



# THE 50 FINEST

It's no easy task keeping up with Chicago's dining scene—and that's exactly how we like it. Judging from the hard-to-snag reservations, and tidal wave of tweets and Instagram posts that inevitably occur when a new restaurant opens, we aren't the only ones keeping tabs. From a stunning homage to Japanese cuisine to a Spanish spot with nary a tapa in sight, this is where we've been eating and drinking. We hope you've come hungry.

BY LISA SHAMES

WHERE THERE'S SMOKE  
The wagyu sukiyaki  
(\$32) at the West  
Loop's Momotaro

## ACANTO

Growing up with a professional pasta-making father not only gave Christopher Gawronski a childhood full of tasty meals, it led to perks for us too. To wit: the chef's terrific housemade pastas, including duck-egg spaghetti (\$19) and lamb-ragout rigatoni (\$20), at this Michigan Avenue pan-Italian restaurant. Fortunately, youth isn't always wasted on the young. **POWER MOVE:** Sommelier Jon McDaniel's wine list works hard to represent all 20 regions of Italy, including a 2006 Radikon Ribolla Gialla (\$150), a wonderfully funky orange wine from Venice. 18 S. Michigan Ave., 312.578.0763, [acantochicago.com](http://acantochicago.com)

## CHARLATAN

We don't know how to break this to you, Three Aces, but we've been seeing a lot of your younger Ukrainian Village sibling, Charlatan. We think chef Matt Troost's tricked-out housemade pastas—black kale spaghettini (\$15), mushroom rotolo (\$27)—flavor-packed salads and creative brunch dishes, like braised beef neck with polenta (\$15), have a lot to do with it. Who knew sibling rivalry could be so delicious? **POWER MOVE:** Amaro geeks have a friend in Charlatan, which features some 18 by the glass, including the slightly smoky Varnelli Dell'Erborista (\$12). 1329 W. Chicago Ave., 312.818.2073, [charlatanichicago.com](http://charlatanichicago.com)

## FORMENTO'S

Messing with warm and fuzzy food memories is tricky business. But that didn't stop the team behind this West Loop restaurant, including chef Tony Quartaro, from taking on those beloved Italian-American spots about which everyone can reminisce—and debate. Start with Nonna's relish tray (\$16) before moving on to civilized portions of housemade pastas. Our neighborhood red-sauce joint didn't offer quail saltimbocca (\$28), but we're sure glad Formento's does.

**POWER MOVE:** With more than 500 selections, the 46-page wine list is a force to be reckoned with—as are the spot-on recommendations from Wine Director Steve Morgan. 925 W. Randolph St., 312.690.7295, [formentos.com](http://formentos.com)

## MFK

Don't let its bantam size—750 square

feet, to be exact—fool you. With restaurant vets, and couple Sari Zernich Worsham and Scott Worsham (Charlie Trotter's, Table Fifty-Two) in charge, Lakeview's mfk acts more like a heavyweight, with Spain-inspired dishes such as crunchy prawn heads (\$9) and white anchovy-topped baguette slices (\$12). Size, it seems, really is just a number. **POWER MOVE:** With only 28 seats, including 12 at the bar, mfk fills up quickly. Secure a spot by making reservations 30 days in advance on OpenTable. 432 W. Diversey Parkway, 773.857.2540, [mfkrestaurant.com](http://mfkrestaurant.com)

## MOMOTARO

When it came to creating the Japanese restaurant of their dreams, Kevin Boehm and Rob Katz didn't hold back—and it shows. Momotaro is a stunning homage to the duo's, and chef Mark Hellyar's, favorite cuisine. Sure, the seven-page menu is daunting—ranging from robata-grilled chicken meatballs (\$8) and housemade tofu (\$12) to some of the city's best sushi—but we've yet to try a dish that didn't leave us wanting for more. **POWER MOVE:** Can't score a coveted reservation? Momotaro's sexy subterranean izakaya is a great alternative, offering creative small plates—uni toast with chorizo, perhaps?—and rare Japanese whiskeys. 820 W. Lake St., 312.733.4818, [momotarochicago.com](http://momotarochicago.com)

