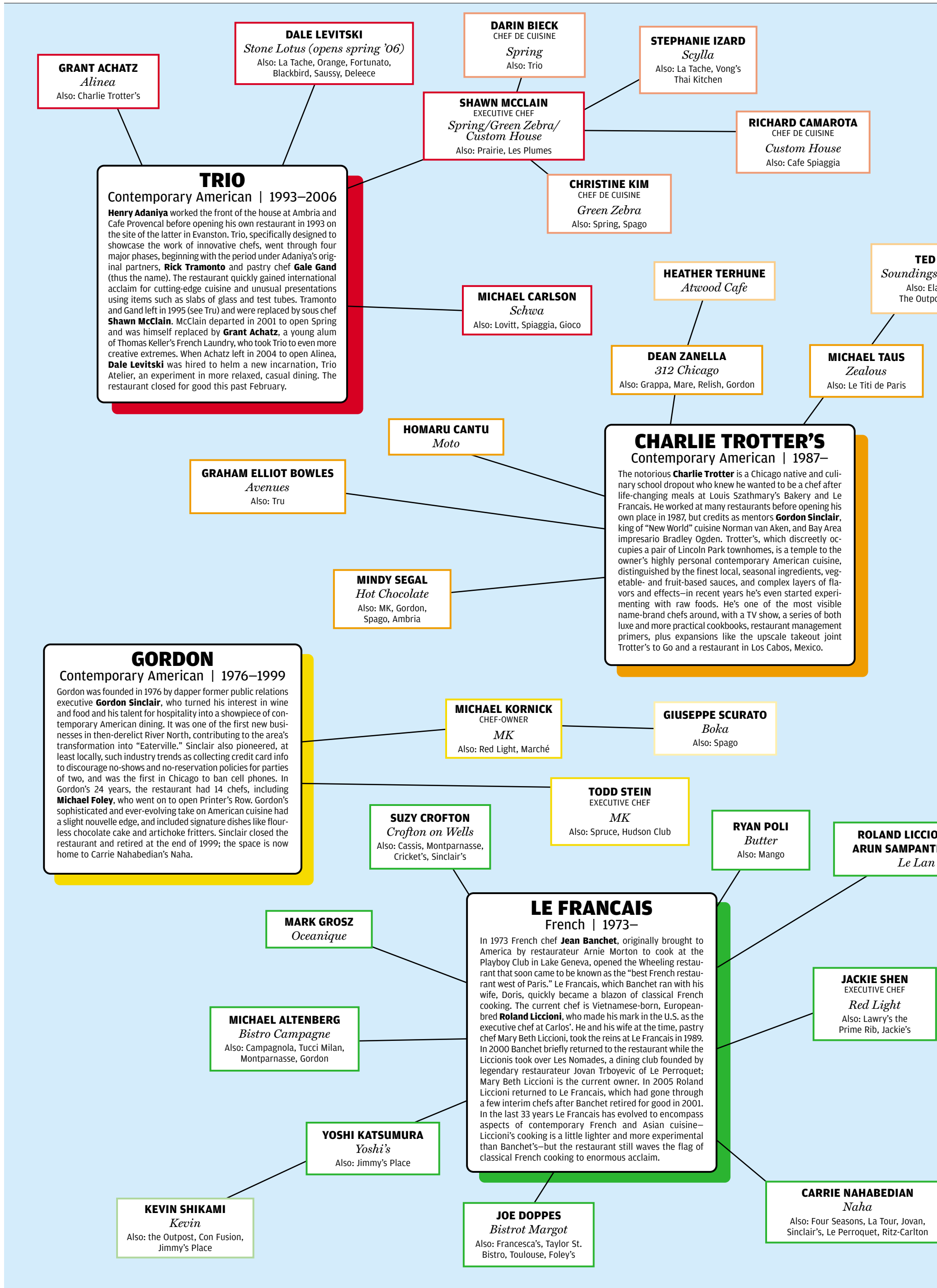
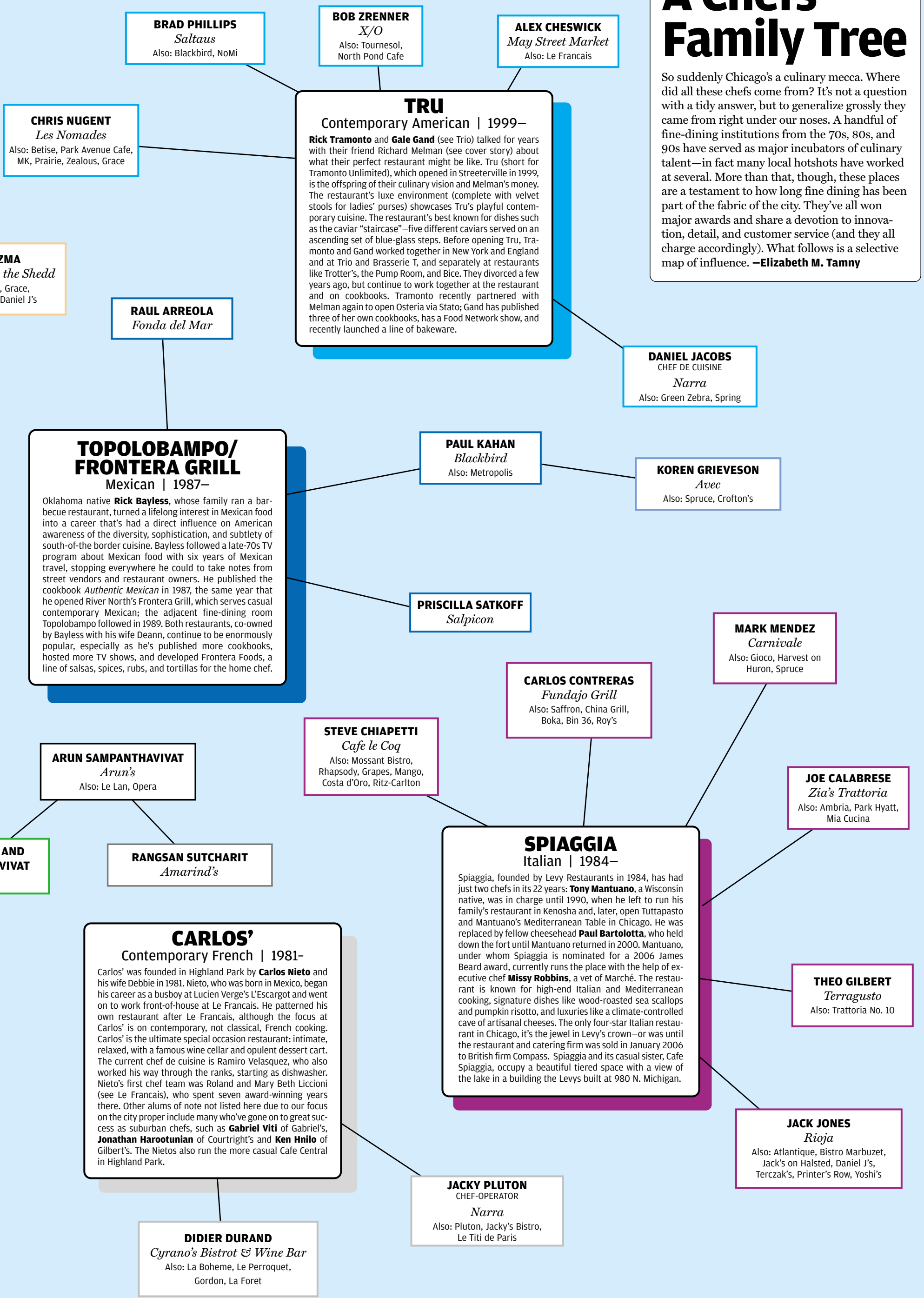


