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DESTINATIONS

# Chicago's Thoughtful New Spaces Make the City Worth Revisiting

*A slate of new hotels and restaurants, as well as innovative new cultural experiences, give you plenty of reasons to return to this Midwestern giant.*

BY ANDREW SESSA

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It might be called the Windy City, but **Chicago** never blows its own horn. And yet America's third-largest metropolis has plenty to brag about, from its cultural legacy and historic architecture to its influential food scene (whether you're talking about the Obamas' date-night fave **Spiaggia** or Polish-sausage subs the length of your arm). As Chicago enters its next chapter, its strength, beauty, and get-her-done attitude are more evident than ever.

Throughout the city center, a clutch of sophisticated hotels is welcoming back travelers, while top chefs are rolling out restaurants that showcase globally minded but neighborhood-driven fine dining. Of course, if it's a beer and a burger you're after, you're in luck there too, thanks to a slew of craft-beer bars elevating a beloved local classic.

But it isn't just hot openings that make the Paris of the Prairie so exciting right now—it's also the spirit of community. You'll see it in the latest edition of the Chicago Architecture Biennial, opening in September, which tasked star designers from around the world with permanently reimagining abandoned public spaces. Construction is also set to begin on the 19-acre Obama Presidential Center, with a museum, a branch of the public library, and gardens. When it opens in 2025, it'll usher in a new era for the South Side—home to the University of Chicago and the **traditional nexus of Black life in the city**. “Chicago has a civically engaged spirit that's only been bolstered by the pandemic,” says Louise Bernard, director of the Museum of the Obama Presidential Center, who shares her area picks here. “People are eager to reengage.” With so much going on, there has never been a better time to visit.



The iconic Willis Tower: still called Sears Tower by many Nikolas Koenig



# No second city

This fall Chicago showcases the breadth and diversity of its culture-scape.

For the fourth edition of the Chicago Architecture Biennial, dubbed the Available City, organizers paired community groups with big-ticket international designers to permanently rethink abandoned urban spaces. A particular highlight is a new entry plaza, designed by Tokyo-based Atelier Bow-Wow in partnership with local artists, architects, and community groups, for a 1.7-mile High Line-style elevated park being developed in the Englewood neighborhood, on the South Side. The multi-site *Toward Common Cause*, a presentation from the [University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art](#) in conjunction with the Chicago-based MacArthur Fellows Program, which turns 40 this year, explores the idea of the commons through works by 29 artists who have received “genius grants” since the program’s inception. Finally, in November, the legendary Steppenwolf Theater unveils a \$54 million expansion and renovation, including a theater in the round. Leading the blockbuster lineup on the main stage is *King James*, a Steppenwolf original about basketball icon LeBron James.

# Best beds in town

Like the city itself, [Chicago's newest hotels](#) are playful and sophisticated.

Classic Chi-Town hotels like the [Drake](#) and [Palmer House](#) became icons by being great places to stay and social hubs for perfectly poured cocktails and celebratory meals. The new crop extends this legacy. After stepping into the four-month-old Pendry Chicago, in a gold-crowned Art Deco landmark building in the Loop, you’ll want to go everywhere at once: the clubby lobby bar for a cocktail, the French brasserie for oysters and steak tartare, and the reservations-only rooftop for sushi and rosé. Wherever you start, the high-ceilinged, midcentury-style rooms are a nice place to end up. At Adorn, up the Magnificent Mile, James Beard Award-winner Jonathon Sawyer’s charred-tomato tartlet is a can’t-miss at the just-renovated [Four Seasons Hotel Chicago](#), as are the Lake Michigan Terrace Suites, whose block-long water-view verandas were previously open only to longer-stay guests. Set on the restaurant row called Fulton Market, super-chef Nobu Matsuhisa’s Nobu Hotel is a hushed reprieve from the crowds outside: Rooms are a relaxing combo of Japanese minimalism and the neighborhood’s industrial vibe. Of course you’ll want to eat at the golden-hued Nobu restaurant, but don’t skip [the rooftop bar](#). Set to open by the end of the year is the Financial District’s LaSalle Chicago, Autograph Collection, an urban aerie occupying the top five floors of one of Chicago’s first skyscrapers, a 22-story Classic Revival landmark.

# Food matters

At the city's buzziest new restaurants, the theme is Midwest meets the world.



Esmé Sandy Noto/Esmé

Think of month-old New American-style Esmé in Lincoln Park as Chicago on a plate. Owners Jenner Tomaska, formerly of Michelin-starred Next, and Katrina Bravo source everything locally, from the Tarbais bean masa steamed in leeks to the crockery.

Expectations were understandably high for the Adriatic-inspired Rose Mary, the first solo spot from ex-Spiaggia executive chef and Top Chef champ Joe Flamm, in Fulton Market. The graceful tuna crudo and hearty lamb ragu show he has more than met them.



Rose Mary Matt Haas/Rose Mary



Amān Courtesy Amān



Chef Zubair Mohajir's Indian pop-up Wazwan Supper Club earned a cult following for its impeccable chicken ballotine, which is wrapped in its own skin and cooked sous vide for two hours. This summer, Mohajir opened the brick-and-mortar Amān, in lively West Town.

## My neighborhood

Louise Bernard, director of the Museum of the Obama Presidential Center, which breaks ground this fall on the South Side, shares her top spots in the area.

“The 61st Street Farmers Market at the nonprofit community space Experimental Station is devoted to community and urban farms around the city, with a special focus on Black farmers. I’m partial to savory pies from Pleasant House Bakery and cheese from Stamper Cheese Company.”

“Located by the University of Chicago campus, the Seminary Co-op Bookstore—and its satellite, 57th Street Books—is a favorite haunt. I often go in for something specific but then find something else too, because the curation is so wonderful.”

“Chicago artist Theaster Gates and his Rebuild Foundation [transformed an old bank into the Stony Island Arts Bank](#). It has exhibitions, music, yoga, outdoor programming, and a film series.”

“I love Virtue, from local chef Erick Williams, who brought this corridor of 51st Street to life. The food has a Southern slant (the gumbo with a side of cornbread is maybe my favorite). He’s friends with many artists, so there’s great art on walls.”

“In Burnham Park, Promontory Point has bike trails and wonderful lake views. I love to walk and run here. There’s also the restaurant and jazz spot The Promontory, which has the best chickpea fries.”

## When it's beer'o clock

Stop in at these epic new craft-brew hubs.

## Bitter Pops

Hood: Lakeview

Don't miss: the local Hop Butcher for the World

Pro tip: Pull your own to-go brews at the adjacent craft-beer shop

## Solemn Oath Brewery

Hood: Logan Square

Don't miss: Lü Kolsch

Pro tip: Check out bathroom murals by the artist of the beers' labels

## Ravinia Brewing Co.

Hood: Logan Square

Don't miss: the Steep Ravine IPA

Pro tip: Hit up the taco truck out back for asada

## Life on Marz Community Club

Hood: Bucktown

Don't miss: American Pale wheat Jungle Boogie

Pro tip: Watch for killer pop-ups from local chefs

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