



diningout

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NEW TRADITIONS

Pair your shopping with some new dining options

You go for the giant trimmed tree. You stay for Mrs. Hering's 1890 recipe chicken pot pie. And that's fine, but, it's an \$11 pot pie, and your ankles hurt from standing in line for hours just to get a seat. Hopefully you didn't order that apple pie martini. But if you did and besmirched your throat with citrus and green apple vodka, sweet and sour mix and Goldschlager, boy, I bet you're really sorry.

Listen, I get it. You've been coming to Marshall Fields', err Macy's, Walnut

Room every December since your grandma's grandma took you, but, let's be honest, the Walnut Room isn't even the best restaurant on the seventh floor of Macy's. So, to help you break out of that shell, and to remake your merry, I've compiled a list of the best dining spots near the Magnificent Mile and State Street to complement your downtown holiday shopping excursions.

Like I said, you don't need to change it up too much at Macy's. Just hop across the hall and check out Rick Bayless' **Frontera Fresco** (Macy's, 7th floor, 111 N. State). The huaraches — sandal-shaped Mexican pizzas — are a good bet. Though, if this December turns out to be a deep freeze, you're better off going to the other side of the food court to **Noodles by Takashi** (Macy's, 7th floor, 111 N. State; 312-781-4483) for a bowl of shoyu ramen. Thick slabs of luscious pork belly swim in a salty rich broth garnished with thick sweet fish cakes, umami-filled sheets of toasted nori and crispy husks of bok choy. The super springy noodles at the bottom of the ramen make this one of the better Asian soups in Chicago, even better than the ramen served at Takashi's more upscale Slurping Turtle.

Although we shouldn't let Macy's have all the fun, when only a couple of blocks away you can have some of Chicago's best deep-dish pizza at **Pizano's** (61 E. Madison; 312-236-1777). There are a bunch of other locations, but there's something about the buttery, pastry-like crust filled with thick, hand-pulled Italian sausage and sweet onions that tastes better at this storefront.

I understand if you have a full day of shopping ahead and you don't want a pound of cheese and sauce weighing you down. In that case, head to **Oasis Cafe** (21 N. Wabash, 312-443-9534) for the best falafel you will ever eat in the back of a jewelry mart. If someone on your Christmas list is also in need of a watch or a diamond ring, you can thank me for helping you kill two birds with one stone. If not, I'm pretty sure these crispy, mahogany-hued, deep-fried balls, which give off puffs of coriander and cumin perfume from their verdant herb-flecked flesh when cracked open, will still earn your gratitude. Don't forget to slather them with a little creamy tahini and spicy harissa; and crunch on a few neon-pink, pickled turnips while you're at it.

If you're a multi-tasking shopper without a moment



Try the chestnut parfait (left) or a tart at NoMi Kitchen inside the Park Hyatt. | SCOTT STEWART-SUN-TIMES





Pizano's sausage and onion deep dish pizza is especially enticing with its flaky, buttery crust at the Loop location at 61 E. Madison. | AL PODGORSKI-CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

to spare, you might grab a to-go sandwich at **Toni Patisserie** (65 E. Washington; 312-726-2020). I'm partial to "Le Banh Mi" featuring silky house-made pate, buttery French ham, tangy pickled veggies and fiery Sriracha mayo on a cracklin' baguette. Also, do not forget to procure one of Toni's slightly salty, airy, pate a choux eclairs slicked with shiny chocolate ganache.

If you prefer to skip lunch in favor of sweets altogether, I recommend hitting up **Do Rite Donuts** (50 W. Randolph; 312-488-2483) for some sticky "banoffee" (banana toffee) pie or winey citrus-spritzed pistachio-Meyer lemon doughnuts.

And while I have it on good authority man can live on donuts alone, I recognize if you're downtown with grandma or mom, a little savory and a whole lot more elegance might be appreciated. In that case, I'd point you to **Henri** (18 S. Michigan; 312-578-0763) for one of Chicago's better steak tartares.

There's also a certain cosmopolitan nobility to be had at **Russian Tea Time** (77 E. Adams, 312-360-0000; blintzes, borscht and caviar, oh my!), quite near the Art

Institute of Chicago. Beware — any dignity you may have could be undone by the generously poured and fairly priced vodka flights. My personal favorite flavors, and might I suggest you shoot them back-to-back, are lime and coriander.

Emboldened by spirits, you no doubt are headed toward the Magnificent Mile, which a few years ago was more like the Miserable Mile when it came to great non-franchise eats. But, those days are long gone, what with the beautiful pork-fat-fried olives and charcuterie trays from the **Purple Pig** (500 N. Michigan; 312-464-1744) and the incredible parfaits and tarts served by Meg Galus at **NoMi Kitchen** (800 N. Michigan, 7th floor Park Hyatt; 312-239-4030). Galus has a certain way with layering textures of custard and fruit while hitting the taste buds with a certain poignant bit of spice like cinnamon or allspice. Even Lettuce Entertain You has stepped up its game with righteous bao, or yeast buns stuffed with spicy kung pao chicken and Mongolian beef at **Wow Bao** (835 N. Michigan; 312-642-5888). The house-made ginger ale is a first-rate

thirst quencher.

If it's refinement you still want, then there is nothing finer than **Tru** (676 N. St. Clair; 312-202-0001) where Anthony Martin is doing some culinary David Copperfield-like tricks with levitating caviar service. **The Lobby at the Peninsula** (108 E. Superior; 312-573-6760), where chef Lee Wolen (a vet of New York City's Eleven Madison Park) is serving a roast chicken of the gods stuffed with buttery brioche bread crumbs, is also pretty swanky.

Sometimes you just want to warm up with a simple little lobster bisque and **Soupbox** (50 E. Chicago; 312-951-5900) is definitely the place to get it. Though, for my money, the best soup on the north side of downtown is the Bookbinder red snapper soup served at the **Coq D'Or** (140 E. Walton; 312-787-2200) in the Drake Hotel. Served with a tiny decanter of nutty sherry, it's a heart-warming tomato-fish stew. If it's pot pie you've longed for this whole time, they've got that, too.

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A bowl of pork-fried almonds and the charcuterie tray are treats at The Purple Pig, 500 N. Michigan.

RICH HEIN-SUN-TIMES