## PARACHUTE

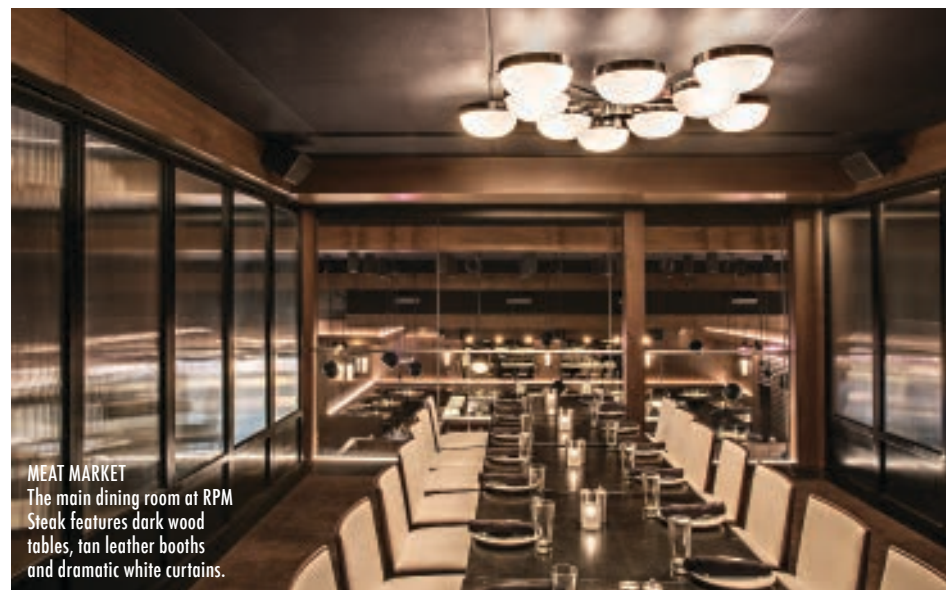
In the hands of less-qualified chefs, mixing Korean and American flavors would have us screaming the F-word ("fusion") in dread. But John Clark and Beverly Kim, the husband-and-wife duo behind this funky Avondale spot, have won us over (and, if the crowds are any indication, everyone else too) with dishes such as baked potato bing bread (\$7), and pork belly and mung bean pancake (\$11).

**POWER MOVE:** There are plenty of interesting beverages here—Korean rice wine from a Niles, Ill., brewery, anyone?—but cool off-the-menu wines are often available to those who ask. 3500 N. Elston Ave., 773.654.1460, [parachuterestaurant.com](http://parachuterestaurant.com)

## RPM STEAK

In a city lousy with steakhouses, this handsome River North restaurant manages to offer something different—coal-roasted harissa-infused chicken (\$24)—while skillfully sticking to the

# 10 MOST EXCITING NEW RESTAURANTS



**MEAT MARKET**  
The main dining room at RPM Steak features dark wood tables, tan leather booths and dramatic white curtains.

revered formula—looking at you, black truffle double-baked potato (\$18) and A5 Miyazaki wagyu (\$85). Equally democratic is sommelier Richard Hanauer's wine list, which runs the gamut from seafood-friendly txakolinas to powerful American cabernets. **POWER MOVE:** The colorful cotton candy being dropped off at tables celebrating birthdays isn't on the menu. But for \$5, you can get in on the party too. 66 W. Kinzie St., 312.284.4990, [rpmsteak.com](http://rpmsteak.com)

## SALERO

Just when we finally figured out the whole tapas thing, along comes this modern Spanish restaurant with nary a small plate in sight. (Basque-style tapas, *pintxos*, are offered, but only at the bar.) After trying chef Ashlee Aubin's creative riffs on classic Spanish dishes, such as grilled octopus with croquetas (\$13) and confit potatoes a la plancha (\$25), we have one word to say: *gracias*.

**POWER MOVE:** Spaniards love gin tonics, as they call them, and so does Salero, which serves three inventive versions of the classic cocktail (\$14). 621 W. Randolph St., 312.466.1000, [salerochicago.com](http://salerochicago.com)

