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weekly nightlife section in



# the DISH

Weekly Dining Guide in  
WINDY CITY TIMES

## SAVOR

### ETA Restaurant + Bar; Cafe Robey

BY ANDREW DAVIS

In a recent staycation review, I mentioned how hotel restaurants have skyrocketed in recent years in terms of the quality of the food (although that hotel's spot didn't necessarily make the cut).

Case in point for the place that excels: **ETA Restaurant + Bar** (455 N. Park Dr.; <https://www.loeshotels.com/chicago-downtown/dining/>), which is nestled in the first floor of the Loews Hotel.

Perfect for a date (judging from the low lighting and romantic grooves), telegenic Chef Matt Lange has concocted some incredibly appetizing dishes.

Now that I've finally come around and actually like avocado, a dish like avocado toast (with citrus salad, nduja and soft egg) is a no-brainer. And just try not to eat all the chicken-fried



ETA Restaurant + Bar chef Matt Lange. PR photo

mushrooms. (How did someone not think of this before?) Other appetizer options include Brat in a Blanet (with hot pepper jam) and even beer-cheese croquettes.

Entrees also shine. I actually opted for the fried-chicken BLT—which was as sinful as it sounded. However, the relatively healthful salmon would be a great selection as well; it was expertly prepared. As for the sides, crispy Brussels sprouts definitely get a thumbs-up, although the mac 'n cheese ranked as merely okay next to the other selections.

Also, ETA has some mouth-watering dessert choices. Just try to ignore the hot-fudge brownie for two, the cheesecake panna cotta or the chocolate stout cake—a wonderful item with Nutella ganache, chocolate pretzels and cherries.

Lastly, don't ignore the cocktails at this

hideaway that probably won't be so for much longer. (BTW, drinks are mostly named after various train lines—in line with the restaurant's name.) I really liked the Super Chief (with vodka, pear liqueur, demerara syrup and prosecco), although I still miss the Secret Garden (kappa pisco, black-rose liqueur, demerara syrup, lemon and egg white) I tried last summer.

#### Cafe Robey

Another example of fine hotel dining is **Cafe Robey** (1600 N. Milwaukee Ave.; <https://www.therobey.com/>), located in Wicker Park's The Robey.

Executive Chef Kevin McAllister has whipped up winter menu options that manage to simultaneously feel upscale and comforting. Things started with a sumptuous beer-cheese soup that had a little kick thanks to droplets of chili oil. Unfortunately, this item was part of the Chicago Restaurant Week menu, along with a lovely salmon and decadent Cocoa Puffs panna cotta—complete with a chocolate-studded spoon.

Luckily, Cafe Robey still offers an intriguing olio aside from those Restaurant Week items. The panzanella was a gustatory delight, combining fried sourdough, roasted Brussel sporouts, red onion, pickled red cabbage, apple and butternut-squash vinaigrette. Also, I really liked the braised and crisped pork belly, which comes with sweet potato, five-minute egg, pickled pearl onions, Fresno chiles and kale. Other choices include



Cafe Robey's carrot dish.

PR photo

dishes featuring scallop, duck and even striped bass.

Vegetarians will certainly appreciate the fire-roasted carrot and fennel with carrot puree, quinoa, arugula and tomato vinaigrette.

And I'll have to return to try one dessert item, in particular: a dark-chocolate mousse with charred pineapple, strawberry dust, almond tulle, chocolate crumb and gold leaf. It sounds as fun and intriguing as The Robey itself.

**Note: Restaurant profiles/events are based on invitations arranged from restaurants and/or firms.**



## Celebration of Life for Aaron Johnson

Join the Chicago family of friends for a celebration of life of bartender Aaron Johnson, this Sunday, February 25 at Scot's, 1829 W. Montrose Ave, from 3-8 p.m. Aaron was a much-beloved smiling face behind the bar at Scot's for a decade. Before that, many still remember him from Clark's On Clark, which shuttered in 2007.

Aaron was a kind soul and will be missed by many, including his partner, Scott Palango.

A potluck buffet will be part of the celebration.

Photos of Aaron Johnson from the Nightspots archive, including his stint on the cover from an April 2002 issue.



## White Party Puerto Vallarta

Presidents' Day Weekend gave us White Party Puerto Vallarta, with an Under the Sea theme, featuring attendees dressed in white on the beach at sunset. This was the party's second year in row, presented by Jeffrey Sanker, who also makes White Party Palm Springs happen each year.

Photos of Jerry Nunn





## BILLY Masters

"I've been trying and I just can't get pregnant."—**Nate Berkus** describes the efforts he and hubby Jeremiah Brent have had in providing a sibling for their 2-year-old daughter, Poppy. Thanks for playing another spirited round of Who's the Bottom?

