



The origin of Chicago's importance lies in its location. To the north and east are the Great Lakes and the Saint Lawrence Seaway that runs out to the Atlantic Ocean. To the south is a network of rivers that flow into the Mississippi and down into the Gulf of Mexico. Chicago is the control point between these two waterways. And for thousands of years, people have been using this spot as a central trading post.

As the United States moved west, Chicago became a commercial center. And in 1825, when the Erie Canal opened, Chicago found itself with a direct water route to New York City, and shipping prices that had dropped by 90 percent. Everybody who grew or manufactured something in the Midwest brought it to Chicago for sale, especially the guys who were raising pork and cattle. Each year, millions of steaks pass through this town, and some of the best of those steaks ended up in the kitchens of some of the town's best restaurants.



These days, one of the most popular steak restaurants in Chicago is Wildfire. It's a steak and chophouse with a 1930s, '40s look. The walls are covered with period photographs, and there's a dramatic open kitchen. Their signature steak is a horseradish-crusted filet mignon.

As Chicago became more and more important, its businessmen and women made more and more money. And often, when you have money, you learn to buy the best, which is why some of the country's best chefs are in Chicago. Perfect example is Charlie Trotter. Instead of going to cooking school, he apprenticed at some of the world's great restaurants, read every cookbook he could get his hands on, and learned his craft on the job.

His restaurant is considered to be one of the finest restaurants in the world. His food comes from a

blending of French technique, American creativity, Asian minimalism and the finest ingredients. Over 90 purveyors provide him with foods produced to his specifications.

As part of his desire to give back to the community that supports him, each week, Charlie invites a group of high school students to come in, have dinner and learn about the realities of the restaurant business. His objective is to teach them that with perseverance and focus, anything is possible. Maybe even a reservation on a Saturday night in his restaurant.



During the second half of the 1800s, Chicago's industrial growth required a larger labor force. Thousands of African Americans came up from the south. But the city also encouraged immigration from Europe. During those years, tens of thousands of Germans, Poles and Greeks arrived in this city. They moved into their own individual neighborhoods and opened up restaurants that served the foods of their native countries.

When it comes to Greek food, a good spot is Papagus, which means Grandpa Gus. The Chicago Tribune called it the best Greek restaurant in the city. It's divided into areas, each representing a different part of Greece. The Paros room represents the northern part of Greece. Handmade cloth tarps line the ceilings. The walls are white washed. And the blue bottles represent the Mediterranean Sea. It's where you'd find the shrimp phyllo bag, roasted jumbo shrimp wrapped in phyllo dough and served on saffron rice. And whole fish grilled over wood. The grill they use in Papagus is 150 years old, and burns only cherry wood. It's also the place for flaming cheese... a Greek specialty.

Chicago also has a large Mexican community that arrived here during the second half of the 20th century. And as you might expect, they brought their native

cuisine to the city. But what you might not expect is Topolobampo and the Frontera Grill that are thought of as two of the best Mexican restaurants in North America. Rick Bayless, who grew up in his family's barbecue restaurant in Oklahoma City, is the chef. As an undergraduate student, he majored in Spanish and Latin American culture. Three of his favorite dishes are tortilla soup with pasilla chili, fresh cheese and avocado. Fish braised with tomatoes, capers, olives and herbs. And quick fried shrimp with sweet, toasted garlic

LETTUCE ENTERTAIN YOU

Chicago is also the home to one of the most interesting restaurant companies in the United States. It's called Lettuce, as in the green leafy stuff, Entertain You. And as you can tell from the name, it is creative and has a sense of humor about what it creates.

It was started in the early 70s by Richard Melman and with his partners, built into a \$170 million business. But unlike most restaurant groups that have a good idea that they take all over the country, Melman has opened almost all of his businesses in Chicago. Curious to find out what commercial insight lay behind this unusual decision, I asked why he did almost all of his work in one town.