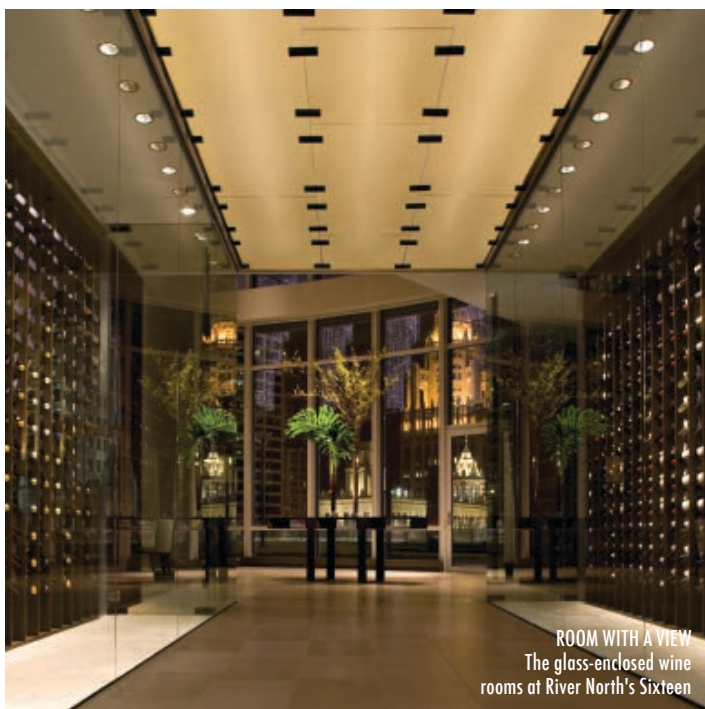
## TÊTE CHARCUTERIE

As if the name didn't tip you off that this spot takes its charcuterie program

very seriously, a peek into the kitchen's sausage-filled glass cases and curing chamber should do the trick. This rustic restaurant from chefs Thomas Rice and Kurt Guzowski, however, isn't just a love fest to meat (although there's nothing wrong with that). Tête also features beautiful vegetable dishes, such as roasted sunchoke with za'atar (\$8), plus its namesake, fromage de tête (\$14). **POWER MOVE:** A selection of those terrific housemade sausages are available to go by the pound. Your grill will thank you. 1114 W. Randolph St., 312.733.1178, [tetechicago.com](http://tetechicago.com)

## WHITE OAK TAVERN & INN

Chef John Asbaty hates to use the now-ubiquitous farm-to-table term to describe the food he's making at this charming Lincoln Park spot. But unlike at some other restaurants, at White Oak, it's not just lip service. Rather, Asbaty uses plenty of local ingredients to create wonderfully comforting dishes such as housemade focaccia with ramps (\$8) and seasonal vegetable tartare (\$14). **POWER MOVE:** Beverage Director Danielle Sander breathes new life into vermouth (no, really) with unique varieties of this fortified wine. 1200 W. Webster Ave., 773.248.0200, [whiteoakchicago.com](http://whiteoakchicago.com)



ROOM WITH A VIEW  
The glass-enclosed wine  
rooms at River North's Sixteen

## 5 BEST WINE LISTS

### ITALIAN VILLAGE

To get an idea of how important wine is to this 88-year-old Loop restaurant, you have only to visit its cellar, which holds some 35,000 bottles. That is, if you could get past the surveillance cameras. Instead, take a look at the mostly Italian list, which includes hard-to-find wines like 1970 Giacomo Conterno Barolo Riserva Monfortino Speciale (\$1,950). 71 W. Monroe St., 312.332.7005, [italianvillage-chicago.com](http://italianvillage-chicago.com)

### SEPIA

While we're a sucker for a restaurant offering 40-plus sparkling wines, including NV Bérèche et Fils Brut Réserve (\$94), there's more to this chic West Loop spot than tiny bubbles. Like the terrific rustic yet sophisticated food of chef Andrew Zimmerman, Wine Director Arthur Hon's list is a crowd-pleaser, making oenophiles, as well as those with less lofty grape aspirations, giddy. 123 N. Jefferson St., 312.441.1920, [sepiachicago.com](http://sepiachicago.com)

### SIXTEEN

Heated tongs and a cold, wet feather aren't

typical bottle-opening tools, but they are for rare wines more than 20 years old like the 1978 Paul Jaboulet Hermitage "La Chappelle" (\$2,600) at this fine-dining restaurant. It's called wine tonging, and Sixteen is the only Chicago restaurant doing it. Grape nuts, indeed. 401 N. Wabash Ave., 312.588.8030, [sixteenchicago.com](http://sixteenchicago.com)

### TRU

This Mag Mile spot offers haute cuisine with all the trimmings, including rare works of art, award-winning service, progressive French cuisine from chef Anthony Martin and a world-class wine list (vintage champagne lovers will appreciate the 1985 Krug Brut, \$1,750). Some things, thankfully, never change. 676 N. St. Clair St., 312.202.0001, [trurestaurant.com](http://trurestaurant.com)

