

# Restaurants

Listings are excerpted from the Reader Restaurant Finder, an online database of more than 1,400 Chicago-area restaurants. Restaurants are rated by more than 2,000 Reader Restaurant Raters, who feed us information and comments on their dining experiences. Web ratings are updated daily; print listings reflect the most current information available at publication time. Reviews are written by

Reader staff and contributors and (where noted) individual Raters. Though reviewers try to reflect the Restaurant Raters' input, reviews should be considered one person's opinion; the collective Raters' opinions are best expressed in the numbers. The complete listings and information on how to become a Reader Restaurant Rater are available at [www.chicagoreader.com/restaurantfinder](http://www.chicagoreader.com/restaurantfinder).

# R

## Critics' Choice

# Bring Your Own for Coastal Adriatic, American Eclectic, or French-Inspired Mexican

### Top-Rated BYOB Spots

#### Andalous

3307 N. Clark | 773-281-6885

F 7.6 | S 7.1 | A 7.0 | \$\$ (9 REPORTS)

MOROCCAN, MEDITERRANEAN | DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL MIDNIGHT

Raters are mixed on the food, but most of them love the proprietor, Hadg Mohamad, who plays host while his wife, Rachida, does the cooking. Worthy of mention by a few Raters were the *pastilla* ("layers of chicken, spices, and phyllo"); a lunch special of Tangiers *tagine*, white-fish fillets baked with tomato and green pepper and thin slices of carrots and potatoes in a garlic sauce; and desserts like *selou*, a pastry made with finely ground nuts and sesame seeds that comes in a cluster of one-inch squares. Spicy harissa and stuffed olives are part of every meal, and hookahs are available should you choose to imbibe. "If I had to take someone to a Moroccan restaurant in Chicago, this would probably not be it," says one Rater. "But all in all, it's worth at least a visit." **Laura Levy Shatkin**

#### Cafe Suron

1146 W. Pratt | 773-465-6500

F 8.0 | S 6.4 | A 7.6 | \$ (9 REPORTS)

MIDDLE EASTERN | LUNCH: SUNDAY; DINNER: SUNDAY, TUESDAY-SATURDAY | CLOSED MONDAY | OPEN LATE: FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL 11

The owners restored the enormous lobby of an old Rogers Park hotel for the backdrop to their Persian cuisine. A mural of the sky graces the ceiling, and natural light flows in through French windows, illuminating a seven-foot-tall, Roman-style sculpture set in a plaster fountain. The wonderfully aromatic food includes classic Middle Eastern appetizers prepared fresh: hummus, fattoush, and dolmas, along with a grilled portobello with tomato puree and melted mozzarella. Another winner is the *kashke bademjan*, smoky eggplant dip with caramelized onions and mint. Fluffy mounds of basmati rice flecked with dill and lima beans are the base for most entrees, which include marinated chicken skewers, nicely charred tenderloin cubes, and charred shrimp. A juicy fillet of salmon comes topped with a distinctly Mediterranean combination of sun-dried tomatoes, garlic, red peppers, and black olives. The floral Persian tea is a nice choice, but the food would also benefit from a good bottle of wine. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

The first annual Windy City Wine Festival, featuring tastings of more than 200 wines, demos by local chefs, and seminars on pairing wines with food, takes place at Daley Bicentennial Plaza (Columbus and Monroe) this Saturday and Sunday. For more information see [windycitywinefestival.com](http://windycitywinefestival.com). Below are three of our critics' favorite places to bring their own bottles.

**ADRIA MARE** sounds Italian, but it's owned by a Croatian couple, Denis and Nadia Bajramovic, whose aim is to bridge the small distance between the northern extremes of Italy and Croatia. On the menu "coastal Adriatic" translates to a variety of aquatic edibles and the usual pasta suspects: penne, spaghetti, and four different risottos. The meal my girlfriend and I shared was superb, and lovingly prepared from scratch. We began with a tart, smoky, garlicky black-olive paté served on lightly fried pieces of wheat bread. Then came cheese tartlets, innovative little bread packages filled with feta, boiled

egg, and tomato and drizzled with a preparation of olive oil, red wine vinegar, and mustard. An enormous portion of seafood risotto teemed with practically everything that swims, scuttles, or glides through the sea. The dish was creamy, with a bite, and tasted of the ocean without being fishy. The tuna steak wasn't quite as good: an unlovely piece of gray fish that tasted fine, but only due to the creamy sambuca sauce it was served with. We ended with the *dolce du jour*, a mountainous piece of carrot cake. The only problem with this otherwise pleasant Edgewater spot is the decor, strongly reminiscent of Red Lobster circa 1975, before that chain went the family-dining route. Fishnets cover the ceiling, buoys hang on the walls, and the bar is festooned with little models of ships. It seems like a small thing, but I suspect this may be the main reason Adria Mare is not packed to the gills. The food deserves an audience. —**Chip Dudley**

