

## CRAIN'S LIST

# BEST NEW RESTAURANTS FOR BUSINESS

The dulllest mediocrities in the Loop pack people in from noon to 2, while creative, polished restaurants in the West Loop and River North languish nearly empty. Cross the river, people! You will find you like your lunch better if you pay another dollar for a Lyft or walk another block or two. Here are the 10 best spots for a business lunch that opened in 2017. **By Graham Meyer and Joanne Trestrail**



ROBIN CHAMBER

**20 EAST**  
 Talbott Hotel, 20 E. Delaware Place | 312-944-4970  
 20 East boasts spacious round tables, comfortable seating and a little black dress of a menu—simple and chic. Straightforward descriptions such as “chopped Cobb” (\$15) and “American cheeseburger” (\$16) portend well-appointed versions of canonical dishes, with, for example, plenty of fresh dill and good blue cheese in the Cobb, and a juicy, flavorful patty and housemade pickles in the burger. Truffled macaroni and cheese subsides to the one-great-accessory philosophy (that same accessory also appears in the truffle patty melt). Four Corners Tavern Group, in consultation with Hogsalt Hospitality (Federales, SteakBar), tailored the menu well to fuel luxury shopping in the Talbott’s micro-neighborhood.—G.M.



ALBERT

**THE ALBERT**  
 Hotel EMC2, 228 E. Ontario St. | 312-471-3883  
 This lavishly art-directed spot—with its wall of stacked, book-filled cabinetry and bar resembling the lab of a mad scientist—is eye-catching. But the atmosphere is adult, the service solicitous and the whole setup conducive to serious conversation. Elegant dishes make the most of seasonal ingredients and involve a wide range (butter, bread) of housemade elements. Tasty surprises are everywhere: Chilled sweet-corn soup, made with coconut milk, comes embellished with blackberries (\$13); roasted beets are paired with braised leeks (\$14); and ramps, dates and turnips (now there’s a combo) accompany delectable sautéed sea trout (\$27).—J.T.



ACE HOTEL

**CITY MOUSE**  
 Ace Hotel, 311 N. Morgan St. | 312-764-1919  
 The trappings at City Mouse illustrate trendy, designerly chic: a cute line-drawn logo of a mouse with a monode, converted-warehouse-like concrete pillars and big windows, outdoor couches and brazier across the urban canyon from the Google logo. The food follows suit. The de rigueur highbrow-lowbrow burger with diner-style patties, American cheese and iceberg lettuce (\$15) dresses itself like award-winning celebrity burgers. Brunch is available at weekday lunch. Avocado toast (\$10, \$12 with egg) fashions itself on hearty seed bread with radish and Hungarian pepper. The kitchen team behind City Mouse, including Jason Vincent, formerly of Nightwood, also heads the equally fabulous Giant, in Logan Square.—G.M.



GIBSONS ITALIA

**GIBSONS ITALIA**  
 233 N. Canal St. | 312-414-1100  
 Gibsons’ new sibling, Gibsons Italia, has much of the same spirit and a similar menu, but with the addition of housemade pastas and other Italian offerings, plus a magnificent view of downtown from its perch in a glassy riverfront high-rise. The atmosphere is more formal than the Gold Coast spot, making it a popular choice for C-suite diners who have guests to impress. Lots of steaks (\$46-\$78) and spurge-worthy shellfish to choose from, of course, but at lunchtime chef Jose Sosa’s pastas (\$15-\$21) and risotto (\$29) also beckon, along with well-made bruschetti (\$12-\$15) and panini (\$15-\$18).—J.T.



MARISOL

**MARISOL**  
 Museum of Contemporary Art, 205 E. Pearson St. | 312-799-3599  
 Marisol has installed itself in a corner of the museum with a creative, seasonal menu, thereby blending art with artisanal. The chef, Jason Hammel, also creates and curates at Lula Cafe in Logan Square, a trendsetter in Chicago’s farm-to-table movement. Winter excellences include a pear-kohlrabi salad with endive, chestnut and white sesame (\$14), with a holiday hint of pie spice and a vinegary tang; and burrata toast with candied squash, persimmon and charred ginger (\$14), sweet like a gift. Hammel’s commitment to seasonal ingredients means the artistry on display here is as contemporary as you can get.—G.M.