### VERA

For such an unassuming restaurant, Spanish-inspired Vera speaks volumes when it comes to its wine program. While wines on tap, unique Spanish varietals—check out the 2011 Pagos de Indalia Pinot Noir Ribera del Andarax (\$62)—and rosés and sherries are all the rage now, Wine Director Liz Mendez has been featuring those for years. We can hardly wait to see what she, um, taps into next. 1023 W. Lake St., 312.243.9770, [verachicago.com](http://verachicago.com)

### FIG & OLIVE

Sure, you could credit the regular visits from celebs (George Lucas and wife Mellody Hobson, among others) to the fact that this chic Mediterranean-inspired restaurant sits in prime Chicago shopping territory. Or that it has outposts in NYC and L.A. But we think the food, which gracefully wanders from the French Riviera to the coasts of Italy and Spain, has plenty to do with it too. 104 E. Oak St., 312.445.0060, [figandolive.com](http://figandolive.com)



## 3 PLACES TO SEE AND BE SEEN



### ROCKIT BAR & GRILL

Long before this River North spot brought on hotshot designer Kara Mann to give the space an edgier look, Rockit—and its partner Billy Dec—has been catnip to actors, musicians and sports stars (Adrian Grenier, the Cubs' Anthony Rizzo). Now with a new menu from chef Kevin Hickey and 23 on-tap beverages, we predict that Rockit's celeb-spotting status isn't going anywhere. 22 W. Hubbard St., 312.645.6000, [rockitbarandgrill.com](http://rockitbarandgrill.com)

### NELLCÔTE

When a restaurant takes inspiration, including its name, from the villa where the Rolling Stones recorded an album, it should come as no surprise that plenty of musicians—Perry Farrell, Kelly Clarkson, Arcade Fire, Billy Corgan and Lana Del Rey—have Nellcôte on their playlist when they're in town. 833 W. Randolph St., 312.432.0500, [nелlcoterestaurant.com](http://nелlcoterestaurant.com)







1



2



3



4



5

# 5 CHEFS OF THE MOMENT

**1. RACHEL DOW, THE BETTY** She's the first to admit that she's worked for a lot of heavy-hitter chefs (most recently at Avec). But at this upscale tavern, Dow is doing it all her way. "I was given the opportunity to do whatever I want," she says. Her globe-trotting dishes, such as fried cauliflower with pineapple sofrito (\$15) and tikka masala-braised chicken thighs (\$18), make us glad someone finally did. 839 W. Fulton Market,

312.733.2222, [thebettychicago.com](http://thebettychicago.com)

**2. JOHNNY ANDERES, THE KITCHEN** While the philanthropic practices of this Colorado-based restaurant group are definitely appreciated, it's the local ingredient-driven food of Anderes, including dishes like Berkshire pork loin with Nichols Farm sprout salad (\$14), that makes us feel even better. 316 N. Clark St., 312.836.1300, [thekitchen.com](http://thekitchen.com)

**3. CAMERON GRANT, OSTERIA LANGHE** After running his own restaurant for two years in Treiso, Italy, Grant got a taste of the real cuisine

of Piedmont—and he hasn't looked back since. Lucky for us, he's willing to share his food knowledge of an area he calls "a jewel of the world" with delicious dishes such as braised rabbit with pork belly (\$23) and hand-pinched ravioli stuffed with La Tur cheese (\$13). 2824 W. Armitage Ave., 773.661.1582, [osterialanghe.com](http://osterialanghe.com)

**4. JIMMY PAPADOPOULOS, BOHEMIAN HOUSE** On paper, a restaurant offering Central European cuisine in the heart of River North, with nary a TV in sight, doesn't sound like a crowd-pleaser. But that was before we—and a lot of other people—tried

Papadopoulos' beef-cheek pierogi (\$13) and pork schnitzel (\$22). You know what they say about making assumptions. 11 W. Illinois St., 312.955.0439, [bohochicago.com](http://bohochicago.com)

**5. CORY MORRIS, RURAL SOCIETY** Who'd have thought that one of our favorite new vegetable dishes—grilled wild mushrooms (\$12)—would be at an Argentine steakhouse? Well, with the talented Morris in the kitchen, it makes total sense. The chef knows his way around wood-grilled meat too, including a terrific short rib (\$40). 455 N. Park Drive, 312.840.6605, [chicago.ruralsocietyrestaurant.com](http://chicago.ruralsocietyrestaurant.com)

