

# A Downtown to Dine For

The Wit goes bold with three (yes three!) new restaurants, a Chicago chef hits the underground and we go crazy for ceviche

## Hotel Sweet!

Delivering more proof that hotel eats aren't just for tired out-of-towners, the 298-room Wit Hotel springs onto State Street with three surefire dining successes from Atlanta-based Concentrics Restaurants. See how the haute hotel is trumping its theater-district competition:

### Roof

Exec chef Todd Stein (formerly at mk) brings us Roof, a 7,000-square-foot indoor/outdoor spot sporting a towering double-sided fireplace, wood-burning oven for individual pizzas—go for the fennel sausage with fontina and caramelized onions—and 27th-floor city views. Beverage manager Josh Kaplan (another mk alum) creates creative wine and cocktail offerings to pair with Stein's Italian-style small plates, such as lamb sliders, hamachi crudo and bucatini with rock shrimp. Almost too hot to handle are counter-height communal tables with fire pits built into the centers. Cool down with a seat at one of three bars or on a cushy lounge. 312.239.9501.

UP ON THE ROOF The view from new restaurant Roof at the Wit Hotel.



### State and Lake

The hotel's sexy spin on a gastro-pub seduces the Loop's 9-to-5 crowd with its cozy leather booths, cork floors and flickering candles; meanwhile, exec chef Bradley Manchester spends his days flirting with traditional American fare, elevating it into a sometimes familiar, sometimes daring menu that includes a duck egg omelet with crab, a sage- and citrus-roasted half chicken and a chicken liver mousse with red onion marmalade. Manchester's focus on local ingredients applies to the food as well as the beer list, which boasts 16 chiefly Midwestern brews on tap. Look for vino options focused on the Pacific Northwest. 312.239.9400.

### Cibo Matto

The name means 'crazy food,' but after previewing Cibo Matto's elegant high-back settees, glass-enclosed wine tower and sensuous fresco from Chicago-born artist Todd Murphy, the only outrageous thing about this resto is that we have to wait until the end of the month for it to open. Todd Stein also heads up Cibo, with a menu that includes Lake Superior whitefish with peperonata and parsley oil, and creamy *fegatini di pollo*. Other options: a roaming salumi cart and a reasonably priced wine list—which, for the caliber of bottles offered, actually is a little nuts. 201 N. State St., [therestaurantsattbewit.com](http://therestaurantsattbewit.com). —Lisa Shames

## TASTE TEST

### Fish Out of Water

In a city well-sated with sushi bars, maki and nigiri remain the easiest go-to for fresh, raw fish. But lately, it's ceviche—sushi's Latin American cousin of finely chopped fish in a citrus juice marinade—that has us hooked. These three restaurants will reel you in, too. —L.S.

#### ► C-House

Yellowtail ceviche tacos began as canapés at this seafood mecca's opening party, but once chef/co-owner Marcus Samuelsson tasted them, their spot on the menu was sealed. Executive chef Seth Siegel-Gardner credits the dish's signature status (think up to 200 a day) with the freshly squeezed juices used and the fatty richness of the yellowtail—and that it pairs perfectly with a mojito. 166 E. Superior St., 312.523.0923, [c-houserestaurant.com](http://c-houserestaurant.com).



#### ▼ Province

A vet of Nacional 27, Province chef/owner Randy Zweiban is a seasoned ceviche star (he's been making them for 20 years, with at least 100 recipes in his repertoire). His most recent combines strips of sashimi-grade fluke with red, yellow and poblano peppers, and fresh citrus juices. But it's the Spanish olive oil and toasted-in-house black pepper that punch it up to perfection. 161 N. Jefferson St., 312.669.9900, [provincerestaurant.com](http://provincerestaurant.com).

#### ► Nacional 27

Curb the raw power of classic ceviche with Nacional's version, which adds poached shrimp to sweet bay scallops soaked in juices, salsa cruda and cilantro. Poaching cuts the fishy taste; the marinade keeps the bold flavor—proving that, with ceviches, there really are a lot of fish in the sea. 325 W. Huron St., 312.664.2727, [n27chicago.com](http://n27chicago.com).

