



Ladies who lunch:
Donna Brazile and
Eleanor Holmes Norton.



The Shrimp & Grits is complemented by sea scallops and Andouille sausage.

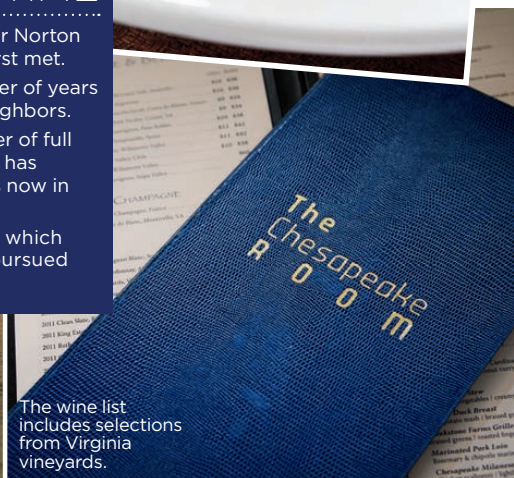
OVER TIME

1982: The year Norton and Brazile first met.

31: The number of years they were neighbors.

11: The number of full terms Norton has served (she is now in her 12th).

9: The age at which Brazile first pursued politics.



The wine list includes selections from Virginia vineyards.

a capitol chat

CONGRESSWOMAN ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON AND POLITICAL STRATEGIST DONNA BRAZILE TALK FRIENDSHIP AND FOOD—AND WHETHER CAPITOL HILL IS EXPERIENCING ANOTHER “YEAR OF THE WOMAN”—OVER LUNCH AT THE CHESAPEAKE ROOM. BY LESLIE QUANDER WOOLDRIDGE

Donna Brazile is about to order buttermilk-soaked fried oysters for the first time, but she *must* ask where the mollusks are from. (“It’s very important to ask about your seafood,” she says, adding, “If it’s good, I’ll tweet about it.”) After her question is answered, she launches into a friendly conversation with her former boss, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, who is now serving her 12th term as the District’s representative. The two have an easy relationship, with the proof in their shared laughter and inside jokes, a repertoire that is the result of 10 years of working together and far more years of friendship.

The ranking member on the House Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, Norton has a strong political presence in Washington but checks in with Brazile, author of *Cooking with Grease: Stirring the Pots in American Politics*, for all

things food and drink. (“She’s a master cook; I’m a no cook,” Norton quips.) The two recently sat down with *Capitol File* at The Chesapeake Room (501 Eighth St. SE, 202-543-1445; thechesapeake.com) to break bread while reflecting on food, their shared experiences, and the current Hill landscape.

Capitol File: What’s your favorite type of food?

Donna Brazile: I’m a native New Orleanian, so I love anything that is authentically Southern.

Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton: Your skill is not just New Orleans cooking. It’s New Orleans cooking without fattening stuff in it. It’s an amazing skill. You have to be a cook of the most extraordinary kind to do gumbo [like you do].

DB: Well, Louisianans know that the trinity—onions, celery, and peppers—is

the foundation of any good cooking. And if you cook with those ingredients, you really don't need to add all of that processed seasoning.

EHN: Donna can cook anything.

DB: Cooking is an experience. It's relaxing. Typically in the South, you have your dinner ready before you go to church. It's the only [real] meal I plan all week, Sunday dinner.

EHN: She's a really giving cook. When my mother was alive, Donna would cook dinner for my mother every Sunday. And you know, that was a real gift to my mother. Donna, are you still a connoisseur of wine?

DB: [Points to her glass of Merlot] Yeah.... This is a dry wine, [and] I taste just a little bit of plum in it.

EHN: Donna knows her wines by name *and* by grape.

DB: I appreciate a great glass of wine.

CF: **Congresswoman Norton, when you're not working, which wines or cocktails do you like?**

EHN: I call Donna and ask her, "What should I have?" [Laughs] I've gotten so that I like a glass of red wine at night, almost every night. It helps me sleep. And I do white wine when I go to places because it keeps me awake.

DB: The whites have more sugar. Sauvignons are good. Moscato, you should just pour sugar in your stomach; I call Moscato "Boone's Farm 2.0." I like Chardonnays that are oaked and buttery from the Sonoma region. Now don't let me do all the talking. I'm probably a better politician than Eleanor when it comes to talking. She doesn't do small talk, and I do it very well.

EHN: Donna was not only my chief of staff for 10 years, she is how I got here, because she was my campaign manager. She convinced me to run when I had just gotten tenure at Georgetown, when I wasn't exactly looking for another life—so, you know, I've learned to listen to her.

DB: Well, the District was going through a transition. [Then-Mayor] Marion Barry had just been caught on videotape, and it was not something he would have been given any awards for. I thought, with the openings, Eleanor would fill several gaps. One, a leadership gap, because the city needed someone at the time who was a proven champion and a proven leader. And I also thought that she could fill a hometown gap. She was a native Washingtonian, third generation, and she was the perfect fit. When I look around the city, I can go to every ward, almost every neighborhood, and can tell you almost everything she tackled within her first decade in Congress.

EHN: The reason she can tell you that is because she's got a photographic memory. That's very valuable in a staffer. And remember, by the time Donna decided to make me run for Congress, she already was a celebrated organizer. She had run the field for [Dick] Gephardt and his presidential campaign. I never thought I would have such talent for 10 years, but it says a lot about the bond between us. She left only when Gore decided to run for president.

CF: **What are your thoughts now about there being more women on the Hill, especially in the Senate?**

DB: I think it's remarkable, but I also think we haven't made enough progress. A third of the Senate should be female; a third of the House should be female. But it's going to take a long time. We need more women to run. We need more women to get over this hurdle of waiting until their mid-40s and 50s to run. Studies show that women want to wait until after their children have finished school.

EHN: But I don't know why that's so bad. Let them wait. Nancy Pelosi waited until [she had] five children. By then they have some experience. I would say Nancy Pelosi is a real role model for that.



The Chesapeake Room's signature Maryland crab cakes.

Congresswoman Norton checks in with Brazile for all things food and drink.



Glass act: bartender Caleb Bilberry.



Donna Brazile prefers Chardonnays from Sonoma.

DB: [I just think that] the earlier women get actively involved, be it with city council or the school board, the better prepared they are to run for Congress.

CF: **Back to food, Ms. Brazile, because you know so much about cuisine. Are you able to enjoy going out for a bite?**

EHN: She's able to pick the right restaurants.

DB: I pick good restaurants, and if I have a bad experience, I won't go again. If people say it's a Louisiana restaurant, I go there just to prove them wrong—or prove them right.

CF: **You mentioned earlier that you like The Oceanaire Seafood Room (1201 F St. NW, 202-347-2277; theoceanaire.com), correct?**

DB: They have the broadest variety of oysters [and] fresh seafood. There are other places, too: Old Ebbitt Grill (675 15th St. NW, 202-347-4800; ebbitt.com), owned by the Clyde's chain. They have great fresh oysters. And if you want some battered fried chicken, Southern style, every Friday night—Mr. Henry's (601 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, 202-546-8412; mrhenrysrestaurant.com). **CF**