# 3

## TOP BARTENDERS AND THEIR SIGNATURE DRINKS



### CONTINUOUS NEGRONI, **THE BERKSHIRE ROOM**

When you're aging a cocktail in a Pappy Van Winkle barrel, it's automatically going to draw attention, says Benjamin Schiller, beverage director at this hip River North lounge. So when deciding which drink to use, he opted for a negroni (\$15). Not only is it always the top pick for industry insiders, but its complex and bitter flavors hold their own—and then some!—after spending some time in that high-profile barrel. 15 E. Ohio St., 312.894.0945, [theberkshireroom.com](http://theberkshireroom.com)



### THE ALFONSO, **THE BETTY**

For the cocktail list at this West Loop spot, Beverage Manager Peter Vestinos wanted to offer drinks that complemented the elegance of the room—trust us, it's gorgeous—and taste amazing too. His take on the classic Alfonso cocktail (a sparkling-wine-based drink with notes of sweet vermouth, gin, bitters and herbs, \$13) is a perfect example. Added bonus: It's just as great as an aperitif as it is a post-dinner cocktail. 839 W. Fulton Market, 312.733.2222, [thebettychicago.com](http://thebettychicago.com)



### THE CZAR'S MANGO LASSI, **BILLY SUNDAY**

With wonderful cocktails at three places (Yusho, Billy Sunday, A10), it's not easy picking one favorite from Beverage Manager Alex Bachman's varied lists. But a new drink at Billy Sunday, an adult version of a yogurt-based beverage found in India that includes mango, dry vermouth and rye polugar (\$35, serves three), has caught our attention in a big way beyond the cute Russian nesting doll in which it's served. 3143 W. Logan Blvd., 773.661.2485, [billy-sunday.com](http://billy-sunday.com)

**NUT CASE**  
Served as part of a nine-course prix-fixe menu at Grace (\$235), this coconut dish features both sweet and savory flavors and ingredients.

THE BERKSHIRE ROOM PHOTO BY THINKLEIGH PHOTOGRAPHY; THE BETTY PHOTO BY ERIC KLEINBERG; BILLY SUNDAY PHOTO BY MATTHIAS MERGES; GRACE PHOTO BY ANTHONY TAHIER



# 5 BEST DESSERT PROGRAMS

## ACADIA

It can't be easy following the beautifully plated dishes of chef Ryan McCaskey at this South Loop fine-dining restaurant. But the desserts of Pastry Chef Ji Yoon have a similar visual appeal as the savory ones that come before them. With her experience at some of the city's top restaurants, including Boka, Blackbird and Henri, we're not at all surprised. Yoon's desserts, such as calamansi with pomelo, Sicilian pistachios and Aperol sherbet (\$13), are almost too pretty to eat, but that never stops us from cleaning our plates. 1639 S. Wabash Ave., 312.360.9500, [acadiachicago.com](http://acadiachicago.com)

## ALINEA

When you have a hard-earned reputation as one of the world's most innovative restaurants, serving a boring dessert just won't do. And chef Grant Achatz's tabletop dessert, which offers a live performance of sorts as the chefs take various seasonal sweet ingredients and artistically plate them directly onto a specially designed mat on the cleared table, is anything but (check out the thousands of YouTube videos for reference). Or, as Achatz says, "This gives us an opportunity to lay a stick of dynamite at the end of the meal and send guests away on a note they won't soon forget." \$210-\$275 as part of 12- to 14-course prix-fixe menu, 1723 N. Halsted St., 312.867.0110, [alinearestaurant.com](http://alinearestaurant.com)

## THE GAGE

No matter which restaurant she's making desserts for—Italian-inspired Acanto, rustic-American The Dawson or gastropub The Gage—Pastry Chef Kymberli DeLost's aim is to incorporate fun into the sweet mix. And, as we've often found, that means delicious too. For those who like their fun with a side of nostalgia, we recommend DeLost's chocolate peanut-butter cake (\$11) at The Gage, which includes layers of dark chocolate cake, peanut butter buttercream, fudge drip, cookie crunch and milk sherbet. 24 S. Michigan Ave., 312.372.4243, [thegagechicago.com](http://thegagechicago.com)

## GRACE

"At the end of a meal, it's always a bit more difficult to keep diners engaged and challenged," says chef Curtis Duffy. And when you're following six or so savory courses, each one more creative and elegant than the next, the challenge is even harder. Duffy's solution? Create desserts, such as the stunning half of a coconut filled with kumquat, carrot and hoja santa leaves, that deliciously blur the line between sweet and savory. 652 W. Randolph St., 312.234.9494, [grace-restaurant.com](http://grace-restaurant.com)

