

Where to Eat and Drink in Chicago During IFT and Sabor in America – 2015

By Noah Michaels

Eat

Frontera Grill, Xoco and Topolobampo

Rick Bayless' Mexican haven, including Xoco on the corner, is a Chicago institution spawning spinoffs around the globe of south of the border fare from street food to high end. Downtown/Magnificent Mile, 445 N Clark St., <http://www.rickbayless.com/restaurants/frontera-grill/>

Avec

Even though chef Koren Grieveson left and Erling Wu-Bower moved to Nico Osteria, avec and chef Perry Hendrix remains one of the most consistent—and packed—spots in town. Fulton River District, 615 W Randolph St., <http://avecrestaurant.com/#>

Au Cheval

Some may decry this as a hipster diner, but the quality of food—crispy potato hash with duck heart gravy; foie gras, scrambled eggs and toast; and those damn tasty griddled burgers—with great cocktails and draft-beer list, puts this spot in a new category. Fulton River District, 800 W Randolph St., <http://auchevalchicago.com/>

The Publican

A few years in, Paul Kahan's temple to pork and shellfish remains strong, with chef Cosmo Goss taking over for Brian Huston in the kitchen. The pork rinds are a must! West Fulton Market, 837 W Fulton Market, <http://thepublicanrestaurant.com/>

Trenchermen

Past, present and future come together in exquisite culinary techniques and ingredients, cocktails, coffees, fascinating design and a bustling bar inside an old bathhouse on a blossoming stretch of North Avenue in Wicker Park. Wicker Park, 2039 W North Ave., <http://www.trenchermen.com/>

Ruxbin Kitchen

The BYO policy and a chef who cooked under Thomas Keller preparing a globally influenced menu was already great, but now that Ruxbin is finally taking reservations, it's that much more accessible. Noble Square, 851 N Ashland Ave., <http://www.ruxbinchicago.com/site/>

Cemitas Puebla

No matter who you are and where you're from, broad swaths of food-loving humanity make the trip to Humboldt Park for Tony Anteliz's authentic cemitas sandwiches and spit-roasted meat. Check out the second location on Fulton Market too. West Fulton Market, 817 W Fulton Market., <http://www.cemitaspuebla.com/>

Dusek's

Leave to people who brought you Longman & Eagle to rehab a landmark Bohemian building in Pilsen into a creative beer-themed restaurant, a basement punch-focused bar and a concert hall. Don't miss the "Juicy Lucy" and the General Tso's sweetbreads. Pilsen, 1227 W 18th St., <http://dusekschicago.com/>

Spacca Napoli

The trendier Neapolitan pizza gets, the more you're reminded who does it best in Chicago. Come for Jonathan Goldsmith's perfectly charred pies from his custom-built oven. North Center, 1769 W Sunnyside Ave., <http://spaccanapolipizzeria.com/>

Tanta Chicago

Superstar Peruvian chef Gaston Acurio's first foray into the Chicago scene has produced top-notch results. Chinese and Japanese influences mingle with Spanish flavors seamlessly while the Pisco-heavy cocktail list is not to be missed.

Downtown/Magnificent Mile, 118 W Grand Ave., <http://www.tantachicago.com/>

Boka

Now a decade old, the Boka Group's flagship restaurant is better than ever following a reboot that added chef Lee Wolen and a stunning remodel. Lincoln Park, 1729 N Halsted St., <http://www.bokachicago.com/>

Parachute

Beverly Kim and John Clark's Korean-American restaurant in Avondale is one of the most critically-acclaimed, original, and best-done restaurants in some time. Avondale, 3500 N Elston Ave., <http://www.parachuterestaurant.com/#home>

GT Fish and Oyster

If it were just fish and chips and chowdah, we'd still be won over. But everything—the hamachi crudo, lobster roll, the ponzu mignonette for the oysters, plump mussels in a steaming red sauce, brandade croquettes—is so incredibly fresh, you'd think you're on one of the coasts. Downtown/Magnificent Mile, 531 N Wells St.,

