



Which restaurants best represent Chicago?

Friday, Dec. 09, 2011

Choosing two restaurants to stand for all that is great about eating out in Chicago is impossible, says Jeff Ruby, the chief dining critic for Chicago magazine (chicagomag.com). After all, this is home to many top chefs and star-rated restaurants – not to mention it's also where you can take a deep-dish pizza walking tour.

But, after a small food fight, Ruby agreed to chop his picks down to three. (Consider it a bonus and a reason to do a lot of strolling between courses.) Together, he says, these restaurants exemplify the scene's innovation, tradition and playfulness. "Chicago is a world-class dining city because of its crazy versatility," he says. "Chicago chefs can take more chances than, say, New York or San Francisco chefs ... where the rent is astronomical and the bottom line is king."

So, drum roll, please:

- Alinea (alinea-restaurant.com). "Grant Achatz's ultramodern spot in Lincoln Park showcases the most creative food in North America right now – 'woolly pig with fennel, orange and squid?' – without an ounce of pretentiousness," Ruby says. Called the greatest restaurant in America by Restaurant magazine and recipient of three Michelin stars, this unique kitchen presents beautiful food in a four-hour, 20-course prix-fixe menu. Prepare to be satiated.
- Gene & Georgetti (geneandgeorgetti.com). The long-running classic steakhouse in River North has attracted celebrities since the days of Frank Sinatra. "It doesn't get more Chicago-y than a gruff waiter serving you a crusted prime T-bone still sizzling from its trip in a Vulcan broiler," Ruby says. Expect shrimp cocktails, Caprese salad, veal chops and an Old World Italian atmosphere.
- Hot Doug's (hotdougs.com). The "Sausage Superstore and Encased Meat Emporium" is a fun, chaotic place for lunch, Ruby says. "The line will be long, but totally worth it, especially if you get a Brigitte Bardot andouille sausage dog and duck-fat fries. This is the best hot dog in a town full of them."