RICHARD MELMAN

I hate to travel. I don't like the aggravation of going to the airports and the delays with the planes. And I have a horrible sense of direction. When I do get to another town, I never know where I am. And I'm a homebody, and I like being with my family. And that's ... that's the reason.



Of the top four restaurants listed in the Zagat guide for Chicago, three are Melman's. Ambria for excellent French cuisine in an elegant atmosphere with Art Nouveau architectural touches. It features a light approach that relies on the use of the freshest ingredients and cooking techniques that enhance the food's lighter flavors.

Everest is on the 40th floor of the Chicago Stock Exchange building, and has one of the great views to dine by. Considered one of the city's top dining rooms, it operates under the direction of chef/owner Jean Joho, who has been described by the *Chicago Tribune* as the most creative chef in the city.

WHERE TO EAT



WILDFIRE

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CHICAGO, IL 60654

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WWW.WILDFIRERESTAURANT.COM

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816 WEST ARMITAGE

CHICAGO, IL 60614

TEL: 1.773.248.6228

WWW.CHARLIETROTTERS.COM

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CHICAGO, IL 60610

TEL: 1.312.661.1434

WWW.FRONTERAKITCHENS.COM

EVEREST

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CHICAGO, IL 60605

TEL: 1.312.663.8920

WWW.EVERESTRESTAURANT.COM

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CHICAGO, IL 60611

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WWW.TRURESTAURANT.COM

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CHICAGO, IL 60611

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And Tru, which presents a progressive approach to French cooking and serves their dishes on a spectacular array of non-traditional surfaces. Like caviar on a glass staircase, or marinated sushi in a bowl with a Japanese fighting fish.

Those three restaurants are rather upscale, and their energy is directed towards producing a great cuisine. But the company showed its sense of humor early on. During the 70s, they opened a restaurant called Jonathan Livingston Seafood, and another one called Lawrence of Oregon.

And for years, I've been a fan of Big Bowl, which is a casual Asian cafe that offers an eclectic menu of simple fresh foods. Asian noodles, stir-fries, soups and wraps. And everything is inexpensive. One of Lettuce Entertain You's most popular restaurants is Mon Ami Gabi, which is an authentic reproduction of a Parisian bar the way they looked in the late 1800s. A signature meal at the restaurant would start with onion soup, followed with a main course of steak with garlic butter and French fries, and end up with crepes banana foster for dessert.



SWEETS OF CHICAGO

The first candy bars made in America were made in Boston, New York and Philadelphia. But by the early years of the 20th century, America's great sweet tooth had moved to Chicago. The reason was very simple; it was an easy place to get corn syrup, dairy products, real estate was relatively inexpensive, and there was a great pool of intelligent and devoted labor. But the event that really changed America's sweet tooth into a full bridge and an



upper plate was the First World War. The U.S. Army ordered American candy manufacturers to produce bars that weighed 20 to 40 pounds. They were shipped to Europe and then cut into smaller pieces at the front. Eventually the job of making the candy in smaller pieces was assigned back to the manufacturers. By the end of the war, candy bars were a regular part of the American diet. And over 40,000 different candy bars were being produced. These days, the candy business in the United States is estimated

at over \$20 billion. And that's nothing to snicker at, especially in Chicago where the M&M Mars Candy Company makes Snickers. Snickers are America's number one selling candy bars and it produces almost \$1 billion of annual sales, which really satisfies. It's made from a nougat base, topped with a mixture of caramel and peanut, which is then enrobed with milk chocolate.

The Snickers bar was developed by Frank Mars. And the original version was not chocolate coated. Frank believed that by combining the food textures found in nature, his candy bar would satisfy hunger. Nice try. But his customers soon told him that chocolate-coated hunger satisfaction was much better.

