

GO WEST

Celebrating the delicious development of **WEST TOWN**

BY JEFFREY STEEN



Credit: John Chuckman, chuckmanchicagonostalgia

“Shoeless” Joe Jackson, of the timeless film “Field of Dreams,” said it best: “If you build it, they will come.”

Such is the story of West Town—the bustling, vibrant community now bounded by Bloomingdale to the north, the Chicago River to the east, Kinzie to the south, and Kedzie to the west. The area got its start in the late 1800s as a haven for Polish immigrants, but slowly benefited from waves of development and continuous immigration.

These days, West Town is a go-to for restaurateurs and shop owners eager for prime real estate and a young, energetic audience—much of it centered on Chicago Avenue. “Development has been gradually moving into West Town from neighboring areas,” Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Kara Hughes Salgado says. “It doesn’t hurt that we’re 10 minutes from downtown, and that big businesses like Google are taking up residence.”

As these businesses come, so do residents. “We still have our Polish roots in the area,” Salgado says, “but the population is getting younger. We’ve got a lot of young artists and entrepreneurs moving here, while real estate developers are taking advantage of prices and property in West Town to meet growing interest.”

Posh housing, world-class shopping, and big business—we all know what comes with this trinity, right? You guessed it: good food. Tapping the cosmopolitan appetites of visitors and locals alike, West Town—particularly Chicago Avenue—is serving up a feast of good eats from dawn ‘til dusk. Whether you’re a native or not, we highly recommend that you sample some of these incomparable culinary destinations—they’re all home runs.



The Winchester



Unite Urban Grill



flo



Green Zebra

UNITE URBAN GRILL

{1450 West Chicago Avenue; 312.455.8900; uniteurbangrill.com}

WHY WEST TOWN: “West Town is the quintessential eclectic, vibrant, emerging area. The sense of community here is very strong, which helps make our restaurant even more welcoming.” —Owner Joe Krouse

WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE: “Unite is a fusion of mine and my wife’s eating preferences and design styles. I call myself a ‘meatatarian’—I like steaks, chops, burgers, ribs, and the like, while my wife Megan has a wider palate and a penchant for fish, hearty grains, and fresh salads. Together, we created a neighborhood spot that unites those preferences. We have a great collection of meat and poultry, as well as vegetarian and pescatarian options.” —JK

TO EAT AND DRINK: Hanger Steak or Baby Back Ribs spar playfully with Roasted Vegetable Farro and the Salmon BLT. Mushrooms are big right now, so keep your eyes peeled for the Wild Mushroom Risotto. If you want a signature libation, be sure to order the Lincoln Park cocktail, kicked up with jalapeño tequila, lime, and alfalfa bitters—among other intoxicating ingredients.

UNITE’S LOCAL TIPS: Dovetail and Seek boutiques for vintage or unique items, Mexique for a dining experience with a celebrity chef, and Carbon Live Fire for a great late-night steak burrito.

WEST TOWN WISDOM: “Out-of-towners don’t often realize that West Town is minutes away from the Loop and River North. You can have the full city experience without the hassles or prices, all while being truly immersed in a dynamic neighborhood.” —JK

THE WINCHESTER

{1001 North Winchester Avenue; 773.698.8703; winchesterchicago.com}

WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE: Part neighborhood café, part restaurant, Winchester leans heavily on the culture of the area. “We started out trying to fill a void in the area,” Owner Chris Pappas says. “There are lots of bars, but not many clean, seasonal, whole-food type restaurants and no real brunch places (other than the bars). We’ve stuck to the clean, fresh, and ‘farm-to-table’ approach. We don’t use anything processed or frozen, and we order our ingredients fresh daily.”

TO EAT AND DRINK: Bucatini and Meatballs and the Flatiron Steak with grilled cornbread. A rosé

to pair is always a good idea, but Bar Manager Jessica Hart also whips up a mean Pink Unicorn (just try it; you’ll love it).

OFF THE CLOCK INDULGENCES: When he’s not at The Winchester, Pappas likes to linger at Mana Food Bar and Matchbox Bar for their dynamic veggie features, Sportsman’s Club for the back patio, and Rootstock Wine Bar and Restaurant because it’s just generally awesome.

