. Get in early to nab a good seat for people-watching. Here, contentment is like shooting fish in a barrel.

Monterey Bay Fish Grotto, 1411 Grandview Ave., Mount Washington; 412/481-4414. Lunch: Mon.-Fri., 11 a.m.-3 p.m.; dinner: Mon.-Fri., 5-10 p.m.; Sun., 5-9 p.m. Smoking in lounge area only. There's also a location with the same hours at 4099 William Penn Highway, Monroeville; 412/374-8530, montereybayfishgrotto.com. — Jennifer Papale Rignani

a la carte

Italian Scallion: Lessons in Italian Cooking

Rita Venturino teaches private Italian cooking classes in her looks-like-a-Wolff-appliance-advertisement kitchen in Gibsonia. Hungry pupils look on as she cooks an entire meal from salad to dessert. She makes things like gnocchi with gorgonzola sauce and flourless chocolate cake look simple. Each course is consumed and discussed, a foodie's hog heaven. Class size is limited, so visit ritaventurino.com to register for fall classes ranging from \$40-\$50. — Jennifer Papale Rignani

Meet Hanka Sawka, Author of Polish Cuisine Cookbook

Author Hanka Sawka will appear as a guest of the Polish Cultural Council at 8 p.m. on Sat., Sept. 17, at Trimont Plaza, Mount Washington. Sawka will share stories from her native Poland, discuss her book, *At Hanka's Table*, and talk about, as she says, "politics on the plate." Sawka and her artist husband, Jan, left when Poland was under Communist rule. The two will recount their escape to America and share delightful stories of Polish food and family traditions. Signed copies of *At Hanka's Table* will be available for purchase. Food prepared with Sawka's recipes will be served. Space is limited. Tickets or information, call 412/871-3347. — Katie Pegher

sips

Italian wine estate Castello Banfi has won numerous awards, and it produces a wide range of top quality Tuscan wines that offer value to the consumer. If you're planning a visit to Italy, you'll want to include a tour of this winery, which comprises some 7,100 acres, of which around 2,400 are vineyards.

 **2001 Banfi Chianti Classico Riserva** has full-bodied fruit flavors with pleasant acidity in the finish (\$16.99; PLCB Code 4594).

 **2001 Castello Banfi Cum Laude** is a super Tuscan wine of cabernet sauvignon, merlot, syrah and sangiovese grapes that offers magnificent flavors of ripe black fruits with soft tannins (\$34.99; PLCB Code 7355).

 **1999 Castello Banfi Brunello Di Montalcino** is one of the top Brunello wines with its plum, rose-petal and spice aromas and delicious fruit and spice flavors (\$54.99; PLCB Code 9266). — Bruce May

Look for Bruce May's "Sips" column every month, where you'll find a quick list of ideal wine and spirit choices for various occasions.