<http://www.gtoyster.com/>

The Girl and the Goat

"Top Chef" Season 4 winner Stephanie Izard teams up with partners Rob Katz and Kevin Boehm of Boka Restaurant Group (Boka and Perennial Virant) at this "fun and funky" shared-plates spot focusing on Mediterranean flavors and local ingredients in the West Loop. There's goat on the menu (smoked goat pizza with tart cherry soffrito, grilled shrimp with spiced goat and kohlrabi kimchee), but that's not all. The lineup is divided into three sections: veggies, fish and meat, and though dishes will change regularly based on seasonality. West Town, 809 W. Randolph St.,

<http://www.girlandthegoat.com/>

The Purple Pig

Located on the Magnificent Mile, this tapas style restaurant offers an incredible selection of pork dishes and a respectable wine selection. There's more than pork at the purple pig, you can also feast on a menu of Mediterranean inspired delights that are sure to satisfy. The atmosphere is bustling and lively. Magnificent Mile, 500 N. Michigan Ave., <http://www.thepurplepigchicago.com/>

Drink

Sportsman's Club

The icy herbal liqueur swirling in this cozy tavern's amaro machine (known as Amaro Stoudemire) may conjure mint leaves, sassafras, or licorice—barkeeps Wade McElroy and Jeff Donahue tweak the blend daily. One constant? An extra buck gets you a Miller High Life (the Lowlife), effectively everything you need to blend in with the bar's grungy art-school crowd. *Humboldt Park, 948 N. Western Ave., drinkingandgathering.com*

Table, Donkey and Stick

If you're game to try the Brooklyn booze trend dubbed the pickleback—a shot of whiskey chased with pickle brine—order one at this Alpine-inspired bar/restaurant with an inviting back patio (enclosed and hearth-heated during winter). Bartenders pair bourbon with rotating brines (cauliflower, onion, leek) for kicky 20-and 30-somethings, whose faces often contort at the chaser's odd but booze-free aftertaste. *Logan Square, 2728 W. Armitage Ave., tabledonkeystick.com*

The Bad Apple

The 25 well-picked beers on tap and another 150-plus in bottles and cans will help wash down that juicy burger made from Pat LaFrieda meat. Prefer spirits to beer? You'll find a solid cocktail menu, too, plus flights of mead, bourbon, and other potables. There's a relaxed neighborhood vibe, and no one will give you the stink eye for bringing your wee ones along. Little patrons are fed well, too, thanks to an unusually healthy kids' menu. *North Center, 4300 N. Lincoln Ave., badapplebar.com*

Lagunitas Chicago Taproom

It can be more than a little challenging to find Lagunitas's bar, located as it is in a labyrinthine structure in a residential hood. But consider the sprawling place the sweet

reward at the end of a maze. The drinkery at the heart of the Wonka-like brewery, where laser lights in the entryway accompany “Pure Imagination” on constant loop, is manned by shiny happy people who seem to live to go to work (and why not?). You can buy growlers in the gift shop; they range from \$12 to \$16, and none of the current offerings are off-limits. That means 64 tasty ounces of the can’t-lose ale Brown Shugga’ is yours for the taking. If you’re new to the growler game, this is the place to go: They’ll feed you samples until you find a beer you love—but not nearly as much as they do. *Douglas Park, 2607 W. 17th St., lagunitas.com*

The Aviary

If you’re looking for a cutting edge cocktail and don’t mind paying for it, head over to Grant Achatz’s Aviary. Make sure to make a reservation if you plan on going. The online ticketing system here offers rezzies for parties of up to six. High-concept drinks double as art. They run upward of \$20, but heck, it’s your day. *Fulton Market, 955 W. Fulton Market, theaviary.com*

Big Star

Guests hoping for a taste of Chicago’s real drinking scene will love the people-watching at this honky-tonk taco joint and all-around “it” bar. Mingle with artsy Wicker Parkers, die-hard foodies, and tequila lovers who’ve downed one too many. What to order: Michelada, a Tecate with salsa and lime in a glass with a salted rim. *Wicker Park, 1531 N. Damen Ave., bigstarchicago.com*