## HOMESTEAD ON THE ROOF

Chris Teixeira is nothing if not versatile. Overseeing all the pastry, bread and dessert programs for The Fifty/50 Restaurant Group, which includes West Town Bakery, The Berkshire Room and Homestead on the Roof, keeps him plenty busy. But it's at the second-floor rooftop restaurant Homestead where we think he really shines, creating desserts ranging from an elegant layered treat of raspberry gelee, bee-pollen creme and raspberry sorbet (\$8) to the playful twist on an ice cream drumstick (\$6). 1924 W. Chicago Ave., 773.332.2354, [homesteadontheroof.com](http://homesteadontheroof.com)



# 5

## OVER-THE-TOP DINING EXPERIENCES

### DEL FRISCO'S

This Gold Coast steakhouse takes wining and dining to new heights (pun intended) with its Stairway to Heaven experience, which begins with an intimate and interactive tour of its four-story wine tower. Accompanied by Del Frisco's team of sommeliers, guests choose from four different wine flight options—Old World, New World, classics or cult—which include five selections from each. From there, a customized four-course menu is prepared to pair perfectly with the wines chosen. *\$1,000 per person, 58 E. Oak St., 312.888.2499, delfrisco.com*

### EL IDEAS

This off-the-beaten-path BYOB restaurant has already earned a dedicated fan base—and Michelin star—for its fun and adventurous approach to multicourse fine dining, which always includes plenty of interaction with the culinary team headed up by Phillip Foss. But if you want a more personal experience, opt for the Front Row Seats, which give two guests the opportunity to dine in the kitchen. Expect a few extra treats, says Foss, as well as plenty of one-on-one time with the chefs. Bragging rights included. *\$175 person, 2419 W. 14th St., 312.226.8144, elideas.com*

### MERCAT A LA PLANXA

Going whole hog takes on a new (and delicious) meaning at this South Loop spot with its roasted pig dinner. Purchased from a local farm, the whole suckling pig is marinated for two days in a Catalan-style sauce and spices before it's roasted. Carved tableside, the traditional Spanish dish comes with grilled green onions, rosemary white beans and fingerling potatoes, and serves eight to 12 hungry guests (six to eight for a half-pig). The only catch? You need to call 72 hours in advance. Pigging out encouraged. *\$440 for whole pig, \$220 for half-pig, 638 S. Michigan Ave., 312.765.0524, mercatchicago.com*

### SPIAGGIA

With stellar views of Lake Michigan and impeccable Italian cuisine from chef Tony Mantuano utilizing only top-notch imported ingredients, dining at this Michigan Avenue award-winning restaurant has always been a treat. (We're not the only ones who think so; the Obamas are big fans too.) But Aug. 10 to 16 the indulgent factor goes up when Spiaggia pays homage to the region of Sicily with a special tasting menu paired with rare wines from Sicilian winemaker Frank Cornelissen. *\$700 tasting menu and wine pairings (two-person minimum); 980 N. Michigan Ave., 312.280.2750, spiaggiarestaurant.com*





**SITTING PRETTY**  
Just to the left of Travele's glass-enclosed kitchen is the family table, where chef Tim Graham's personalized multicourse meal is served.

## TRAVELLE

While everyone in the gorgeous David Rockwell-designed dining room at Travele—located in an iconic 1960s Mies van der Rohe skyscraper, no less—gets a view of the chef action in the glass-enclosed kitchen, those who book the family table get the added advantage of being mere inches away. Beyond the front-row vantage point, the six to eight guests dine on dishes created exclusively for them by chef Tim Graham, who chooses each of the five or so courses based on the group's food preferences. Got a question, say, about that whole-roasted goat cooked three ways or banana leaf-wrapped Hawaiian ono? Graham and his team are right there to answer any questions. \$1,000 for table, 330 N. Wabash Ave., 312.923.7705, [travelechicago.com](http://travelechicago.com)

# 5 BEST BRUNCH SPOTS



**BIG JONES** Chef Paul Fehribach has been singing the praises of Southern food at his laid-back Andersonville spot for years (check out his new cookbook, *The Big Jones Cookbook*, for more insight). Authenticity and emphasis on heirloom ingredients can be found on the weekend brunch menu too, with dishes such as corn griddle cakes (\$12), shrimp and grits (\$17), and gumbo ya-ya (\$12). 5347 N. Clark St., 773.275.5725, [bigjoneschicago.com](http://bigjoneschicago.com)

