

michael gebert's

# The Fooditor 33

2021

## 1. Ever West Loop • Fine Dining, Tasting Menu • \$\$\$\$

1340 W. Fulton, Chicago • ever-restaurant.com

Far and away the most extravagant opening of a benighted year, highlighting Curtis Duffy's ultra-refined, exquisite food in a minimalist setting where service threads the needle between social distancing (everyone's in black masks, tables are far apart) and elite comfort. *What to order:* tasting menu (currently takeout only).

## 2. Moody Tongue South Loop • Beer, Tasting Menu • \$\$/\$\$\$

2515 S. Wabash, Chicago • 312.600.5111 • moodytongue.com

Jared Rouben's brewery with a focus on fruit and spice flavors existed before as a tasting room. But the new location (the former Bäderbrau brewery), with Jared Wentworth (Longman & Eagle) as chef, takes beer-food pairings to a new artistic level in the Dining Room, while running a bar and a barbecue takeout operation at the same time. *What to order:* Dining Room: tasting menu. Takeout: pork ribs, smoked brisket, goey butter cake.

## 3. Mis Moles Avondale • Mexican • \$\$

3661 N. Elston, Chicago • 773.604.8500 • mismolesrestaurant.com

The year's greatest feat of restaurant time travel is that Frontera protégé Geno Bahena's late 90s restaurants like Ixcapuzalco and Chilpancingo, with their moles as subtle and profound as French sauces, should turn up out of the blue in the former Cafe Continental/Little Bucharest space (with the irrepressible Branko Podrumedic as manager). *What to order:* red or black mole with duck or pork, uchepos, guacamole.

## 4. Testaccio Logan Square • Italian • \$\$

2456 N. California, Chicago • 773.661.6028 • testacciochicago.com

Aldo Zaninotto, of Osteria Langhe a block away, turns the former Quote space into a very pleasing Roman small bites and snacks spot, paired as always with well-chosen wines (Aldo used to be an importer). *What to order:* charcuterie, lamb kefta spiedini, tajarin carbonara, oven-grilled whole branzino.

## 5. Hermosa Hermosa • Chinese, Cambodian • \$

4356 W. Armitage, Chicago • 872.802.4920 • hermosarestaurant.com

Ethan Lim, who comes from a Cambodian Chinese restaurant family but spent time as a host at Next among other things, opened this five years ago as a neighborhood fast food stand.

In the last year it suddenly exploded in ambition, first with terrific handcrafted Asian sandwiches, then with sitdown Cambodian dinners. *What to order:* Cambodian fried chicken sandwich, Korean spicy pork sandwich, Moo Ping sandwich; Cambodian dinner.

## 6. Kasama Ukrainian Village • Filipino, Bakery, Coffee • \$\$

1001 N. Winchester, Chicago • 773.697.3790 • kasamachicago.com

On one side this neighborhood spot from Oriole veterans Genie Kwon and Tim Flores makes finely-crafted modern versions of Filipino flavors; on the other, exceptional pastries. Someday, you'll hang out here with coffee and a cardamom-scented kouign-amann. *What to order:* tocino ribs, Filipino breakfast, charred corn; kouign-amann, ham and cheese danish, ube and huckleberry tart.

## 7. Pizza Fried Chicken Ice Cream Bridgeport • Pizza, Fried Chicken, Beer • \$\$

960 W. 31st, Chicago • 773.565-4192 • pfcic.com

Spinoff of the Maria's Bar/Kimski complex; I never tried their initial Detroit style square pizza, but the current Chicago-style tavern pizza breathes new life into a stale style, a cracker-thin crust cooked to a defiant well-done, topped with spicy tomato sauce and fennel-heavy balls of sausage. It's fantastic. The fried chicken is solid too; the ice cream is Pretty Cool bars; the beer is Marz, so it's all good. *What to order:* pizza, fried chicken, ice cream.