In terms of hunger, Frank's claim to fame was not limited to the Snicker's bar. During the 1920s malted milk drinks were very popular. So he developed a candy that felt like a portable milk shake, and he called it a Milky Way. It's made from chocolate, caramel and nougat. Similar ingredients to Snickers but without the nuts. He also believed that there was an ideal shape and size for each bar and based his designs on the ratios used by the ancient Greek and Egyptian architects. And like those venerable mathematicians, Frank Mars looked to the heavens for guidance, with a particular interest in Mars, the Milky Way and Star Bursts.

Chicago is also the home of the Tootsie Roll, which was the first penny candy to be wrapped in paper. In 1896 Leo Herschfeld immigrated to the United States from Austria, opened a little shop and began to make candy from a secret formula. He named that candy after his daughter Clara, whose nickname was Tootsie.



These days, the president of the company is Ellen Gordon. She showed me how Tootsie Rolls are made. They start out from a base, which is primarily sugar, corn syrup, soybean oil, skim milk, and cocoa. That mixture is heated, cooled, thinned out, rolled, cut and wrapped. Over 60 million Tootsie Rolls are made each day. Tootsie Rolls also come in the form of a Tootsie Pop, which was the first soft-centered lollipop. The hard candy outside starts as a hot strip of sugar and water. As it cools, it's formed around a cone. Tootsie Roll mix is fed into the center of the cone. A unique machine turns some of the sugar candy around to form a ball over the Tootsie, and then pops in a stick. And over the years, it's become apparent that most Tootsie Pop lovers want to get

WHERE TO SWEET



TOOTSIE ROLL INDUSTRIES
7401 SOUTH CIRERO AVENUE
CHICAGO, IL 60629
TEL: 1.773.838.3400
WWW.TOOTSIE.COM

THE ELI'S CHEESECAKE COMPANY
6701 W. FOREST PRESERVE DRIVE
CHICAGO, IL 60634
TEL: 1.800.354.2253
WWW.ELICHEESECAKE.COM

SWEDISH BAKERY
5348 NORTH CLARK STREET
CHICAGO, IL 60640
TEL: 1.773.561.8919
WWW.SWEDISHBAKERY.COM

through the hard candy outside and into the Tootsie as fast as possible. And so the company began to reduce the thickness of the coating.

This Company represents the sweet dreams of my youth. Not only do they make Tootsie Rolls and Tootsie Pops, but they make Dots and Crows and Sugar Daddys and Sugar Babies and Charleston Chew and Junior Mints. This is what I used to eat when I went to the movies. As a matter-of-fact, I went to the movies to eat candy. I thought the movies were something that the candy guys threw in to keep me quiet while I was eating.

Candies can be divided into three categories; chocolate, hard, and soft. In general, hard candy and soft candies have similar ingredients; water, sugar, and flavoring. And if the candy turns out to be soft or hard is a function of how much heat is applied to the mixture. The higher the heat, the harder the candy. Chicago is home to the largest maker of non-chocolate candies in the United States. The company is called Brachs, and it was started in 1904 by Emil Brach. They make 300 different candies including Peppermint Starlight Mints, and they are masters at the mixing of jellybeans. I learned that almost all jellybeans

start out with the same-based mixture in the center. The specific flavor comes only from the coating. When it comes to most jellybeans, flavor is only skin deep.

SPECIALTY BAKERS

Like many cities in the United States, Chicago's love of sweets includes a group of specialty bakers. And one of the most famous is Eli's who's been baking cheesecake since 1977. Chicago is the largest cheesecake market in the country. And Eli's is the largest specialty cheesecake bakery, turning out 16,000 cakes each day. Mark Schulman, an attorney who gave up suing for sifting, is the president of the company. The plant's daily tours are a top attraction.