**DOVE'S LUNCHEONETTE** There's a lot to love about the newest offering from One Off Hospitality, beyond the fact that its menu of Southern-inspired Mexican food from chef Dennis Bernard—smoked brisket tacos (\$13), chicken-fried chicken (\$15)—is offered all day *and* night. To wit: The coffee's strong, the cocktails even stronger and the custom pies come from Hoosier Mama. Save us a seat. 1545 N. Damen Ave., 773.645.4060, [doveschicago.com](http://doveschicago.com)



**DUSEK'S** When chef Jared Wentworth found himself with a lot of ham hocks left over from a dinner dish at this Pilsen restaurant, he took those tasty bits of meat, along with perfectly poached eggs, thick slices of rye bread and cheese sauce, and turned them into one of the city's best eggs Benedicts (\$12). But be warned: The creative chef likes to constantly change things up. 1227 W. 18th St., 312.526.3851, [dusekschicago.com](http://dusekschicago.com)

**FAT RICE** Before a dish makes it on the menu at this bustling Macanese restaurant, owners Abe Conlon and Adrienne Lo put it through a tough testing process to get it just right. And that goes for items featured at their Sunday dim sum brunch, including the egg tarts (\$5), which, according to the menu, are made with puff pastry, custard, love and secrets. We don't doubt it for one bit. 2957 W. Diversey Ave., 773.661.9170, [eatfatrice.com](http://eatfatrice.com)

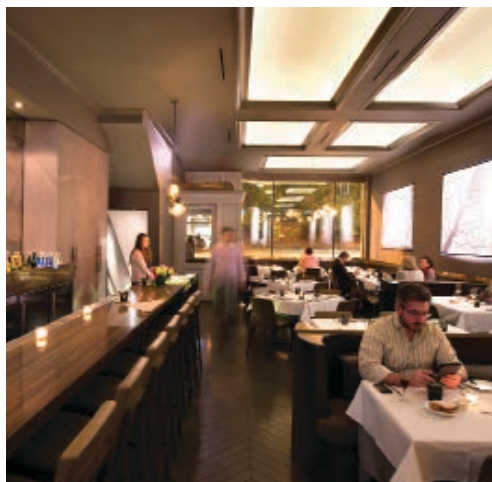


**THE RADLER** There are tough decisions to be made at this German beer hall when it comes to its brunch menu. You could get one of chef Nathan Sears' tasty housemade sausages (\$10) or the equally good chicken schnitzel (\$14). Going meatless is also an option, with hash-brown poutine with cheese curds and mushroom gravy (\$12). Our suggestion? Bring plenty of plate-sharing friends. 2375 N. Milwaukee Ave., 773.276.0270, [dasradler.com](http://dasradler.com)



## BRINDILLE

In the talented hands of James Gorski and Tom Nahabedian of Bureau of Architecture and Design, a nondescript gift shop for a neighboring live music club became a stunning 50-seat restaurant full of curved banquettes, delicate light fixtures resembling tree branches—*brindille* is French for "twig" or "new growth"—and muted tones of gray, cream and gold. And we're not the only ones who are smitten; the French cuisine-leaning River North restaurant from celebrated chef Carrie Nahabedian (Tom's cousin) recently received a James Beard Award for its interior design. 534 N. Clark St., 312.595.1616, [brindille-chicago.com](http://brindille-chicago.com)



## 3 DESIGN-DRIVEN VENUES



### TAUS AUTHENTIC

It wasn't enough for chef Michael Taus to create the concept and globally inspired menus at his recently opened Wicker Park restaurant. He also got his hands dirty with the construction and interior design of the space. Both the spacious lounge—grab a spot near one of the two fireplaces come winter—and dining room are decked out with chic pieces of midcentury-modern furniture and some of the prettiest light fixtures around. Is there anything Taus can't do? 1846 W. Division St., 312.561.4500, [tausauthentic.com](http://tausauthentic.com)

## BOKA

Ten years may not seem like a long time, "but for a restaurant, that's a lifetime," says Kevin Boehm. That's why he and partner Rob Katz decided to shake things up at their Lincoln Park restaurant once it hit the decade milestone. During a brief six-week closure, Boka went through a beautiful transformation, which included the installation of a 33-foot-long preserved moss wall tricked out with staghorn ferns and whimsical portraits courtesy of Bottle & Branch's Heather Shouse. That quirky yet modern vibe is a perfect fit with the playful yet refined food of chef Lee Wolen. Boka, you're not getting older, you're getting, well, you know... 1729 N. Halsted St., 312.337.6070, [bokachicago.com](http://bokachicago.com)