The Violet Hour

Speakeasies have a sexy mystique about them--and that's exactly what you'll find at this Wicker Park cocktail lounge from Terry Alexander and crew. There's no sign except for a yellow lightbulb, and it's hard to find the entrance in the wood paneled exterior. Once inside, you'll spy a framed note requesting bargoers to refrain from cell phone use. But the decor is what's really striking: cornflower-blue walls, white crown molding, crystal chandeliers and gorgeous hardwood floors give the space an elegant ballroom-like feel. Extremely high-backed blue leather chairs clustered around tiny white nightstands illuminated by candlelight add an Alice-in-Wonderland air. Now let's get serious: The classic cocktails (gimlet, negroni, paloma) are superb. Bartenders make each with painstaking precision, using housemade simple syrups, bitters and twice-filtered ice cubes. But expect to wait a bit for each beverage as bartenders lovingly labor over their shakers--no doubt you'll find it worth it. *Wicker Park, 1520 N. Damen Ave., <http://theviolethour.com/>*

Refresh

Intelligentsia Coffee

This local coffee chain is all grown up, with outposts across the country, including coffee bars in L.A. and a “lab” in Manhattan. Back home where it all started in 1995, there are now seven locations in Chicago and baristas keep it real with brisk service, perfect cappuccinos and straight-up drip alongside single-cup brew. Basic pastries are available, but most are there for non-Starbucks fuel. ◦Broadway, 3123 North Broadway; ◦Monadnock Building; 53 West Jackson Blvd.; ◦Millenium Park, 53 East Randolph St.; ◦Logan Square, 2642 North Milwaukee Avenue; ◦Old Town, 1233 N. Wells; ◦Wicker Park, 1609 West Division, <http://www.intelligentsiacoffee.com/>

Metropolis Coffee Company

Outstanding sums up this delicious coffee roastery and hangout for Edgewater residents and Loyola students. In addition to serving a mean cup of java, MCC also offers premium-grade teas and a small, but tasty, café menu. Bring your laptop, kick back and catch up on your e-mail with other coffee-swilling denizens. Edgewater, 1039 W Granville Ave.,, <http://www.metropoliscoffee.com/>

Star Lounge

Jesse Diaz has turned this unassuming West Town café into a coffee destination. Sidle up to the “bar” for a taste of Dark Matter coffee, which is roasted in eight-pound batches above the café in unusual flavor profiles that have caught the attention of area restaurants, including Alinea. Diaz’s unconventional roasting approach extends to iced coffee, which achieves its delicate flavor using heat-extraction rather than trendy cold-brewing. No clue what we’re talking about? One of the veteran baristas behind the bar can walk you through it. West Town, 2521 W Chicago Ave., <http://www.darkmattercoffee.com/>

The Wormhole

To get Wicker Park excited about another coffee shop, you’d have to do something pretty crazy. Like, say, install a DeLorean in the front of the store. Okay, Wormhole, you win. So now that this time-travel-themed coffee shop has the neighborhood’s attention, what else is going on here? A small selection of baked goods from Fritz Pastry (including doughnuts!); Cheerios and other assorted cereals; and some very serious

baristas, who use beans from a variety of cult roasters and who cold-brew the strongest iced coffee that's ever graced our parched, caffeine-starved lips. Wicker Park, 1462 N Milwaukee Ave., <http://thewormholecoffee.com/>

Gaslight Coffee Roasters

Owners Tristan Coulter and Zak Rye have taken their experience in the local coffee trade (both worked for Metropolis) and applied it to a rustic-hipster aesthetic (think reclaimed wood, vintage lanterns and requisite taxidermy). The space is quite nice for sipping a cup of pour-over coffee, made either from beans roasted in-house or from a rotating roster of guest roasters. Should all that caffeine need balancing, platters of Smoking Goose charcuterie, house-pickled veggies and Marion Street cheeses make for a solid snack. Logan Square, 2385 N Milwaukee Ave., <http://gaslightcoffeeroasters.com/>

Bow Truss

This storefront is not, in many ways, a coffeehouse. There are no comfy couches, no Wi-Fi, and more than half the room is devoted to an active, open-view roasting facility, where coffee aficionados roast Bow Truss beans for owner Phil Tadros's other cafés and restaurant clients. Yet the knowledgeable barista at the small coffee bar in the front serves drip and pour-over coffee, plus all manner of espresso beverages and a tea program. A single, communal table seems as well suited for a morning alone as to a conversation with a stranger. So, funny enough, it's a lovely little coffeehouse. Boystown, 2934 N Broadway., <http://bowtruss.com/>