

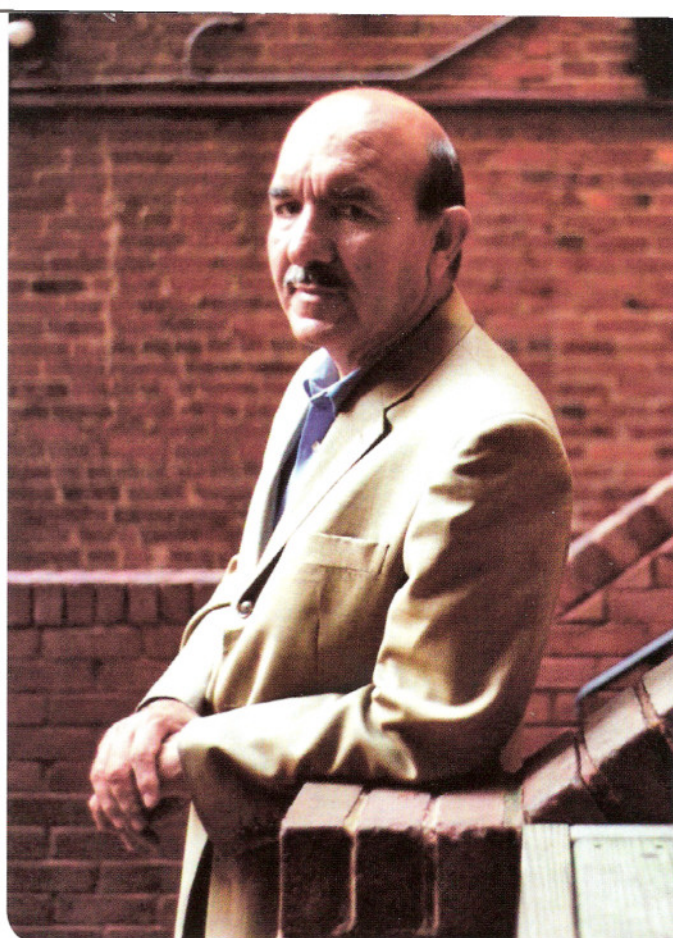
## Why I love... Baltimore

**Restaurateur Qayum Karzai has a taste for midtown**

BY ABIGAIL GREEN

**W**hen the Afghan Air Force sent Qayum Karzai to a flight training program in the U.S. more than 30 years ago, food was the last thing on his mind. Ultimately, severe motion sickness derailed his dreams of becoming a pilot and forced him into the food business—which proved to be Baltimore's good fortune. The onetime waiter now owns three popular midtown restaurants: the traditional Afghan eatery The Helmand, Tapas Teatro adjacent to The Charles movie theater, and b, a casual neighborhood bistro in Bolton Hill.

If his name sounds familiar, it's because Qayum's older brother, Hamid Karzai, is the president of Afghanistan. Although Qayum and five other Karzai siblings live in the U.S., he visits his native country often and spends much of his time and energy helping to improve life there. In 1998, he and his wife, Pat, founded the nonprofit Afghans for Civil Society, which recently launched the first independent radio station in Kandahar. In an e-mail from Afghanistan, where Karzai was running for parliament, he discussed what he loves about his adopted hometown.



"What is so great about Baltimore is you can enjoy a live play, a symphony or an opera, see a ballgame and [find] great restaurants, all within walking distance or a short cab ride. I usually walk three to five miles around my restaurants and [admire] the beautiful buildings with their interesting, detailed architecture, especially the many churches."

Unable to pick just one, Karzai narrowed down his favorite neighborhoods to three: Mount Vernon, home to Baltimore's Washington Monument, the Peabody Conservatory of Music and the Walters Art Museum; Bolton Hill, with its tree-lined streets and 19th-century rowhouses; and the theater district near Penn Station, home to the Lyric Opera House and Meyerhoff Symphony Hall. "Lots of friendly people and great restaurants," Karzai says. His own included, of course.

### SEE ARCHITECTURE

**Mount Vernon Place**  
Seated on a bench watching bronze nymphs frolic in the fountains, you'd almost think you were in Paris. Watch art students sketch the gothic church, peek inside the six-story George Peabody Library (if a wedding's not in progress) and, if you're lucky, get a glimpse of a movie being filmed at the Engineers Club.

### CLIMB STAIRS

**Washington Monument**  
**Mount Vernon Place**  
(410) 396-1049  
Washington, D.C.'s may get all the glory, but Baltimore's Washington Monument, completed in 1829, was the first to honor the first U.S. president. For those willing to pay \$1 and climb the 228 steps to the top, the 178-foot column offers a panoramic view of the city. If

you prefer your views with a cocktail and a side of live music, The 13th Floor of the Belvedere Hotel (1 E. Chase St.) is it. The upscale, dimly lit bar is surrounded by windows and hosts live jazz, reggae, rock and local bands.

### CATCH A MOVIE

**The Charles Theatre**  
1711 N. Charles St.  
The furthest thing from a

soulless multiplex, The Charles, a 1,150-seat, old-school movie house, shows a mix of first-run independent and foreign films, Hollywood blockbusters and cinema classics. On Sunday mornings, the theater hosts Cinema Sundays, featuring bagels and coffee, movie screenings and discussions; guest speakers include critics and filmmakers. Tickets are \$6 for matinees, \$8 after 6 p.m. Cash only.

### BRING IN THE FOOD

**Sofi's Crepes**  
1723 N. Charles St.  
(410) 727-7732  
If you're catching a flick at The Charles, skip the popcorn and savor the warm, chocolatey goodness of the Nutty Banana, a fluffy crepe made to order and filled with sliced bananas and Nutella. Moviegoers are allowed to bring crepes into the theater.