

12 sweet s'mores desserts **14**

Craft beer takeovers **19**

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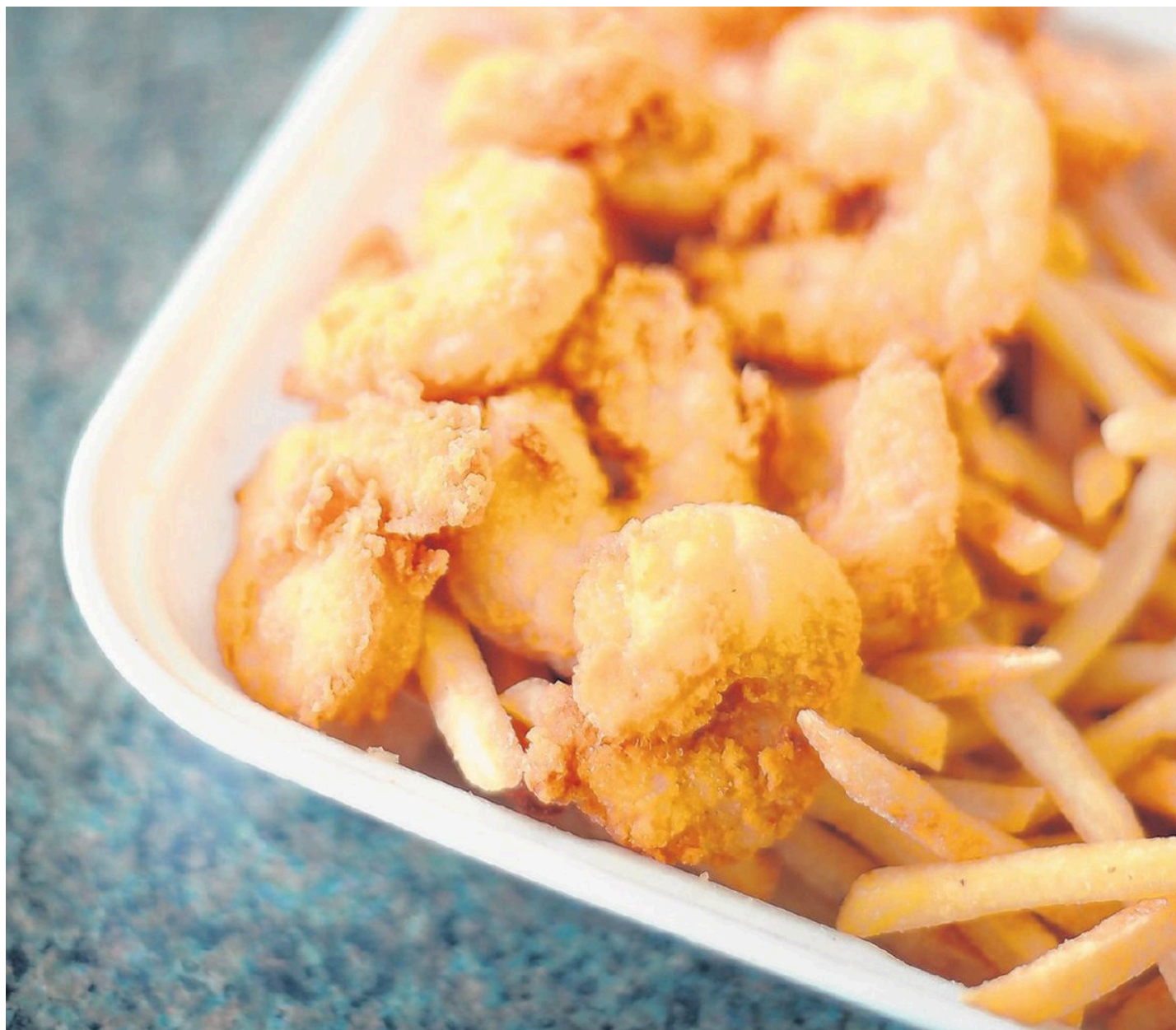
NOT FOR RESALE



Tacos al pastor at
Taqueria Los Barrilitos.

West Side cravings

**TASTE ALL THE NEIGHBORHOOD
HAS TO OFFER. PAGES 6-8**



Troha's Chicken and Shrimp House in Little Village.