## 8. Pizza Friendly Pizza Ukrainian Village • Pizza, Sandwiches • \$\$

1039 N. Western, Chicago • 773.395.2483 • pizzafriendlypizza.com

Noah Sandoval of Oriole, closed for COVID, led the square/Detroit/Sicilian pizza craze with this takeout spot back of co-owner Bruce Finkelman's The Empty Bottle, serving artfully composed toppings on an airy, crunchy crust with a 5-day fermentation, plus a few sandwiches and salads. *What to order:* Rapini & Lemon, Pepperoni & Basil, Italian cold cuts sandwich.

## 9. In-On Thai Uptown • Thai • \$\$

4641 N. Broadway, Chicago • 773.944-0114 • inonthaichicago.com

Several years ago, In-On Thai was an LTHForum favorite at the north end of Lakeview; then its building got knocked down. Returning in Uptown not long before COVID, it seems to have been embraced by everybody, and rightly so, as a Thai restaurant making its food with particular love and care. *What to order:* marinated pork ribs, mee krob, fried rice with BBQ pork, jungle salad with crispy fish.

## 10. Aya Pastry Noble Square, West Town • Bakery • \$

1332 W. Grand, Chicago • 312.846-6186 • ayapastry.com

Veteran pastry chef Aya Fukai (Sixteen) went solo with terrific baked goods, from crusty breads to croissants, cakes and cookies. The recent addition of a drive-thru made perfect 2020 sense.

*What to order:* plain croissant, ham and cheese croissant, kouign-amann, Samoa cake, baguette, shokupan.

## 11. Evette's Lincoln Park • Tacos, Middle Eastern • \$

350 W. Armitage, Chicago • 773.799.8478 • evetteschicago.com

Mexican-American Rafa Esparza (Finom Coffee) and Lebanese-American Mitchell AbouJamra teamed up to do Mexican-Lebanese fusion food (a real thing—the origins in fact of the shawarma-like cone of pork in taco al pastor). But even if it wasn't, shawarma-style chicken on a velvety-soft flour tortilla is all the justification the idea would need. *What to order:* tacos arabes, halloumi taco, chicken shawarma wrap.

## 12. JT's Genuine Sandwich Shop Irving Park • Sandwiches • \$\$

3970 N. Elston, Chicago • 773.754.7729 • jtsgenuine.com

The native sandwiches of the midwest, much better crafted than usual, are the focus of this sandwich shop with a patio area hidden around the corner. *What to order:* Fried chicken sandwich, breaded pork tenderloin sandwich, Italian pork and greens sandwich, Made Rite.

## 13. El Oso Cafe @ The Promontory Hyde Park • Mexican • \$\$

5311 S. Lake Park Ave. W, Chicago • 312.801.2100 • promontorychicago.com

The woodburning hearth at the Hyde Park restaurant and music venue The Promontory is being used during lockdown—and who knows after that—by Jonathan Zaragoza of birria family fame, turning out rustic Mexican dishes and some more upscale ones (a tamal is as deconstructed as a Graham Elliott Caesar salad). *What to order:* taco del dia, tamal frito, huarache, pozole.

## 14. Flour Power West Town, Ukrainian Village • Italian, Pasta • \$\$

1642 W. Chicago, Chicago • 312.363.3066 • flourpowerpasta.com

Wilson Bauer, ex of Schwa and other funky high-end spots, and his wife Alice traded restaurant late nights for family-friendlier hours making fresh pasta for cooking at home, as well as meal kits and a small quantity of nightly prepared dinners—which combine the supple, satisfying housemade pasta with well-crafted classic Italian sauces. *What to order:* pastas, nightly specials.

## 15. Ørkenoy Humboldt Park • Sandwiches, Nordic • \$\$

1757 N. Kimball, Chicago • 312.929.4024 • orkenoy.com

Humboldt Park's first brewery, located in the shadow of the 606, combines herbal-infused brews with a food concept that fits the neighborhood—100 years ago: it's built around Norwegian open-faced sandwiches, albeit the kind of hipster fusion *smorrebrod* that might as easily feature kimchi and gojuchang. *What to order:* spambrod, Fry Life, Madi's caraway knots.