Each day the company goes through 15,000 pounds of cream cheese, 4,000 pounds of sugar, 265,000 fresh eggs, 5,000 pounds of sour cream, and 200 pounds of Madagascar vanilla. All cheesecakes are based on the simple process of sweetening fresh cheese curds and baking the mixture. And that's what Eli does with over 75 different recipes, including ones based on Heath Bars, Reeses Peanut Butter Cups, and Key Limes. But the best seller is still the original plain. They have a dessert cafe in which they offer a series of creations based on cheesecake. A Dipper is a slice of cheesecake that's frozen onto a stick, dipped in chocolate, and coated with the topping of your choice. A Smush is cheesecake and ice cream smushed together. And finally, shakes made from cheesecake and ice cream.



Cheesecake is one of our earliest baked goods. Historians tells us that the ancient Greeks took goat cheese and sheep cheese, sweetened it with honey and made a cheesecake that was fed to the athletes at the first Olympics which took place in 776 BC.

Much of the food in Chicago is based on the cooking found in the ethnic neighborhoods. A perfect example is The Swedish Bakery in Andersonville. It opened in 1928 and continues to bake the breads, cakes and pastries that were dear to its founder. A neighborhood favorite is the Andersonville Coffee Cake. It's a light cardamom yeast cake with a topping of almonds. The great bakers that came to Chicago with the large German



immigration of the 1800s and early 1900s are represented by Dinkel's, which opened in 1922. It was opened by Joseph Dinkel of Dinkelsvule in Southern Bavaria. They're famous for their sweet German Christmas bread, which is called a Stollen. And if you are interested in tasting a perfect doughnut, the way they tasted before they were mass-produced by national chains, this is the place.

Another fine German bakery, Schmeissing's. It was opened in 1934 by Gene Schmeissing who came here from Castle Germany. Good breads, fine fruit tarts, and a turtle cookie made with a sweet cookie dough base covered with nuts, topped with caramel and crowned with chocolate. The baker calls them a turtle. But I think they should be called a tortoise, because one bite "taught us" to love them.

HOUSE OF BLUES

While I was analyzing Chicago's sweet dreams, I stayed at The House of Blues Hotel, which is a Loews Hotel. The interior decoration is a mixture of Gothic, Moroccan, East Indian, uptown, downtown, across town and high-tech. In the same way that The Blues Brothers film took a relaxed approach to Chicago, the House of Blues Hotel takes a relaxed approach to the somewhat staid manner you find in most hotels. When you check in, you get a CD of Blues Rocker R&B.

The elevators run at a perfectly normal speed. But just to make sure you don't get bored while you're waiting, they have placed a television set in the wall next to the doors. Unfortunately, the other day somebody changed the station from CNN to an old Marilyn Monroe movie. And I was two hours late for my appointment. But I was in a good mood and mood is very much what this hotel is all about.

The hotel has a special deal with the Crunch Gym, which is on the bottom floor of the building. There's also a state-of-the-art AMF bowling center in the hotel's building.

Directly across the courtyard from the hotel's entrance, is the House of Blues Restaurant and Music Hall. Every Sunday they hold a Gospel brunch. The buffet is basically Southern food and it's an all-you-can-eat service. About 25 different dishes including jambalaya, sweet potato hash, barbecued chicken, buttermilk biscuits, and bread pudding with a bourbon sauce. The interior space is based on an old opera house of Prague with three tiers of



Baroque balconies. But the decorations are based on African American folk art.

Each week a different gospel choir comes to The House of Blues and gives everyone an opportunity to praise the Lord and pass the biscuits. Today's group is Andre Patterson and the Shop Choir. Andre used to be a hairdresser and he needed money to buy more chairs for his shop. He brought together some of his clients and fellow hairdressers and formed a gospel group to raise the money.



SECOND CITY

Since 1959, the Second City has been touring the world and making people laugh. Its alumni list reads like a Who's Who of American Comedy. Alan Arkin, John Belushi, Bill Murray, Robert Klein, Dan Aykroyd, Martin Short, Gilda Radner. The Second City troops are masters of improvisational humor, and very often, part of a joke.



TO LEARN MORE . . .

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