MARINA MAKROPOULOS/TRIBUNE FILE

GO WEST, AND EAT

A guide to eating your way through Chicago's West Side

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

While North and South Siders duke it out for Chicago supremacy, West Siders have quietly gone about their business. They don't need to assert anything because they're too busy enjoying a wealth of culinary offerings their warring counterparts don't even know about. The Westsiders would probably like to keep it that way, but the wealth of culinary delicacies, which includes terrific tacos and tortas, blistered juicy chicken, Eastern European dumplings, Michelin-level cooking and even reinvented American comfort food, deserves its spot in the sun. Fortunately for you, we've got the rundown.

FRIED SHRIMP FROM A CENTURY-OLD SHACK

Troha's Chicken and Shrimp House

4151 W. 26th St. 773-521-7847

How does a 100-year-old landlocked Little Village restaurant end up serving some of Chicago's best flaky golden fried shrimp (\$10.70 for half order)? It all started in 1917 when George Troha plied locals with a bowl of chili and a stein of beer for a nickel. During the Depression, chili meat became scarce, so Troha switched over to selling fresh and smoked fish, eventually unveiling shrimp in 1935. The idea of frying it came a few years later, after the restaurant's owners were inspired by a visit to New Orleans. The Trohas also claim to have developed carry-out fried chicken six years before KFC. Whether that's true or not, one thing is certain: The fourth-generation owners are still killing it a century later.



CAROLYN VARIANO/TRIBUNE FILE

Tilapia with grilled vegetables and rice at Papa's Cache Sabroso in Humboldt Park.



ABEL ARCINIEGA/TRIBUNE FILE

La Chaparrita's signature plate is their crispy tripa taco, which includes cilantro and onion.

KICKIN' CHICKEN

Papa's Cache Sabroso

2517 W. Division St. 773-862-8313

Papa's kitchen rotisserie beckons with a battery of roast chickens (\$7.50-\$16.50). Their mahogany-colored and char-flecked skin and juicy flesh will make you regret every Costco or grocery market chicken you've ever bought.

El Pollo Real

3823 W. 31st 773-847-3907

Like Papa's Cache Sabroso, the chicken here is moist and juicy to the bone, but these birds are not spit-roasted. They're grilled over live fire charcoal and develop a smoky char that pairs well with blistered knob onions and pickled red onion, perfect for swaddling in a warm tortilla (\$7.68 and up).

TACO TUESDAY FOREVER

La Chaparrita Grocery

2500 S. Whipple 773-254-0975

If Little Village is the center of Chicago neighborhood taco magnificence, then La Chaparrita is its capital. All the tacos are great, but the crispy tripa (\$2.40), or crunchy bits of offal showered with onion and cilantro wrapped in a supple corn tortilla, will change your life.

Taqueria Los Barrilitos

3518 W. 25th St. 773-673-0102

If you're looking for great tacos al pastor (\$1.70), you're looking for a taqueria featuring a magnificent trompo, aka a spinning pyramid of pork slathered in rusty achiote paste. If you don't see a trompo, the kitchen is likely just marinating their pork and cooking it straight on the griddle, which often results in a mushy steamed mess. The meat never has the chance to crisp up or char from a constant flame like it does here.

Jerk Taco Man

4001 W. Jackson Blvd. 312-709-8281

On weekends, there are often Hot Doug's-like lines for the charcoal-grilled chicken tacos bursting with cheddar and cilantro (\$6). If you drank a lot the night before, you might also want to refresh your constitution with a Styrofoam clamshell full of the loaded jerk steak nachos (\$15).

Jarabe Mexican Street Food

2255 W. Taylor St. 312-725-0507

For the longest time I believed one of the best breakfast tacos/burritos in Chicago was the McSkillet burrito from McDonald's. It had a rusty red salsa, fluffy scrambled eggs, golden French-fried potatoes, crisp peppers and sausage bits that no Mexican spot could quite match. But, alas McDonald's discontinued the McSkillet in favor of the limp sausage burritos with mushy meat they serve today. Since then, I have been searching for a successor, that is until I tried the chorizo and potato "El #1" featuring bright pico de gallo and salty queso (\$3.25) from Jarabe.



Café Marie-Jeanne in Humboldt Park.

BRIAN CASSELLA/TRIBUNE FILE



TERRENCE ANTONIO JAMES/TRIBUNE FILE

The #1 breakfast taco at Jarabe Mexican Street Food.

El Faro

3936 W. 31st 773-277-1155

If you bring a vegan friend to most taquerias, the only thing they're likely to be able to munch on is a tortilla, and maybe not even one of those if it's been griddled in pork fat. Not so at El Faro, which offers a vegan-friendly assortment of soy-based steak and chorizo (\$3.75 and up).