**OSTERIA DEL PASTAIO**  
 111 E. Chestnut St. | 312-649-0055  
 The replacement in the Gold Coast storefront that held ladies-who-lunch stalwart Pane Caldo, a capable pasta-focused white-tablecloth spot, is Osteria del Pastaio, a solid pasta-focused white-tablecloth-with-paper spot. Osteria del Pastaio is quietly run by Jean-Louis de Mori, of Los Angeles’ Maccheroni Republic. Diners can do a column A/column B noodle-and-sauce matchup, but better to opt for the composed pasta dishes, such as bigoli e salsiccia (\$15), a thick spaghetti with sausage and broccoli in butter sauce, or strozzapreti del principe (\$18), spinach-imbued gnocchi in lobster cream sauce. Low-carbers can make a meal of beef carpaccio (\$12) and port-cherry duck (\$25).—G.M.



**PORTSMITH**  
 Dana Hotel & Spa, 660 N. State St. | 312-202-6050  
 The seafood-focused spot from the parvenu Fifty/50 Restaurant Group (Steadfast, Homestead on the Roof) serves elegantly plated, upscale food in a luxurious atmosphere of bistro-meets-seashore decor. Dishes let their ocean-tinged flavors swim free, with clever and logical accompaniments. Ahi tuna (\$28), seared briefly, shares the plate with romesco and a clarified-butter-browned avocado. Scallops with spicy-seafood condiment XO sauce (\$28) intermingle with turnips and line up in the shade of a giant basil branch like those that come with pho. Portsmith recently scaled back its lunch menu, keeping the most lunch-friendly dishes and lowering some prices. It feels like the restaurant you wish you could find when walking down a boardwalk lined with tourist traps.—G.M.



**SOMERSET**  
 Viceroy Chicago hotel, 1112 N. State St. | 312-586-2150  
 It’s a joy to see Michelin-starred chef Lee Wolen (Boka, the Lobby at the Peninsula) perform subtle magic at a place you can pop into for lunch with so little ado. Somerset is informal the way a country club, or the deck of an ocean liner, might be—all brass, glass and shiny parquet, with filtered light spilling down from a wall of windows. At midday, business folk, shoppers and others tuck into artful vegetable crudite platters with crackers and savory dips (\$15), superb roasted chicken thighs with delicata squash and maitake mushrooms (\$18), or maybe a soup-and-sandwich pairing (\$15) like the kicky one we sampled, with lentil soup and puffy flatbread topped with mint and slow-cooked lamb. Take guests here if you want to show them why we deserve our rep as a restaurant town all day long, not just at dinnertime.—J.T.

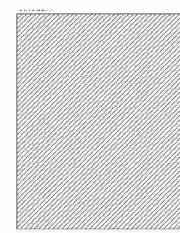


**TASTE 222**  
 222 N. Canal St. | 312-383-6620  
 Cozy Taste 222 draws diners who want a small, easygoing spot to take colleagues or clients for food that’s more interesting than most lunch fare. The mastermind behind the place, which resembles a well-appointed living room (with an excellent bartender), is former McDonald’s CEO Don Thompson. His venture-capital firm, Cleveland Avenue, and a related foundation are housed elsewhere in the three-story building. Taste 222 showcases their work mentoring and investing in food-business entrepreneurship, but the operation doesn’t feel like a corporate experiment. Chef Judson Todd Allen’s attention to detail and respect for fresh ingredients pay off with such touches as housemade root-vegetable chips (\$4), terrifically tasty soups (\$5/\$8) and a fried-chicken sandwich (\$14) so crunchy and luscious, you’ll want another one tomorrow, but only if you can resist the meatloaf sliders (\$12).—J.T.



TORALI ITALIAN-STEAK

**TORALI ITALIAN-STEAK**  
 160 E. Pearson St. | 312-573-5160  
 White marble and other opulent materials make you feel you’re on a gleaming, Italian modernist movie set, all clean lines and la dolce vita. Locals: There’s no need to leave all this seductive splendor to hotel guests. Torali’s oversized semicircular booths are ideal for business chats where privacy matters, and the inspired execution of steak, seafood and Italian dishes should seal any deal under consideration. Salads, sandwiches and pastas star at lunchtime. A bounteous Crab Louie salad (\$24) is, frankly, ritzy and deeply delicious; of the pastas we tried, spaghetti with summer squash, grana padano and five superb shrimp (\$22) was the most gratifying. Players in supporting roles are worth your attention, from crusty bread and herby olives (\$8) to decadently cheesy polenta fries (\$12) and the bruschetta of the day (\$11).—J.T.



Originally published on Feb. 12