Over the last two years Jody Andre (Tomboy, South) has turned **SPEAKEASY's** cavernous Devon Avenue space into a comfy, reliable neighborhood spot where the friendly staff is as much of a draw as the eclectic American food. The permanent BYOB policy, which can really help keep the tab under control, can't hurt either. The three rooms—bar/smoking section, dining room, and cabaret—are white-tablecloth classy, but the atmosphere is casual, with black banquettes lining bordello-red walls. Chef Tiffanie Hicks left in July, but her replacement, Kevin Bednarski, is doing fine with what's still basically her menu. Appetizers include tempura-battered artichokes in wasabi hollandaise, chicken pot stickers, and a "duet" of smoked salmon and refreshing tuna tartare with toast points and assorted garnishes. My friend's crock of French onion soup was just OK; it could have used a dash of salt, and the Gruyere on top was as brittle as creme-brulee crust in spots. In a typical twist, the signature Speakeasy salad with bacon and Gorgonzola is dressed with crunchy nuggets of garlic granola in lieu

#### Caliente

3910 N. Sheridan | 773-525-0129

F 7.8 | S 6.6 | A 6.9 | \$ (7 REPORTS)

LATIN AMERICAN, MEXICAN/SOUTHWESTERN | DINNER: TUESDAY-SATURDAY; SUNDAY BRUNCH | CLOSED MONDAY | OPEN LATE: TUESDAY-SATURDAY TILL 11 | SMOKE FREE

Victoria Medina-Lollino designed her pan-Latin restaurant to be at once artsy and familiar. Her approach is reflected in the decor—there's a colorful mural on one of the spice-colored walls and folk art scattered around the place—and the menu. "It's basically what I eat at home," explains

Medina-Lollino, who's the chef as well as the owner. "It's not exactly traditional. I try and throw in a few curves." Tasty appetizers include plump, tequila-marinated shrimp and a trio of hefty empanadas stuffed with (1) sirloin steak and almonds, (2) cheesy garlic potatoes, and (3) a syrupy

sweet guava paste. The corn-and-red-pepper soup is watery but refreshing, with heaps of kernels. Entrees include a flavorful skirt steak (a tender slab served with fresh salsa, black beans, and coarser-size tortillas), a chicken breast stuffed with poblanos and goat cheese, and traditional



Denis and Nadia Bajramovic and their black-olive paté at Adria Mare



JOEFF DAVIS

of croutons. Entrees are divvied up into half courses and main courses and include tweaked standards like mint-and-pistachio-encrusted lamb chops, bouillabaisse with a saffron-tomato broth, and vegetarian risotto with cremini mushrooms, Roma tomatoes, asparagus, and Parmesan. The half courses, explained a sweet and attentive waiter, are "normal portions" (about five ounces of protein plus a couple of sides) while the main courses are "American size." My half course of seared sea scallops was delicious—three firm disks in a lemon beurre blanc surrounding an island of garlic mashed potatoes topped with a tuft of sauteed spinach—and given the various starters I had already tossed back, didn't leave me hungry. But at \$20 the price per scallop seemed pretty steep. My friend's beef tenderloin, with similar sides, was a dollar cheaper and significantly more substantial. Dessert was a rich chocolate creme brulee, spiked with chiles and served with fresh strawberries and two dense curry truffles. As he dropped off the check, the waiter quipped, "How did you like my spicy balls?" —**Martha Bayne**

At this Ravenswood restaurant, Luis Perez applies French bistro cooking techniques he learned under Jack Jones (as chef de cuisine at Jack's American Blend and Bistro Marbuzet and sous-chef at Daniel J's) to the Mexican food his mother cooked when he was growing up. Perez says he's been "experimenting with different ways to combine ingredients."

**Dorado**  
2301 W. Foster  
773-561-3780

**DORADO's** short menu offers unique takes on Mexican favorites like roast pork (his version is a thick tenderloin, rosy and tender and served with a guajillo cream sauce) and delicious combinations like crunchy almond-crust trout laced with satiny coconut cream sauce and caramelized plantains, a lovely contrast of earthy and sweet. For dessert there's one of the richest flans around and a moist, light tres leches cake. The typical entree is priced in the mid-teens, and the place is still BYO—consider bringing a light-to-medium-bodied red wine (like a pinot noir) or even a full-bodied white, like a Condrieu from the Rhone Valley or a Riesling from Wachau, Austria. —**Laura Levy Shatkin**

