



HORSESHOE.
HAMMOND



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VIEWING
PARTY



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UNDISPUTED
TRUTH



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MARCH
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MARCH
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MAY
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THE venue

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eat&drink

THE ESSENTIALS

UPPING YOUR CHICAGO RESTAURANT CRED, ONE BITE AT A TIME



A lamb trio at North Pond Restaurant
KATLYN MCQUAID PHOTO FOR REDEYE

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

North Pond might be the only restaurant in the country that went from being a homeless shelter to serving haute cuisine. Built in 1912, the Arts and Crafts-style building located in the heart of Lincoln Park on the edge of the North Pond nature sanctuary was originally a warming hut for ice skaters. Over the years, it also served as a storage shed, a hot dog stand and a city shelter for the homeless.

Richard Mott operated a series of concessions at the University of Chicago, Northwestern and other local universities. His business was seasonal and he was looking to even out revenue in the summer. When he saw the former warming hut, it reminded him of Tavern on the Green in New York's Central Park.

Despite that inspiration, opening a restaurant in this location seemed less than ideal.

"The building was run down. Back then, the area was still dangerous at night," chef/partner Bruce Sherman said. "But Nancy Warren, the architect, imagined an Arts and Crafts restaurant, and, well, what full-blooded American doesn't say, 'Oh, I want to open a restaurant?'"

North Pond Cafe opened in 1998, serving low-country cuisine such as rabbit and grits. At that time, Sherman had just quit his job as a chef at the Ritz-Carlton. He answered a blind ad in the Chicago Tribune and was hired at North Pond in the fall of 1999. Sherman reimagined the restaurant as a seasonal, local farm-sourced temple of cuisine.

Cooking seasonally and locally in 1999 was rare.

"When I said my cooking was seasonal, one of our first customers asked me, 'Which seasons are you open?'" he said.

Today, when "green" cooking is everywhere, Sherman is still one of its foremost practitioners. In an era of small plates and chemical stabilizers, Sherman's legendary corn soup,

NORTH POND

2610 N. Cannon Drive 773-477-5845

Looks like: Honeyed woods and umbrella-like chandeliers

Sounds like: A crackling fire, the tinkle and clank of glassware and the low murmur of conversation

Smells like: The season. Green and vibrant in the spring, sweet corn perfume in late summer and roasted squash in the fall

regularly served in the late summer or early fall, derives a simple magic from sweet corn recently plucked from the stalk.

"As I grow older, I'm less fussy. We're in an age and stage [of cuisine] where it's about tweezers and less about substance than it was 15 years ago," Sherman said.

If that sounds unfashionable, that's because it is. North Pond is the antithesis of hip. Not kowtowing to trends is the very essence of Sherman's and North Pond's success—North Pond has a Michelin star and Sherman was named a James Beard Award-winning Best Chef for the Great Lakes region in 2012.

In a time when you have to fight your friends for that last bacon-wrapped something on a shared plate or shout above loud conversations to be heard, North Pond is a respite. Sherman serves an appetizer-entree format or an elegant chef-driven fixed tasting menu (\$90), and is practicing some of the highest cooking craft of any restaurant in the city. On a snowy evening, with the roaring fireplace and the big pond beyond the front dining room windows, being here feels like you left the city and are dining at a weekend cottage in Michigan designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. If you're beginning a great love story and looking for a space to share your dreams with a special someone, North Pond is the spot.

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