



Kith and Kin

RATING: ★★★★★

1119 W. Webster Ave.,
773.472.7070

What the stars mean:

★ = fair, some noteworthy qualities;
★★ = good, above average;
★★★ = very good, well above norm;
★★★★ = excellent, among the area's best;
★★★★★ = world-class, extraordinary in every detail. Reviews are based on multiple visits. Ratings reflect the reviewer's overall reaction to food, ambience and service.

WHAT TO WEAR: *J. Crew or J. Press—pretty much anything goes.*

WHAT TO ORDER: *Spaghetti carbonara, chicken thighs, banana cream donuts.*

WHEN TO GO: *Weeknights for a restorative post-work meal.*

WHAT TO KNOW: *The fireplace table is the best in the house.*

WHO GOES: *An industry crowd and creative types mixed with Lincoln Park residents and a fair share of Polo-clad kids.*

WHAT IT COSTS: *Appetizers \$5-\$14; entrées \$15-\$25; desserts \$5-\$7.*

Next of Kin

Is David Carrier's new Lincoln Park locale the next gathering place for Chicago's creative crowd? | *By Michael Nagrant | Photography by Anthony Tablier |*

Writers love a clubhouse. William Shakespeare and Sir Walter Raleigh left their burdens behind in pewter steins under flickering candelabras at London's Mermaid Tavern. In New York, Dorothy Parker and Robert Benchley helmed their famed vicious circle during lunches at the Algonquin. And in Chicago, not so long ago, if you stooped low and threw open the red door at 430 N. Michigan Ave., you might find Mike Royko, Roger Ebert or Rick Kogan, maybe all of them, testing their wit, and certainly their livers, in the Wise Guys' Corner at The Billy Goat.

Decades later, those of us born after that crew's Old Style-fueled haze kinda got cheated. It feels like all we have for gathering now is Twitter. It ain't bad. Ebert's still there, and he's more engaging than ever. But, bytes of biting commentary are never quite as

convivial as the buzz of barroom bards and clatter of cups one finds in a real tavern. Enter Kith and Kin, a new spot in Lincoln Park that's attracting some of the most genuinely interesting crowds in Chicago.

As long as the quality of the food stays tip-top (right now, it is), you're going to find me here often, cozying up to the sputter and fizzle of the stone fireplace beneath the kitschy recycled cardboard deer head and throwing down a pint of Great Lakes Dortmund Gold beer. Don't let the kids climbing over banquettes, the flickering candles and the neutral gray walls fool you. While Kith and Kin looks like an average Lincoln Park joint, it's actually kind of punk rock.

Tonight, the soundtrack blares with what seems like a line cook's iPod on shuffle— CONTINUED...

KITH AND KIN Above, clockwise from left: A banquette in Kith and Kin's dining room; a server station; the restaurant's name means 'friends and family'; tables near the entrance. Below: A bourride of wild striped bass, little-neck clams, fennel and oranges.





“Chefs Carrier and Brochu cook like Michelin-starred moms. Though the dishes are familiar, there’s a real rebellion in how well everything is seasoned and prepared.”



From top: Several signature crocks, including pimento cheese and eggplant purée with almond and raisin relish; beer-battered grouper cheek sandwich.

...CONTINUED wistful Dylan, deadpan Cake and snarling White Stripes. Some of the waiters rock square Army-style hats, others Freud-like bald heads and full beards. There seems to be no dress or personality code. Chaos? No. The worst that will happen is a minor mishap like my first course, when I get a crock of pork creton instead of the smooth puréed brandy-perfumed chicken liver I ordered. At Kith and Kin you bypass all the de rigueur robotic doting and please and thank-you banter-filled service you find at other spots; instead servers feel like friends who know exactly what you need. And maybe they do—getting the wrong dish is like a Monopoly bank error in my favor. The creton, a ground and simmered pork pâté studded with onions, has a deep, rich flavor and coats my mouth in the same way a juicy beef burger might.

Consulting chef David Carrier (Trio, French

Laundry), a genial dude who looks like a former Bears linebacker, and sleeve-tattooed chef de cuisine Andrew Brochu (Alinea, Pops for Champagne) draw a heavy industry crowd early in the week. Hence you might witness, like I did, a server from one of Chicago’s top restaurants practically pull off her sweater to unveil a new full-body tattoo to her well-known chef buddy—who, after maybe a few too many Sazerac cocktails himself, later knocks a framed photo off the barroom wall. But you’ll probably drink more than your fill, too, if you appreciate a truly perfect Sazerac: a clean, slightly sweet whiskey elixir topped off with lilting notes of fennel. This version’s five times better than the last one I had in New Orleans. If you prefer red wine, the lush berry tones and earthy body of the Jaspi Negre Grenache/Cabernet goes to your head just fine.

Plunging forward, the menu is a great menagerie of liquor-sopping treats, from crisp golden fries topped with squeaky cheese curds and silky French Laundry-worthy poutine (roasted chicken gravy) to perhaps the best carbonara I’ve had in Chicago: a nest of spaghetti tossed with house-cured, juniper-tinged guanciale (bacon-like pig jowl). The whole thing’s crowned with a runny orange yolk. When that egg bursts, it becomes a creamy sauce that’ll fulfill all your stomach’s dreams.

Confit chicken thighs sport a crispy skin of hot fat and salt that reminds me of a perfect pork rind. A snowy yellow mound of sweet grits is made even better by a smoky, rich broth and plump, briny shrimp. This place is knocking me silly. I would even order from the kids menu. My two-year-old son, the pickiest eater I know, is practically vacuuming up the mouth-coating umami of a rich tomato soup and the buttery lightness of the housemade brioche grilled cheese.

Chefs Carrier and Brochu cook like Michelin-starred moms. Though the dishes are familiar, there’s a real rebellion in how well everything is seasoned and prepared. Even in shortcomings, like a too al dente pappardelle or under-sharp pimento cheese, I still like each overall dish.

I write about restaurants not for the romp of foie gras and truffles, but for the opportunity to explore the community and relationships that exist around food. However inspired I may get by liquid nitrogen frozen potato blini or sous vide custard, this is better. Kith and Kin makes the food I want to eat every day and draws the kind of people I can get down with. It makes a very fine clubhouse, indeed. ■