Restaurants Special



A Chefs' Family Tree

So suddenly Chicago's a culinary mecca. Where did all these chefs come from? It's not a question with a tidy answer, but to generalize grossly they came from right under our noses. A handful of fine-dining institutions from the 70s, 80s, and 90s have served as major incubators of culinary talent—in fact many local hotshots have worked at several. More than that, though, these places are a testament to how long fine dining has been part of the fabric of the city. They've all won major awards and share a devotion to innovation, detail, and customer service (and they all charge accordingly). What follows is a selective map of influence. —Elizabeth M. Tamny



CIZMA
at the Shedd
Aline, Grace, Post, Daniel J's

RAUL ARREOLA
Fonda del Mar

TOPOLOBAMPO/FRONTERA GRILL
Mexican | 1987–
Oklahoma native Rick Bayless, whose family ran a barbecue restaurant, turned a lifelong interest in Mexican food into a career that's had a direct influence on American awareness of the diversity, sophistication, and subtlety of south-of-the border cuisine. Bayless followed a late-70s TV program about Mexican food with six years of Mexican travel, stopping everywhere he could to take notes from street vendors and restaurant owners. He published the cookbook *Authentic Mexican* in 1987, the same year that he opened River North's Frontera Grill, which serves casual contemporary Mexican; the adjacent fine-dining room Topolobampo followed in 1989. Both restaurants, co-owned by Bayless with his wife Deann, continue to be enormously popular, especially as he's published more cookbooks, hosted more TV shows, and developed Frontera Foods, a line of salsas, spices, rubs, and tortillas for the home chef.