INSIDER’S SECRET: Duke University men’s basketball head coach Mike Krzyzewski grew up in the Ukrainian Village, not far from The Winchester.

FUTURE PREDICTIONS: “It is nice to see the recent development in the Polish Triangle area. For years, all you heard is that it was going to change completely, yet it hasn’t until now. I think that will benefit the landscape of the Division Blue Line area tremendously.” —CP

“Out-of-towners don’t often realize that **WEST TOWN** is minutes away from the Loop and River North. You can have the **FULL CITY EXPERIENCE** without the hassles or prices, all while being truly immersed in a **DYNAMIC NEIGHBORHOOD**.” — Joe Krouse, Unite Urban Grill





WHISK {2018 West Chicago Avenue; 773.252.9060; whiskchicago.com}

WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE: “WHISK is a brunch and burger place that brings diners fresh food with a Mexican twist,” explains Owner Ricky Rodriguez. “The idea first took root when I got into the industry at 15 [years old]. I always wanted to open my own restaurant, inspired by the way people come together around food. My goal at WHISK is exactly that: to bring people together over a great meal. That’s why we have the community table, oversized booths, and a back patio perfect for bigger groups and families.”

TO EAT AND DRINK: The David’s Special (a unique take on shrimp and grits), Eggs Benedict (offered on the weekends only), The House Burger, seasonal caldos (soups and stews), and the infamous Snickers-Stuffed French Toast. To sip, consider housemade mint peach tea, cherry limeade, and bottled iced coffee.

WEST TOWN WISDOM: “This is an amazing community because of its diversity,” Rodriguez says. “There are great restaurants, boutiques, parks, and more—including a wealth of artists, chefs, gardeners, and designers trying to make their mark on Chicago Avenue with fresh stores and installations.”

WHERE TO GO IN THE KNOW: According to Rodriguez, Bar DeVille and Five Star are tops for drinks and small bites.

INSIDER’S SECRET: “One of my good friends has a farm in his backyard in West Town and allows neighbors to pick fruit from it. I’d better not say where it is, though ...” —RR

ARAMI

{1829 West Chicago Avenue; 312.243.1535; aramichicago.com}

WHY WEST TOWN: “I’ve been living in and doing business here since 1997,” says Owner Ty Fujimura. “The thing that drew me here two decades ago was the sense of community. The support for local businesses is huge in West Town, and I love that. And it played out with Arami, as well. We were one of the first, forward-thinking restaurants on Chicago Avenue, and locals loved it. Plus, there’s a great vibe in West Town and businesses all over the community like to promote other businesses.”

WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE: A fixture in West Town for five years, Arami bills itself as a Japanese restaurant that focuses on a few quintessential Japanese cooking techniques. Created by Ty and Troy Fujimura—brothers of Japanese decent—Arami offers traditional sushi, forward-thinking maki, classic robata grilling, and a phenomenal noodle program that goes way beyond ramen.

The design is a perfect match for the culinary experience, offering a setting reminiscent of a tranquil Japanese garden.

TO EAT AND DRINK: “Any visitor to Arami should definitely try our sashimi—it’s sourced from all over the world,” Fujimura says. “And our signature ramen dish, the Arami Ramen, is not to be missed. If you’re a grilled foods aficionado, order the Asian-Cured and Grilled Berkshire Pork Belly. If you’re looking for a tried-and-true crowd pleaser, I recommend the Tuna Tartare made with bluefin tuna and paired with an uni shooter.” On the drink side, sake is king. Be sure to try the custom-brewed variety made specially for Arami called Ichi No Torii.

OFF THE CLOCK INDULGENCES: Fujimura often heads to Bar DeVille for cocktails and the company of locals, Rootstock for wine and small bites, and Ode’s for classic Chicago dogs.

ON WEST TOWN’S FUTURE: “I’m really excited to see that the old liquor laws and zoning restrictions are loosening, allowing older businesses to revive and different types of businesses to come in and bolster the community. For example, Forbidden Root Brewery is opening in West Town soon. They struggled to get permission to open, but the support of the community allowed them to succeed. I love that kind of collective community thinking.” —TF