DREAMY OMELETS

Café Marie-Jeanne

1001 N. California Ave. 773-904-7660

André Soltner, the legendary French chef who led the kitchen of New York's influential Lutece, used to judge a cook by how he made an omelet. By that standard, Café Marie-Jeanne's owner and chef Mike Simmons, who whips up a glistening yolk-rich curd stuffed with trout and dolloped with a cloud of dill-spiked sour cream, would probably be one of Soltner's favorite humans. Even if that weren't true, once you



E. JASON WAMBSGANS/TRIBUNE FILE

Mushroom, potato and tarragon vareniky at Shokolad Pastry and Cafe.

try this eggy masterpiece (\$12), you'll be tempted to make it a staple of every weekend.

SOMETHING FOR THE SOUL

Macarthur's

5412 W. Madison St. 773-261-2316

Long before hipster restaurateurs brought "meat and two" or "meat and three"-style dining to trendy foodie circles, Macarthur's was serving up soul proteins like ham hocks, (\$7.99) smothered chicken (\$8.99) and fried chicken (\$6.99) next to an assortment of sides like allspice-perfumed collards and quivering scoops of mac and cheese.

Green Tomato Café

3750 W. Ogden Ave. 872-588-3380

It's apt that this West Side cafe was launched as an outreach of the Lawndale Christian Health Center ministry, because once you eat the sweet and tangy BBQ

Chicken sandwich (\$5.75), a poultry-based Sloppy Joe of sorts, you'll be giving praise to Jesus.

Shokolad

2524 W. Chicago Ave. 773-276-6402

Ukrainian food doesn't quite get the cred of other European cuisines, but this Ukrainian Village spot offers quite the assortment of crave-worthy carbs. Mushroom dumplings swim in tarragon cream (\$9), while a crispy pork chop sports a schnitzel-like crust (\$10.50). The potato pancakes are lacy and the sour bright borscht (\$4 for small bowl) will warm you from the inside.

El Milagro

2400 W. 21st Place 773-579-6136

The steak tacos are legendarily large, but the beef you want is the guisado de res, a juicy Mexican stew bursting with cumin and chili that will fuel you through the kind of snowpocalypse that closes down and strands cars on Lake Shore Drive. (\$3.50 and up).

Los Candiles

2624 S. Central Park Ave. 773-522-8544

Sometimes you just can't choose between rojo or verde. At Los Candiles, if you order the huevos divorciados (\$9.40) with chilaquiles, you don't have to, because you get a couple of runny sunny side up eggs—one topped with farm-fresh red tomato salsa, and another with grassy green salsa—as well as a healthy mound of crispy chips for sopping up the bounty.

Pozoleria San Juan

1523 N. Pulaski Road 773-276-5825

The bowl of verde, aka green chili pozole, is like a slurpable Jacuzzi for the soul. Tender shreds of pork mingle with the carb comfort of hominy and the peppery crunch contrast of radish, cabbage and chicharrón bits (\$9.25).

HOT POCKETS

Gordilla's

3759 W. 26th St. 773-823-1499

If you've got a hangover or a paunch from consuming too many burritos the size of an airliner, head over to this Little Village spot where they serve up Durango-style burritos (\$2.99), or flour tortillas filled simply with a slather of creamy beans and shredded smoky chili-spiked barbacoa. The relatively svelte burrito looks more like a flauta than a steroidal Chipotle creation.

Diana's

1000 N. Francisco Ave. 773-235-9218

There are a lot of good Puerto Rican joints in Humboldt Park if you're just looking for a tasty jibarito or a heaping pile of yellow rice with pigeon peas. But if you're in the mood for fry-oil dappled flaky empanadas stuffed with steak (\$1.25) or crab, this is your stop.

Gorditas La Tia Susy

3500 S. Western Ave. 872-281-5099

Tiny masa rounds are griddled fresh until they puff up like tortilla dirigibles, and then they're topped with mashed pintos and a glistening mound of juicy carne asada (\$3.50).

La Casa de Samuel

2834 W. Cermak Road 773-376-7474

There are plenty of great Mexican restaurants in Little Village, including the venerable Nuevo Leon, but what sets Samuel apart are the ladies in front making tortillas to order. These tortillas, delivered piping hot to your table, are so good, you might want to drape them on your face and just inhale the corn perfume like you're indulging in some weird new-age Mexican-inspired facial.

Izalco

4377 W. 26th St. 773-522-2050

The pupusas (\$2.50) or masa pockets are filled with gooey cheese and beans and sport a leopard print of griddle spots that offer a smoky caramelized contrast to the fluffy interior.