ARUN SAMPANTHAVIVAT
Arun's
Also: Le Lan, Opera

RANGSAN SUTCHARIT
Amarind's

CARLOS'
Contemporary French | 1981–
Carlos' was founded in Highland Park by Carlos Nieto and his wife Debbie in 1981. Nieto, who was born in Mexico, began his career as a busboy at Lucien Verge's L'Escargot and went on to work front-of-house at Le Francais. He patterned his own restaurant after Le Francais, although the focus at Carlos' is on contemporary, not classical, French cooking. Carlos' is the ultimate special occasion restaurant: intimate, relaxed, with a famous wine cellar and opulent dessert cart. The current chef de cuisine is Ramiro Velasquez, who also worked his way through the ranks, starting as dishwasher. Nieto's first chef team was Roland and Mary Beth Liccioni (see Le Francais), who spent seven award-winning years there. Other alums of note not listed here due to our focus on the city proper include many who've gone on to great success as suburban chefs, such as Gabriel Viti of Gabriel's, Jonathan Harootunian of Courtright's and Ken Hnilo of Gilbert's. The Nietos also run the more casual Cafe Central in Highland Park.

DIDIER DURAND
Cyrano's Bistrot & Wine Bar
Also: La Boheme, Le Perroquet, Gordon, La Foret

SPIAGGIA
Italian | 1984–
Spiaggia, founded by Levy Restaurants in 1984, has had just two chefs in its 22 years: Tony Mantuano, a Wisconsin native, was in charge until 1990, when he left to run his family's restaurant in Kenosha and, later, open Tuttapasto and Mantuano's Mediterranean Table in Chicago. He was replaced by fellow cheesehead Paul Bartolotta, who held down the fort until Mantuano returned in 2000. Mantuano, under whom Spiaggia is nominated for a 2006 James Beard award, currently runs the place with the help of executive chef Missy Robbins, a vet of Marché. The restaurant is known for high-end Italian and Mediterranean cooking, signature dishes like wood-roasted sea scallops and pumpkin risotto, and luxuries like a climate-controlled cave of artisanal cheeses. The only four-star Italian restaurant in Chicago, it's the jewel in Levy's crown—or was until the restaurant and catering firm was sold in January 2006 to British firm Compass. Spiaggia and its casual sister, Cafe Spiaggia, occupy a beautiful tiered space with a view of the lake in a building the Levys built at 980 N. Michigan.

JACKY PLUTON
CHEF-OPERATOR
Narra
Also: Pluton, Jacky's Bistro, Le Titi de Paris

JACK JONES
Rioja
Also: Atlantique, Bistro Marbuzet, Jack's on Halsted, Daniel J's, Terczak's, Printer's Row, Yoshi's

THEO GILBERT
Terragusto
Also: Trattoria No. 10

JOE CALABRESE
Zia's Trattoria
Also: Ambria, Park Hyatt, Mia Cucina

MARK MENDEZ
Carnivale
Also: Gioco, Harvest on Huron, Spruce

CARLOS CONTRERAS
Fundajo Grill
Also: Saffron, China Grill, Boka, Bin 36, Roy's

PRISCILLA SATKOFF
Salpicon

KOREN GRIEVESON
Avec
Also: Spruce, Crofton's

PAUL KAHAN
Blackbird
Also: Metropolis

DANIEL JACOBS
CHEF DE CUISINE
Narra
Also: Green Zebra, Spring

CHRIS NUGENT
Les Nomades
Also: Betise, Park Avenue Cafe, MK, Prairie, Zealous, Grace

BOB ZRENNER
X/O
Also: Tournesol, North Pond Cafe

ALEX CHESWICK
May Street Market
Also: Le Francais

BRAD PHILLIPS
Saltaus
Also: Blackbird, NoMi