## 3 SPOTS ON OUR RADAR

### ROISTER

At this spot opening later this year in the former home of iNG, Grant Achatz and Nick Kokonas will be letting their hair down—well, as much as the guys behind Alinea, one of the country's top restaurants, can. The concept is still developing, but a la carte offerings and plenty of seating for walk-ins are both planned. 951 W. Fulton Market

### CRUZ BLANCA

Want to get a taste (literally!) of Rick Bayless' Randolph Street project before it opens this fall? Head to Xoco Bistro or Frontera Grill, where he's debuting La Guardia, the first beer that'll be served at the soon-to-open brewery, which will feature a tasting room, growler program and, natch, terrific food. 900 W. Randolph St.

### DUCK DUCK GOAT

Turns out those drool-inducing food photos chef Stephanie Izard has been posting on Twitter from recent trips to Beijing, Chengdu, Shanghai and Hangzhou aren't your typical vacation pics. Rather, Izard's been in major research mode for her third restaurant, scheduled to open this fall. 857 W. Fulton Ave.

**EAST MEETS WEST**  
Look for handmade dumplings and noodles at chef Stephanie Izard's new restaurant, Duck Duck Goat.





**BIRD IS THE WORD**  
At River Roast, chef John Hogan serves his wood-smoked chicken whole and resting on a bed of potatoes.

# 3 TRENDS DEFINING CHICAGO

**FOWL PLAY** Poultry, the menu-throwaway dish formerly most ordered by timid Aunt Bettys, is now flying high at restaurants all over town. At **River Roast** (315 N. LaSalle St., 312.822.0100, riverroastchicago.com), chef John Hogan serves his wood-smoked chicken whole, standing proud over a bed of potatoes (\$39). The roasted half-chicken (\$24) at **Bavette's** (218 W. Kinzie St., 312.624.8154, bavetteschicago.com) has incredibly crispy rosemary-flecked skin and juicy flesh underneath, making you forget that you're actually in a steakhouse. And at **The Duck Inn** (2701 S. Eleanor St., 312.724.8811, theduckinnchicago.com), chef Kevin Hickey's bird of choice is—surprise, surprise—duck, which he cooks whole in a rotisserie and

accompanies with shaved beets and duck fat-topped potatoes (\$62).

**FLOUR POWER** Who would've thought this year's greatest invention since sliced bread would be, well, sliced bread? But there's much more going on here than just a simple piece of toast. At Alpana Singh's **Seven Lions** (130 S. Michigan Ave., 312.880.0130, sevenlionschicago.com), chef Chris Curren piles his toast appetizer with Brussels sprouts, creamy burrata and pine nuts (\$14). The Loop's **Goddess and the Baker** (33 S. Wabash Ave., 312.877.5176, goddessandthebaker.com) keeps its breakfast toast simple but uberflavorful with smashed avocado, herbed ricotta and peppery arugula (\$5). One of the three toasts offered at **Baker Miller** (4610 N. Western Ave., 312.208.5639, www.bakermillerchicago.com) is actually just toast (\$4). But when it comes from bread baked in-house from ground in-house grains and accompanied by housemade jams and butters, we're not complaining.

**SUPER BOWLS** Ramen, once the lowly meal of cash-strapped college students, has now become the star player at many local restaurants, including **Furious Spoon** (1571 N. Milwaukee Ave., 773.687.8445, furiousramen.com), modeled after chef Shin Thompson's grandfather's noodle shop in Japan; River North's **Ramen-San** (59 W. Hubbard St., 312.377.9950, ramensan.com); **High Five Ramen** (112 N. Green St., 312.754.0431, highfiveramen.com); and **Strings** (2141 S. Archer Ave., 312.374.3450, ramenchicago.com), which recently opened a second location in Lincoln Park (1629 N. Halsted St., 312.624.9604). Even fine-dining chefs are getting into the noodle game. On Sundays, **Acadia's** (1639 S. Wabash Ave., 312.360.9500, acadiaichicago.com) bar area fills up fast with in-the-know diners who've come for chef Ryan McCaskey's tonkatsu ramen (\$14), which includes pork shoulder and belly, wood ear mushrooms, scallions, spicy lobster oil and some of the tastiest and richest broth in town.