**Tom Daley** and **Dustin Lance Black** made a big announcement on Valentine's Day—they've hired a surrogate and are having a child. To make it official, they posted the ultrasound on Instagram. And I say—with almost no trace of sarcasm—good for them. Alas, this news has led to many people online attacking the couple. Some of it seems to be homophobia and jealousy (and, let's face it, both of these guys are pretty hot), but some are attacking them for bringing a child into a relationship destined for failure due to their less-than-stellar fidelity, and the diver not being much more than a child himself. And I say—in all sincerity—mind your own business! If we stopped every good-looking couple in a doomed relationship from having children, where would my future boyfriends come from?

Now we get to the story of **Alexander Polinsky**, who is a former child actor. He was kinda the Danny Pintauro of Charles in Charge. Polinsky claims that he was on the receiving end of physical abuse, assault, mental torture, sexual harassment and homophobic bullying by **Scott Baio**. The part I took special note of is when Chachi allegedly threw a cup of hot tea in the boy's face and called him a "fag." Now, I'm no expert, but I believe the very definition of the term "fag" is a person who throws hot tea in someone's face! Some of Polinsky's other allegations include Baio once pulling the 12-year-old's pants down in front of a group of 100 bystanders. Another time, Scott cut a hole in the canvas wall of Polinsky's dressing room and shoved his genitals through it.

The day after my birthday, I went to The Wallis in Beverly Hills to see BOTH shows by **Patti LuPone** and **Seth Rudetsky**. Patti was in spectacular voice—in fact, she was even better the second show. Since it was days after the Grammys, she told the story behind her appearance in the tribute to **Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber**. Before she started, she said, "Is there any press in the audience? I dunno if I should tell this story if there's press in the audience." After a bit of prodding, she said, "Just don't print it. ... Oh, go ahead, what the hell," followed by "No, don't." So, I'm taking that as a yes. When War Paint was on Broadway, NY1 (a local channel) did a piece on their Sunday morning program about the show. When the interviewer asked LuPone about Webber, she said that she thought Andrew was mentally unstable.

Within days, she got a cease-and-desist letter from famed lawyer **Bert Fields**—who has represented such sane people as **Tom Cruise** and **John Travolta**. She consulted with a lawyer who told



**Nate Berkus recently discussed, um, personal efforts.**

PR photo

her that she could legally express her opinion, so she was in the clear. Then Webber got involved and said it didn't bother him. Fast-forward a month, and Patti gets a call from her manager saying the Grammys wanted her to sing "Don't Cry For Me Argentina." Patti's response was, "Does Andrew Lloyd Webber know? If he doesn't, don't tell him!" The manager said Andrew knows, and he's thrilled! They had a nice rehearsal. (She says when she said the word "detente," she meant it would last one day—like a day-tente.) After the show, Andrew sent her a very nice note and also left her a complimentary voicemail. Why Andrew Lloyd Webber has Patti LuPone's phone number and I don't is a mystery of monumental proportions.

Last weekend, I zipped to our nation's capital to see a couple of special theatrical events. The first was the National Symphony performing a truncated concert version of West Side Story. This almost nonsensical rendition decimated the story to the point that many people couldn't figure out what was happening! But it did underline the genius of Leonard Bernstein's score and Stephen Sondheim's words. One expected that an entire symphony orchestra and some of Broadway's finest young talents would deliver a high-wattage evening, but everything was on a low simmer and never came to a boil. In a typical production in a small house, these voices would likely have been fine. But, given the sound mix, nobody quite rose to the level of the event—a missed opportunity, indeed.

The following night, I saw the latest revision of the musical Chess, led with aplomb by **Raul Esparza** playing Freddy. While I missed his acerbic take as the Arbiter (the role he played in Seth Rudetsky's Broadway concert version in 2003), there's no denying he's a terrific Freddy, with rock-star abandon and swagger balancing out the quieter bipolar moments. It was a magnetic performance. **Ramin Karimloo** may be the best all-around Anatoly I've ever seen—complete with a consistent Russian accent! As Florence, **Karen Olivo** showed us exactly what was missing from the previous night. She's not lost any power, bite,

or presence since her 2009 Tony-winning Anita in West Side Story. For me, **Ruthie Ann Miles** was the weakest link; her Svetlana looked like a refugee from a mid-90s Moscow bus and truck tour of Miss Saigon—as the matinee cover for Kim! Was she bad? No—just not up to the standard of her colleagues. The theater had electricity in the air. Every entrance, every number and every moment was met with a roar of applause, making it quite an "event."

When Baio's spilling tea, it's definitely time to end yet another column. Here's something you wouldn't have heard from me when I started writing this column over 20 years ago—these 48-hour quick cross-country trips are a killer! I'd rather be sitting home checking out BillyMasters.com—where you can get your kicks below the waistline, sunshine. If you have any questions, send them along to [Billy@BillyMasters.com](mailto:Billy@BillyMasters.com), and I promise to get back to you before I get a cease-and-desist letter from Patti! Until next time, remember: One man's filth is another man's bible.