

Love at First Bite

Seeking winter romance? We're cuckoo for hot cocoa, bacon bourbon popcorn and the new, former roadie chef at Goose Island | *By Lisa Shames* |



Mussels from Goose Island.

Q&A

Hell Raiser

When we first heard that Goose Island's new chef, Andrew Hroza, not only used to travel the country creating meals for bands like Van Halen, The Eagles, Billy Idol and Prince when he worked for Hell's Kitchen Catering, but is also a certified cicerone we thought, how cool! Quickly followed by, um, what's that? Here's the scoop from Hroza himself.



THE GOOSE AND THE CANDOR

Chicago native Andrew Hroza spills about his new gig at Goose Island.

So, what is a cicerone? What a sommelier is to wine, a cicerone is to beer. It's a certification that shows you know all the different aspects: brewing, pouring, storing, traditions, styles. I took it on from a chef's standpoint to look at it in the pairing sense. A lot of people who take the certification program are brewers. It's relatively new for a chef to be going for it.

What was it like working at Hell's Kitchen? Besides my confidentiality agreements [laughs]? It was a neat time of my life where I was a chef to the bands and a caterer for the tour itself. It consisted of arriving at the venue at 8AM to set up a traveling kitchen. You'd go to the local markets, find out what's seasonal and prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner based on that. Then you'd

break down the kitchen at night and do it all over again the following day. There's nowhere in North America that I haven't been, from little towns in North Dakota to every major city. But unfortunately sometimes I'd never see the sunlight because I was inside the venue all day and then got back on the bus at night.

Tell us about the new menu. We're trying to make it a bit more American. We're doing in-house butchering and have the new products that come from that, like homemade sausages. We're making a juniper-and-coriander rub for pastrami to pair with our juniper-infused ale. I'm doing smoked duck confit quesadillas. It's typical food but with a lot more wow to it. 1800 N. Clybourn Ave., 312.915.0071, gooseisland.com.

TASTE TEST

Cocoa Loco

Goodbye, gingerbread latte. Thanks to Rick Bayless and his Aztec blends, we've remembered how good a steaming mug of chocolate can be.

► Xoco

You (and the rest of Illinois) may have heard that the team here grinds Mexican cacao beans in-house to make the six types of hot chocolate. We'll cut to the chase: The Barcelona, as thick as brownie batter, is a chocoholic's dream. 449 N. Clark St., 312.334.3688, xoco-chicago.com.



Pour the city's hottest chocolate at the Four Seasons hotel.

► Seasons Lounge and Bar

Go glam with the Haute Chocolate at the Four Seasons hotel: a chocolate-lattice-topped cup, a pot of hand-churned melted Valrhona chocolate and house-made chocolate marshmallows, all served on a silver tray. 120 E. Delaware Pl., 312.649.2389, fourseasons.com/chicago.

► Vosges

The Aztec Elixir Couture Cocoa, an alleged aphrodisiac of dark chocolate shavings, yellow maize and chili peppers, is guaranteed to warm you up. It's up to you what happens after that. 951 W. Armitage Ave., 773.296.9866, vosgeschocolate.com.

► Hot Chocolate

Of dessert diva Mindy Segal's seven hot chocolates, the Mexican, with rich dark chocolate, milk and touch of fresh cinnamon, is the Cocoa Chanel—glamorous, but still perfectly classic. 1747 N. Damen Ave., 773.489.1747, hotchocolatechicago.com.

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Starlight, Star Bright

It's true: Our new favorite weekend brunch spot has nary a mimosa nor cup of coffee in sight. But on a Sunday afternoon, we had Wicker Park's Big Star—which has been standing-room only, if that, every night since it opened in November—almost to ourselves. Sprawled in a prize booth, it was easy to enjoy the taco de panza (crispy pork belly with tomato guajillo sauce, crumbles of fresh Mexican cheese and cilantro), taco al pastor (spit-roasted pork shoulder with grilled pineapple, onions and cilantro) and cup of stewed pinto beans (a perfect vessel for those inevitable leftover taco meat bits). The smaller-than-usual house-made corn tortillas were made to manage with one hand—leaving the other free for the paper—and a squeeze of fresh lime turned \$1 Schlitz to a tart and tasty sub for our usual breakfast beverages. Unlike some of the hipsters that have been flocking to the hotspot, Big Star looks even better in the daylight. 1531 N. Damen Ave., 773.235.4039.

MINI REVIEW



BIG MAN ON CAMPUS Big Star's a big hit with the Wicker Park crowd.

NOSH NEWS



Cheesecake lollipops from Primehouse executive chef Rick Gresh.

Rad Romance

Get your lady gaga with the four-course prix fixe Valentine's meal at David Burke's Primehouse, where smoked caviar, foie gras mousse and oysters meet signature dry-aged steak. A take-home dessert includes strawberry 'paint' and brushes, his and hers cheesecake lollipops, squeeze bottles of caramel and chocolate sauce—and plastic sheets, just in case. February 13 and 14. \$75; reservations recommended. 616 N. Rush St., 312.660.6000, davidburke.com.

THE INN CROWD The Empty Bottle guys have a full house with Logan Square's Longman & Eagle. They've teamed with two new partners to offer riffs on French and American classics, like wild boar sloppy Joes—plus six “no frills, no service” guest rooms opening in the spring. 2657 N. Kedzie Ave., 773.276.7110, longmanandeagle.com.

CORNERING THE MARKET Get your paws on bacon bourbon caramel popcorn from chef Ginna Haravon (Everest, The Chopping Block), who—after creating the treat in 2007 for a potluck Super Bowl party—has finally gone commercial. saltedcaramel.net.

BACK TO BUSINESS Kaze goes under and—lo and behold—enter Macku Sushi, from brothers Kaze, Macku and Hari Chan once more. In addition to the same signature sushi with unusual toppings, try hot food, too. 2239 N. Clybourn Ave., 773.880.8012, mackusushi.com.



Mado co-owner Rob Levitt hosts an in-house butcher demo.

Swine Fever!

Contrary to what the senders of the angry e-mails thought, “We’re not chasing pigs around Mado with a butchering knife,” says Rob Levitt to the small crowd gathered around him—and the 180-pound Slagel Farm pig—at the restaurant on a recent Sunday afternoon. What he *is* doing is hosting weekly butchering classes in the Bucktown restaurant he owns along with his wife, Allie. The classes started in November, inspired by requests from the restaurant’s regular clientele; now, Levitt is booking sold-out audiences of eager meatheads. (For the record, Mado has been butchering animals in-house since they opened in April 2008.) With the butcher-love trend going strong in

places like Brooklyn (Marlow & Daughters), San Francisco (Avedano’s, helmed by three women) and Richmond, Virginia (Belmont Butchery), we’re happy to see it burgeoning here—and for the chance to see a pig like we’ve never seen it before. Levitt has just detached the leg to a round of applause, in between offering words on cutting technique (“Your knife scraping against bone is a good sound”), specific parts (“Leaf lard is what you want for pie crusts, and sometimes I put it on my toast”) and why he butchers whole animals at the restaurant (“A farmer can’t raise just a pork chop”). \$50/person, includes sampling of meat cuts. 1647 N. Milwaukee Ave., 773.342.2340, madorestaurantchicago.com. ■