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## 16. Lao Peng You

Ukrainian Village, West Town • Chinese • \$\$  
2020 W. Chicago, Chicago • 872.206.8624 • oldfriendchicago.com

The Wat brothers who run this spot grew up making dumplings with their Chinese immigrant grandparents—perhaps that explains why they stand out as something distinctive next to the typical dumplings found all over town, as does anything with carbs here. *What to order:* pork and dill dumplings, xi'an bing, chung yao bing, cold noodle.

## 17. Big Kids

Logan Square • Sandwiches • \$\$  
2545 N. Kedzie, Chicago • bigkidschicago.com

Currently a popup in the former Johnnie's Grill/Young American space, this collaboration between Ryan Pfeiffer (Blackbird) and Mason Hereford (New Orleans' Turkey & the Wolf) offers a short menu of indulgent sandwiches which, at their best, offer gloppy, delicious sensory overload. *What to order:* collard greens sandwich, fried bologna.

## 18. Menya Goku

North Center • Ramen, Japanese • \$\$  
2207 W. Montrose, Chicago • 773.942-6701 • menyagoku.com

This ramen-focused spot from the owners of Wasabi has an authentic Japanese feel inside, tiny and intimate. The specialty is tantan ramen—a spicy ramen with dan dan noodles—though I was just as happy with the more familiar tonkotsu. *What to order:* goku tantan men, goku tonkatsu, karaage slider.

## 19. Tlayudas Oaxaca Grill

Albany Park • Mexican • \$\$  
3652 W. Lawrence, Chicago • 773.681.0266 • tlagrill.com

Authentic Oaxacan food—note the *chapulines* on the menu—highlighted by the tlayudas, a small-pizza-sized crispy tortilla topped with beans, meat, cabbage and onions. It's not actually like pizza at all, except in sheer scarfability. *What to order:* tlayuda, grilled whole chicken.

## 20. Phodega

Bucktown • Asian, Vietnamese • \$\$  
1547 N. Ashland, Chicago • 773.687.8187 • phodega.com

First-rate pho leads a short list of Asian comfort soups and foods in a bodega atmosphere—all of it something Bucktown/Wicker Park was definitely missing before this place appeared. *What to order:* pho bo, pho ga, Hainanese chicken and rice, Vietnamese coffee.

## 21. Rye Deli & Drink

West Loop • Deli • \$\$  
25 S. Halsted, Chicago • 312.602.2100 • ryechicago.com

I just got to preview a couple of things from this newish deli, so I can't comment comprehensively, but everything I had had smart, unconventional thinking behind it—pastrami is smoked like Texas brisket, bread and Montrealish bagels are baked in-house from midwestern grains, the schmear for your bagel is labneh with middle eastern spicing rather than Philly cream cheese—all terrific. *What to order:* all of it.

## 22. Jeff & Jude's

West Town • Deli, Bakery • \$\$  
1024 N. Western, Chicago • 773.661.1227 • jeffandjudes.com

Another artisanal deli, from baker Ursula Siker (and named for her parents). It was a work in progress as of when I tried its pre-opening pop-up, with some things so, so right (her fantastic marble rye, a crusty loaf with ash-black swirls; excellent black and white cookies) and others needing work (the taste and texture of corned beef and pastrami are on the salty side, but good... once you get past the spiky barrier of cracked pepper on the outside of the latter). *What to order:* corned beef sandwich, lox tartine.

## 23. El Fogon de Elena

Albany Park • South American • \$\$  
3149 W. Lawrence, Chicago • 773.267.6893

Little Colombian café with a lot of heart, specializing in handmade arepas and hearty breakfasts like the calentado (apparently Colombian for "garbage plate," and big enough for two breakfasts). *What to order:* arepas, calentado.

## 24. Santa Masa Tamaleria

Avondale • Mexican • \$  
2949 W. Belmont, Chicago • santamasa.com

Delivery-only tamale spot from Danny Espinoza, who's cooked around Chicago; he planned to open a Mexican seafood restaurant, but for now settled on tamales as a COVID-friendly food. These are certainly tasty, warm and comfy, just like we need right now. *What to order:* verde de pollos, rajás, pozole.

