

THE RICH GET RICHER

IN A CITY ALREADY SATURATED WITH GREAT PLACES TO EAT, WE WERE DELIGHTED TO FIND THREE NEW RESTAURANTS TO SPOIL US EVEN FURTHER **BY TRENT MODGLIN**

THE SCOUT

1301 S. Wabash
(312) 705-0595
www.TheScoutChicago.com

The scene: A welcome new addition to the South Loop, some people might label this a sports bar. But it's really more of a sports restaurant. Why? Because the food is just too important to what they do — and too good — to leave it as a cliché. Loved the huge windows in front, the wood floors, exposed brick walls, plethora of TVs and variety of unique light fixtures. Almost had a castle or warehouse feel to it. Seems to draw a steady post-work crowd, a few folks on dates and some good-sized groups. A spacious back room with its own bar is perfect for parties, and an elevated patio will surely be a draw when the weather turns warm.

Food highlights: If you're a fan of mussels, go for their version from Prince Edward Island, basted with Allegash beer, smoked bacon, onion and chives. Usually

you don't think about green beans as a legitimate appetizer (or vegetable for that matter), but you will after sampling The Scout's fried tempura green beans with a spicy dipping sauce. We consider ourselves lucky to have ordered the Down South salad, bursting with so many flavors, it's difficult to decide what you like best. Try lettuce, buffalo-glazed chicken strips, pepperjack cheese, tortilla strips, chipotle ranch, tomatoes, roasted corn, avocado, black beans and onion straws. See what I mean? Fantastic. I almost wanted to order another one to go. As entrees, we enjoyed the scallops over green onion barley with a tomato relish (fish of the day) and the Blank Angus pot roast with redskin mashed potatoes and onion straws.

Local commentary: "The Scout may be listed as a sports bar, and while they do have a great bar and many TVs for your sports-viewing pleasure, their menu shows off their true colors: excellent dishes, more upscale than your usual sports bar. ... Great



QUAY

addition to the South Loop. The vibe is fun, and the place seems to be crowded more often than not. Goes without saying that it's a good place to watch a game."

Final thoughts: Although there are a lot of TVs, at no point do you feel overwhelmed by them. ... Huge beer selection with a lot of craft brews. ... People forget about the South Loop sometimes, and this is a big reason why they shouldn't. ... Go for the game, stay for the food and atmosphere.

QUAY

465 E. Illinois
(312) 981-4800
www.QuayChicago.com

The scene: Located right down the street from Navy Pier, this is

an uber-contemporary setting, complete with exposed pipes, modern light fixtures and cozy wood booths. Quay has three distinctly different rooms, so make sure to explore them all. At the front is the aforementioned contemporary sports bar, with ample seating and 30 flat-screen TVs to keep you entertained. A few steps beyond the bar is a beautiful dining room with large illuminated columns. Our favorite room, though, was the long, skinny Atrium Lounge in the back, with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the Ogden slip on the Chicago River. Tinted windows subtly showcase an open kitchen — always a plus in my book.

Food highlights: The huge

bowl of light, crispy calamari we ordered could have been a meal in itself. The thick lobster bisque carried a hearty tomato flavor and had tender chunks of lobster floating in the middle. As the main course, we focused in on the pan-seared halibut (with smoky beans and bacon and charred rapini) and the diver scallops with braised short ribs, which were excellent and a made a believer out of my fiancée, who previous to then had not tried a scallop in her life. We shared a side dish of Quay's rich macaroni and cheese with chipotle pulled pork. One word: dynamite. Arguably one of my favorite dishes in a long time. As if we needed dessert, we went with the upside down key lime tart with granola and macarons.

Local commentary: "I thoroughly enjoyed the breaded oysters and the applewood smoked bacon pizza. The presentation of the food was very appealing! ... I'm obsessing over how massive

the space is and how different each room is. To me, this makes the dining experience much more interesting. Enter in a sports bar, transition into a killer dining room and end in a back bar with a perfect visual of the river and downtown. ... Service was very nice and friendly. Informative without being overwhelming. ... I would call it modern cozy. The furnishings are modern, but the relaxed environment is casual."

Final thoughts: The staff is extremely attentive and even delivers silverware on a silver platter. ... Very versatile space and menu with something for everyone. ... We can't wait to go back in the summer to have a drink in the back lounge off the river.

CANTINA LAREDO

508 N. State St.
(312) 955-0014
www.CantinaLaredo.com

The scene: The first Illinois location for the Texas-based chain, Cantina Laredo, in a mas-

sive stone and glass building, is a glitzy yet comfortable addition to the popular River North neighborhood. Enjoy a hand-muddled mojito or a flavored margarita in the cantina downstairs and then shift to the adjacent dining room when your appetite calls. Upstairs lies a modern and spacious lounge, perfect for meeting up with friends. There are different menus depending on which floor you're on, with the lounge offering small plates and three-taco dishes, while the dining room caters to those looking more for a full meal of upscale Mexican specialties.

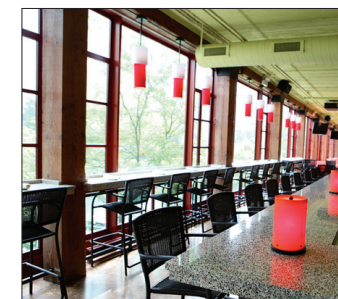
Food highlights: Don't even think about passing on the guacamole (made fresh at your table) or ceviche to start off. Barbacoa tacos made of slow-roasted brisket with marinated onions, queso fresco and cilantro drew solid reviews from our table. And the fish tacos, consisting of mahi mahi, marinated vegetables, queso fresco and chipotle aioli were light and tasty. The tampico dish of grilled chicken breast topped with sautéed artichoke hearts, mushrooms, spinach and red bell peppers with sour cream-poblano sauce and monterey jack cheese was impressive as well.

Local commentary: "Shrimp tacos were amazing even though I am not the biggest fan of shrimp. ... A seriously hip lounge upstairs. I have to give an extra nod to the top-notch cocktails (best mojitos in town), appetizers, service and ambiance. ... Beautiful and spacious venue, perfect for groups.

Final thoughts: This is high-end Mexican food, using a generous blend of flavors. ... We've heard the Sunday brunch is a worthwhile event. ... Definitely an upscale, stunning spot.



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Cantina Laredo is high-end Mexican food, using a generous blend of flavors in a beautiful and spacious venue.



CANTINA LAREDO