



Chicago Cut

RATING ★★★

300 N. LaSalle St.,

312.329.1800, chicagocut.com

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 *Boardroom chic—this is Gordon Gekko territory*

WHAT TO ORDER *Crab cake, coriander-crusting sushi scallops, truffle scalloped potatoes, chocolate bag dessert*

WHAT TO KNOW *Cut serves a mean power breakfast of New York Strip and hollandaise-sauced poached eggs*

WHO GOES *Loop wheelers and dealers and socialites on the town*

WHAT IT COSTS *Appetizers \$4-\$19, entrées \$19-\$90, desserts \$7-\$15*

Everybody Loves Raymond

Think Chicago doesn't need another steakhouse? This riverfront newcomer proves otherwise.

| By Michael Nigrant | Photography by Anthony Tablier |

Dear Raymond,

I really don't like steakhouses. They're generally exercises in hubris built to prove that you can have asparagus stalks as thick as the forearms of a cage fighter no matter the season. They are monuments to excess—full of towering platters of gratinéed spuds and vats of creamed spinach, examples that mankind has moved beyond setting foot on the moon and is now focused on wrestling an acre's worth of leafy greens into a moderately sized bowl.

And maybe that's progress.

But steakhouses are also crusty old dioramas of class, where the unwashed masses, like myself, are stuffed in

the back behind a velvet curtain, tucked in a table right behind the kitchen door, while the beautiful people sit in burnished banquettes in the center of the room and drink red Bordeaux that cost as much as a meal at Alinea.

But you, Raymond, waiter of waiters, master of your domain, the dining room of Chicago Cut, new bastion of beef on the banks of the Chicago River, made me and mine feel like a king of kings. To be fair, it wasn't all you. The majesty of golden-lit swaying skyscrapers across the water, the velvet upholstered swaddle of your dark wood chairs, the symphonic tinkle of glass and plate, and the boisterous buzzing crowd did their part.

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MEATHEADS From left: Chicago Cut's left-like, riverfront dining room; the 35-day, dry-aged Prime rib eye

...CONTINUED But because you look like a *Moonstruck*-era Nic Cage with your slicked-back hair and moony eyes, my mother-in law swooned with every pour of your luscious cherry- and chocolate-flavored 2007 Tamari Reserva Mendoza Malbec. We hardly batted an eye at the 350 percent markup, or the other bottles similarly priced. After all, that's the price we pay for an iPad ordering system that allows you to search by region, type, vintage and price, an interactive experience far superior to spending an hour parsing a faded leather-bound tome hoping a sommelier notices the look of desperation spreading across your face.

But your attentions did not come at the exclusion of us: like Houdini freeing his bound body from a coffin at the bottom of a lake, you knew how to dangle the promise of a 35-day, dry-aged bone-in rib eye in front of my father-in-law. Just to be sure he would bite on the spectacle, you lubricated him with a fine Amaretto sour, rife with fresh, bright sour flavor.

The sale of the steak was nothing compared to the acquisition of its crispy seared crust and marbled ruby medium-rare flesh. Clean and grassy, earthy and mineral-rich, the meat near the bone burst with

salty luscious buttery fat and tasted like a breached lobe of seared foie gras. It was better than the parsimonious sliver of duck liver you served us on dry, over-toasted, mouth-scratching crostini with a thoughtless dollop of lukewarm orange mostarda.

But that's not your fault. You lauded the crab cake. Thankfully, we listened and we were rewarded with a hunk of golden-seared jumbo lump meat with nary a whisper of filler. Its circular shape, a sweet briny homage to a barrel-cut filet mignon crowned with crispy rich cracker meal, was foiled nicely by a tangy slaw and bright avocado remoulade.

Our plates rife with the detritus of hoovered-up appetizers, you hailed another stack of porcelain for our entrées. But, when the busboy came with the tiny appetizer plates, you knew they would groan under the heft of slightly pink cross-hatched hunks of pork chop glistening with a brown sugar mustard glaze. And so you sent him to get the heavy artillery. But the bus boy disappeared for far too long. The entrées arrived. As we sat

plateless, the truffle perfume from the scalloped potato beckoned. Knowing what we do now about this velvety carbolicious bounty, we would have scooped it up with our bare fingers, but horrified, you ran and got the plates and fresh serverware yourself and prevented the indignity.

You scooped cheesy corkscrews of righteously al dente macaroni and cheese larded with at least a lobster tail's worth of meat upon our plates. As you lifted the pasta with two spoons to my plate, I had never felt more like Richie Rich, and you were my trustworthy butler, Cadbury.

But butlers are aloof. You, my friend, are not. You poured a fine Missouri lager for the woman from Berwyn with the crispy blonde hair at the next table with the verve you also reserved for decanting her tablemates' *Veuve Cliquot Rosé*.

You are so good, I am jealous that you're already taken. But then again, who can begrudge the fact that you've partnered up with one of Chicago's treasures, chef Jackie Shen (formerly of Red Light). Steakhouses are usually run by barrel-chested, amplebellied, burned-out executive chefs. Shen is a petite, iron-fisted culinary captain with a pixie cut.

Shen made her bones beyond this carnivore's temple, and so she brings an Asian-fusion gourmet sensibility to Chicago Cut. Because of this, it is a steakhouse worthy of an ex-CEO grandpa and a choosy foodie sister-in-law. Shen's golden fried wonton basket, stuffed full of puck-sized, coriander-crusting sushi-grade scallops swimming in a tiny lake of velvety, spicy curry cauliflower purée, like your graceful service, would succeed at any restaurant.

And Raymond, you did Shen proud when you steered us to her signature chocolate bag dessert filled with airy Belgian white-chocolate mousse, crisp sweet berries and a swirl of tangy raspberry sauce. Though she's been making it for 25 years, and the mint sprig garnish smacks of a culinary trick straight out of 1986, it's still an incredibly fun and fulfilling finish.

As we were sopping up the last crackles of chocolate and stuffed like Thanksgiving turkeys, you spared us from waiting in a blustery rain squall by ferrying our parking voucher to the valet curbside. Because you are a great waiter, I know you shake your

head at this adulation. You might even suggest I've been too kind, but you, my friend, have made me love steakhouses once again.

Thank You,
Michael Nagrant ■



A STEAK OUT Clockwise from top left: Chef Jackie Shen's signature chocolate bag dessert; lobster macaroni and cheese; Shen inside the dry-aging room



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