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taqueria fare like tacos and enchiladas. For dessert there's flourless chocolate cake, key lime pie, and plantains served with dulce de leche ice cream. Caliente is BYO; there's a \$4 corkage fee. **Kathie Bergquist**

**Caro Mio**  
1825 W. Wilson | 773-275-5000

**F 7.7 | S 8.5 | A 7.3 | \$\$** (21 REPORTS)  
ITALIAN | LUNCH: MONDAY-FRIDAY; DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL 11 | RESERVATIONS ACCEPTED FOR LARGE GROUPS ONLY

Tucked along a quiet stretch of Wilson is this cozy Italian eatery. Crimson walls, linen tablecloths, candlelight, and soothing music make the room alluring, and the menu's full of simple, classic dishes. The antipasti offered might be *polenta al sugo*, fresh grilled polenta topped with a rich ragout, or *insalata di calamari*, marinated and grilled calamari set on a bed of greens, celery, black olives, and red peppers in a balsamic vinaigrette.

Homemade pasta, risotto, and gnocchi make up the bulk of the menu, though chicken, veal, and seafood are offered in preparations like vesuvio, parmigiana, and cacciatore. Caro Mio is BYO forever, and there's never a corkage fee. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

**Casbah Cafe**  
3151 N. Broadway | 773-935-3339

**F 8.6 | S 8.3 | A 8.7 | \$\$** (6 REPORTS)  
MIDDLE EASTERN | LUNCH: SUNDAY, TUESDAY-SATURDAY; DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL MIDNIGHT, OTHER NIGHTS TILL 11

Artifacts and Persian rugs add richness to this otherwise nondescript storefront on a bustling stretch of Broadway. Raters find the fare surprisingly good: favorites include the baba ghanoush, the feta plate, the chicken with artichokes in white wine, and the three lamb preparations—Marrakech, brochette, and shish kebab. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

**CHIC Cafe**  
361 W. Chestnut | 312-873-2032

**F 8.3 | S 6.6 | A 6.0 | \$\$** (10 REPORTS)  
GLOBAL/FUSION/ECCLECTIC | LUNCH: TUESDAY-SATURDAY; DINNER: FRIDAY, SATURDAY | CLOSED SUNDAY, MONDAY

This teaching dining room of the Cooking and Hospitality Institute of Chicago features a great skyline view of the Gold Coast, but if you'd rather observe the scenery inside you can do that too: the kitchen is encased in glass, so you can watch your meal being prepared. The prix fixe menu changes daily, and you must arrive between noon and 12:45 for lunch, 7 and 7:45 for dinner. We especially enjoyed a roasted-vegetable phyllo stack with goat cheese sauce and an outstanding roasted red pepper bisque. Our satisfaction varied with the entrees: salmon with coconut cream sauce was exceptional, whereas hazelnut-and-mushroom-stuffed quail wasn't. The big winner for dessert was a chocolate terrine with passion fruit anglaise, satisfying from the first bite. A

Food (F), service (S), and ambience (A) are rated on a scale of 1-10, with 10 representing best. The dinner-menu price of a typical entree is indicated by dollar signs on the following scale: \$=less than \$10, \$\$=\$10-\$15, \$\$\$=\$15-\$20, \$\$\$\$=\$20-\$30, \$\$\$\$\$=more than \$30. Raters also grade the overall dining experience; these scores are averaged and **As** are awarded as follows: **AAA**=top 10 percent, **AA**=top 20 percent, **AA**=top 30 percent of all rated restaurants in database.

classy touch: gratuities are donated to the school's scholarship fund. This is a great place for a relaxed, leisurely lunch. **Evan Graner, Rater**

**Coast Sushi**  
2045 N. Damen | 773-235-5775

**F 8.5 | S 7.0 | A 7.3 | \$\$** (12 REPORTS)  
JAPANESE | DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: MONDAY-SATURDAY TILL MIDNIGHT

Subtle lighting casts a flattering glow on the wood tables and comfortable woven leather chairs; carved wood chopsticks are another nice touch. Familiar starters include asparagus beef—tenderloin slices glazed in teriyaki sauce and wrapped

around asparagus spears—and unique creations like sesame-crusted scallops and Sunny Side Shiitake, in which the mushrooms are filled with an egg-yolk sauce. The tofu in the agedashi salad was cut into thick triangles, quickly fried (leaving the center soft and creamy), set on a bed of baby spinach, and topped with scallion, dried bonito flakes, and a light dressing of dashi (soup stock). The *oyako* soup (chicken, eggs, scallions, and thick rice noodles) had great flavor but was a little short on broth. The nigiri was superfresh; the red snapper, yellowtail, and sea bass are all worth a try. Signature maki include Coast Crab—tobiko, king crab, and spicy mayo—and a Maine lobster variety rolled with cucumber and driz-

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