

eat

Fava bean and  
English pea falafel

# Terms *of* endearment

**FORM MEETS FUNCTION AT HONEY'S,  
ONE OF CHICAGO'S BEST NEW OPENINGS**

By Michael Nigrant | FOR REDEYE





Buckwheat pasta a la chitarra

**REVIEW**  
**Honey's**  
 1111 W. Lake St.  
 312-877-5929  
 ★★★★★  
 Already hot



are spiked with sharp champagne vinegar, coriander- and cumin-marinated eggplant slices. The dish came out looking like an edible terrarium recreation of a forest floor. The acidity of the eggplant contrasted well against the rich creaminess of the peas and dollops of preserved lemon yogurt.

"When I was growing up I used to eat a lot of preserved eggplant straight from the jar with my mom," Welch said. "This dish is a hat tip to her. When she came in, I brought her out a little dish of the preserved eggplant."

### Sweet and savory

Cates' sweet offerings, which also feature sophisticated savory components, are just as beautiful and tasty as Welch's plates. A wedge of honey semolina cake (\$11) looked like a sailboat spinnaker emerging from a frothing ocean of blueberry sorbet and tarragon ice cream. A chocolate tahini bar (\$11) sat on a plate swooshed with date chutney and dripped with a melting oval of buttermilk ice cream whose tanginess foiled and rounded out the rich and bitter notes of the bar. The dish reminded me of the chocolate-covered Joyva Halvah bars my mother used to fill our fridge with (I still crave and procure them from Kaufman's deli in suburban Skokie when I need a fix).

### Bottom line

Honey's dining room and bar are relaxed, but the food quality is so high that it feels like an a la carte version of a prix fixe dining temple. Ultimately, Honey's is one of the better new restaurants to open in Chicago this year.

**MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE CONTRIBUTOR. REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED, AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE.**

## It could be worse.

They could have named it Cuddle Bear's or Bae's. But thankfully, the six-man crew—Justin Furman (New York's defunct The Harrison), Tyrone Redic (Acadia), Virgil Abloh (Kanye West's creative director), Ahmed Braimah (Underground), Andrew Miller (a branding PR strategist who favors giraffe-print shoes) and executive chef Charles Welch (Sepia)—settled on a less annoying term of endearment for their new West Loop restaurant, Honey's.

"It's a nickname Justin and his wife share, but it's also got a lot of meanings for us," Welch said. "You know that saying 'You catch more flies with honey than vinegar'? Everyone who comes in the door gets the best we can offer, a little bit of sweetness. That's our standard."

I can appreciate that, but it's still a curious name more fitting of a gentleman's club or truck stop diner than the restaurant I recently visited. I guess I'm hung up on the name because it's just about the only detail this smart group of dudes overlooked. Still, Honey's is one of the better openings of 2016.

### Colonial jungle bar meets Room & Board showroom

The success of the new restaurant starts with a slick curated architectural vibe that inspires me in the same way many Hogsalt (Au Cheval, Bavette's, Gilt Bar) spaces do. Located in the West Loop in the shadows of rusty elevated train tracks and bath fixture stores, you don't expect much. In fact, you can barely find the place. There's no sign, just a couple of classic porch light-style lanterns. Inside the doors, you'll find a compressed,

low-ceilinged room that feels cramped and even less promising than the curbside. But once the host whisks you into a two-story bar with white arches, gold hardware and a trove of liquor bottles glinting in the light that pours through the room's huge triangular-shaped skylight, the game is on. Servers and bartenders wear stylish white butcher-style jackets, Windsor-knotted black ties and black Vans tennis shoes trimmed with a wavy white stripe.

Though it's enclosed, the generous shimmery light, gilded back bar and alabaster color scheme make the space feel like some kind of secret outdoor drinking lair, the kind of place James Bond would have somehow found while slipping behind enemy lines.

The dining room is a bit more subdued, with milk chocolate-colored wood shelves filled with art, plates and architectural and cooking tomes. Dining tables are outfitted with curved Danish-style chairs, and there's a smattering of half moon-shaped banquettes outfitted in a soft gray material.

### Savory and stylish

Even more stylish than the room itself are the plates from Welch and pastry chef Alison Cates. Curls of hamachi (\$18) are adorned with hazelnut snow, glistening caviar-like finger lime, pingpong paddle-shaped shiso leaves and jewel-toned flakes of dehydrated grapefruit fruit leather. While most chefs go crudo crazy and drench their fish in citrus, Welch refrains from marinating his hamachi. He relies on the finger lime to provide bursts of acidity, but the clean sea-kissed flavor of the firm-fleshed fish also shines through.

I'm sort of a purist when it comes to oysters (\$3 each). I favor a spritz of lemon or a touch of mignonette at most so that I can focus on the quality and flavor of the flesh. Welch lards his with tart mango vinegar, shaved macadamia, cucumber slivers and tiny mint leaves. It's a crisp combination.

The briny oyster flavor still cut through, but it was followed by a bracing tropical cocktail that whetted my appetite for the rest of the meal to come.

A tangle of housemade buckwheat pasta showered with thyme butter, a sandy mound of crispy bread crumbs, pecorino, tiny morel mushroom rafts and purple thyme blossoms (\$18 for half order, \$28 for full) looked like a windswept beach scene. The noodles were chewy, and the richness of the morels and butter stirred my soul.

Tiny verdant peas and curled pea shoots strewn about mahogany-colored half-domes of fava bean- and pea-stuffed falafel (\$24)

#### RATINGS KEY

- ★★★★ DEAD UPON ARRIVAL
- ★★★★ PROCEED WITH CAUTION
- ★★★★ GIVE IT SOME TIME
- ★★★★ TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT
- ★★★★ OFF TO A GOOD START
- ★★★★ HEATING UP
- ★★★★ ALREADY HOT