## 25. Milly's Pizza in the Pan

Logan Square • Pizza • \$\$  
1801 N. Spaulding, Chicago • 224.656.4732 • millyspizzachi.com

Delivery/takeout operation which aims to reinvent—no, not Detroit square, for once this year, but the kind of pan pizza associated with Burt Katz (Pequod's, Burt's). So it's the thick crust with the caramelized edge, but it all tastes a bit brighter and more freshly made. *What to order:* choose among several styles with preset combos, or you can pick your own.

## 26. El Asadero Colombiano

Jefferson Park • South American • \$  
4800 N. Central, Chicago • 773.283.8323

Chickens roast over live charcoal all day long at this Colombian restaurant, and though there's a full menu of perfectly good South American food, during lockdown, those chickens to go are all you need. *What to order:* chicken.

## 27. Flo's Kitchen

Avondale, Logan Square • Mexican • \$  
3335 N. Troy, Chicago • 708.307.1058 • facebook.com/FlosKitchenFoodTruck

Flo's Kitchen is in fact a food truck, located out back of a house unless it says they're at a park or other event on Facebook. Anyway, 2020's favorite Mexican comfort food, the quesabirria (birria and cheese in a tortilla, with broth for dipping) is the standout along with carne asada and pastor tacos. Check

Facebook for location and hours (they are, at this writing, on winter break). *What to order:* quesabirria.

## 28. PiniPico Coffee Co.

Old Town • Coffee, South American • \$  
1538 N. Clark, Chicago • 312.624.8389 • pinipico.com

Coffee shop near Sandburg Village with a sideline in authentic Brazilian pastries, just right for comfort eating in this travel-deprived time. *What to order:* Ham and cheese or spinach and feta empanada, chicken empada, guava or Nutella pao de quiejo.

## 29. Cat-Su Sando

Humboldt Park • Sandwiches, Japanese • \$\$  
3220 W. Grand, Chicago • 312.574.0546 • catsusando.com

This delivery operation wasn't the first place to do Japanese convenience-store-style sandwiches, but it has the most accessible menu of sandos and other playful Japanese-style snacks. *What to order:* cat-su sando, cat-su club, chicken noodle soup.

## 30. French Quiche

Lincoln Park • French, Sandwiches • \$  
2210 N. Halsted, Chicago • 773.857.0097 • fqchicago.com

From veteran chef Dominique Tourné (Chez Moi), a charming French café serving sandwiches (on crusty La Fourchette bread), lush and creamy quiches, and some dinners to cook yourself like cassoulet and beef bourguignon. *What to order:* quiche Lorraine, quiche Savoyarde, croque monsieur, le jamon beurre, Oceanic flatbread.

## 31. Pocho's

McKinley Park • Breakfast, Mexican • \$\$  
2025 W. 35th, Chicago • 773.475.7829 • pochoschicago.com

One of the signs that a neighborhood is gentrifying is the arrival of a sunny, friendly, community-focused breakfast café, local art on the walls and a hint of ambition on the plate. Here's McKinley Park's! *What to order:* Chilaquiles all the way, shakshoukah, rajás omelet.

## 32. Lizzy J Cafe

North Center • Soul Food, Breakfast • \$\$  
2205 W. Montrose, Chicago • 815.735.2762 • lizzycatering.com

Longtime African-American caterer opened a tiny, very friendly café with soul food breakfast and brunch items to put a smile on your face. *What to order:* chicken and sweet potato waffles, fish and grits, Crabby Benny.

## 33. Razpachos

West Elsdon • Frozen Treats, Mexican • \$  
5611 S. Pulaski, Chicago • 773.570.7011 • facebook.com/razpachos

It's worth making what will be a trek down south for most readers, to experience the psychedelic array of frozen treats (paletas, ice cream and more) in distinctly Mexican flavors. What to order: manganado, tamarindo, diabliito, chamoy, arroz con leche, jamaica...

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