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## Mint Ambition

The communal table is merry in theory, but how often do you *really* end up swapping stories with strangers? Forge a true culinary comradery with Mint Experience, a new venture from 25-year-old Chicago entrepreneur Nicole Paul. The party-planning pro chooses restaurants in River North—she will be expanding to other neighborhoods soon—and invites you to come solo (Single Mint) or in twos (Double Mint) to try a new restaurant with new tablemates. Single Mint brunches and dinners are grouped by age (25-35 and 35-55, roughly), and both Single and Double Mints cap at 20 guests to create an intimate, but invitingly casual, event. This month, Mint hosts meals at Devon Seafood Grill and new spot Italia's, where we hope we can tear ourselves away from the chicken Milanese long enough to make some new pals. *Reservations required. 312.502.4581, mintexperience.com. —L.S.*

Ghirardelli lava cake at Devon Seafood Grill, where new dinner club Mint Experience meets in July.



## NOSH NEWS



The new Protein Bar offers smoothies blended with vanilla and chocolate protein.

**SMOOTHIE OPERATOR** Get reacquainted with your bikini thanks to new spot Protein Bar. Owner Matt Matros lost 60 pounds on a high-protein diet, and he's spreading the word with blended drinks, quinoa bowls, wraps and more. *235 S. Franklin St., proteinbarchicago.com.*

**DOUGH BOY!** Forget delivery. On Friday nights, one sixtyblue fires up its wood-burning oven for \$5 thin-crust pizzas in the Blue Bar. The \$4 Prosecco cocktails go down as easy as, well, the zucchini blossom- and blue cheese-topped pies. *1400 W. Randolph St., onesixtyblue.com.*

**PARK AGE** Visit Lockwood at the Palmer House Hilton for its Picnic in the Park package—flush with goodies like smoked salmon sandwiches and shrimp cocktails, and packed with silverware, plates and napkins, too. *17 E. Monroe St., lockwoodrestaurant.com.*

**PUTTING DOWN ROOTS** The team behind Humboldt Park's cozy Rootstock Wine & Beer Bar includes alums from Webster's Wine Bar, Goose Island and Pops for Champagne. *954 N. California Ave., rootstockbar.com.*

**CALLING HIS BLUFF** Okay, farm-fresh *does* feel more authentic when we're 30 miles outside of city skyscrapers. At Inovasi in Lake Bluff, feast on suckling pig, crème fraîche and more from former Bank Lane Bistro chef John des Rosiers. *28 E. Center Ave., Lake Bluff, inovasi.us. —L.S.*



Q&A

Chef Efrain Cuevas at one of his Clandestino dinners at Lush wine shop.

## The Clandestine Chef

As one of the featured subjects in Mark Caro's new book, *The Foie Gras Wars*, Chicago chef Efrain Cuevas and his series of underground dinner parties are emerging into an uncharted spotlight. This month, Cuevas, whose Clandestino dinners get diners down and dirty in the kitchen, hosts a meal inspired by serving vessels made by local ceramics artist Melissa Monroe (who will also make a piece during the event), as well as a "Total Aphrodisiac" dinner to benefit Slow Food Chicago.

**A blogger once wrote that she might be in love with you and called you "yum"...** It was cool that someone thinks that what we're doing to raise awareness about where meat comes from is interesting.

**By raise awareness you're talking about holding a head-to-tail goat dinner with meat from a goat you killed?** Yeah, we couldn't do it because of city inspectors.

**Why is it important to kill an animal yourself?** If you're going to eat meat, you should

understand where it comes from and be willing to take responsibility for that. I respect every piece of meat I cook, and I only eat responsibly raised meat.

**How does it feel to be in a book?** When the foie gras ban passed, I thought it would be cool to do this 'Screw you [Alderman] Joe Moore' dinner. Mark called me and asked if he could cover it. I really believe as a chef you need to try everything, and foie lends a richness to food you can't get from anything else. *clandestinodining.org. —Michael Nigrant ■*