SLAMMIN' SAMMIES

Moon's Sandwich Shop

16 S. Western Ave. 312-226-5094

Manny's gets all the glory, but the corned beef (\$6.41) served here—in between a couple of pillowy pieces of caraway seed-studded rye bread slathered with a smear of yellow mustard—is just as worthy when considering Chicago's best brined beef sandwiches.



ABEL URIBE/TRIBUNE FILE

Boeufhaus' 55-day dry-aged rib-eye with a side of cauliflower gratin.



PHIL VELASQUEZ/TRIBUNE FILE

Split-Rail's green bean casserole.

Spinning J

1000 N. California Ave. 872-829-2793

The interior with reclaimed fixtures from a 1920s Milwaukee-area soda fountain makes you feel like you've somehow found a DeLorean with a flux capacitor and traveled back in time like Michael J. Fox. But the unique food, especially a beet Reuben (\$11) that subs in roasted, thinly sliced beets for the usual corned beef, makes you feel like you're eating in the future.

Doña Torta

3331 W. 26th St. 773-257-0000

The airy bolillo loaves used for the sandwiches are yacht-sized and stuffed with all kinds of toppings. Go with "La Bomba," (\$7.75) which is filled with a butcher's case worth of breaded steak, pork, ham and bacon plus gooey chihuahua cheese, pineapple, and a crisp salad of lettuce, tomato, onion and cilantro.

WINE AND DINE

Rootstock Wine and Beer Bar

954 N. California Ave. 773-292-1616

The name of this Humboldt Park spot is a nod to the hearty roots that make up great wine vines. And yet, whenever I'm here sipping on a fabulous Riesling and killing some silky chicken liver pate (\$6.50), I hear the raspy voice of the Beastie Boy's emcee, King Ad-Rock, rapping "How we gonna kick it?" followed by the refrain from the rest of the boys, "Gonna kick it root down!" Rootstock purveys the kind of community and comfort that makes you want to put your roots down and be a regular for life.

Boeufhaus

1012 N. Western Ave. 773-661-2116

There is no shortage of seared hunks of expense-account-capturing beef and sides

of baked potatoes bigger than an NFL regulation football served in Chicago. Boeufhaus doesn't play that game. Instead, they focus on quality over quantity, provisioning discerning steakhouse seekers with delicate beignets larded with short rib (\$10) and a fennel-kissed fluke crudo (\$14) along with a 55-day dry-aged rib-eye (market price) that's funkier than any Prince track.

El Ideas

2419 W. 14th St. 312-226-8144 (\$155+)

The world is full of smart-ass chefs who like to shoot their mouths off. What makes owner and executive chef Phillip Foss particularly special is that he blends a sharp wit with even sharper Michelin-level cooking skills. If you've got the money, try and score a "front row" seat, which puts you in the middle of the action, allowing you to pepper chefs with questions as they construct some of the more beautiful plates in Chicago.

STELLAR SUSHI

Kai Zan

2557 W. Chicago Ave. 773-278-5776

Sushi spots in Chicago are generally a dime a dozen, most of them serving up fat truck driver-worthy slabs of raw fish topping mushy rice. But there are a few that focus on serving delicate scrimps of sashimi and nigiri buttressed by well-seasoned toothsome-grains. Of those, even fewer know how to serve a multi-course omakase, or chef's choice progression of sushi, on the level of the best prix fixe Chicago restaurants. Kai Zan is one of the few.

'MERICA

Split-Rail

2500 W. Chicago Ave. 773-697-4413

No doubt you've sidled into plenty of plump leather banquettes in Chicago restaurants, but I bet you've never sat in a booth lined with yellow equestrian-graphic-laden fabric that makes you want to yell "tally-ho!" Amidst that funky seating, Chef Zoe Schor serves up gourmet Americana (\$14-\$32), including McDonald's-killing jalapeño-tinged chicken nuggets and a stellar green bean casserole tossed with earthy 'shrooms that'll have you wanting Schor to come over and cook Thanksgiving dinner for your clan next year.

Philly Bros

3944 W. Chicago Ave. 773-661-1331

Sometimes you can't make it to the county fair. The good news is if you live in Chicago, you can have the fair come to you in the form of Philly Bros' deep fried Oreosundae (\$4.99), potato chips on a stick, and the Philly Burger hoagie (\$7.99 and up) stuffed with loose ground beef, which eats kind of like the awesome love child of a submarine and a patty melt.

Michael Nagrant is a RedEye freelancer.