



Work or Play

In addition to maintaining its status as one of the top three U.S. convention cities and Condé Nast Traveler's pick for best big city for the second year in a row, Chicago saw record tourism levels in the first nine months of 2018. With new magic-theme, karaoke, and other inventive spaces opening in the past year, the city is now brimming with even more unique meeting and event venues, offering a bevy of planning options from the South to the North Side.

By ERIN BRERETON

The 22-story-high rooftop **Vu** bar located next to McCormick Place convention facility opened in October and offers skyline views—and six unique spaces for private events, including a soundproof karaoke room for 16 seated guests, a private Club Bar area that connects to the venue's west terrace, and the glass-enclosed Solarium, which holds 75 for a standing event or 45 for a seated dinner. Hosts looking for a more work-oriented atmosphere can make use of Vu's Board Room space, which includes a flatscreen TV and space for 25 standing or 16 seated guests for a dinner. For larger groups, the entire venue is available for reception-style events for 450 guests. (133 East Cermak Road, vurooftop.com)

WHERE TO HAVE A MAGICAL EVENT

Custom-built for magic performances, the 1,300-square-foot **Chicago Magic Lounge** was constructed on the site of a one-time commercial laundromat by local magicians who wanted to create a lounge to honor Chicago-style magic and serve the city's magic enthusiast community. The venue, which opened in February 2018, presents shows and offers space for event rental. Its spaces include an enclosed bar area for groups of about 35 guests; the **Blackstone Cabaret Theater**, with tables and banquette seating for 150; and the **554 Club**, which offers more traditional theater gallery seating for about 40 people. The Art Deco-styled space features terrazzo flooring, vintage posters of magicians, and a library filled with more than 100 rare magic books. (350 North Clark St., chicago.magiclounge.com)



Euro Tour

Find continental fare for client entertaining or group dining at these restaurants.

Opened in October, the Art Deco-inspired **Tavernaux Tavern** offers several private event space options, including the entire venue, which is available for as many as 400 standing or 120 seated guests. The loop eatery's mezzanine space, which holds 100 for receptions or seats 40, includes a balcony that overlooks the venue, providing a bird's-eye view of both the bar and dining room. Guests can relax in plush lounge furniture and nosh on event-friendly versions of menu items. Small portions of the eatery's lobster thermidor, for instance, are served on crostini. Sections of the bar or dining room can also be used for semiprivate events of as many as 50 people; the venue's year-round patio seats about 50 or holds about 75 guests for a cocktail-style reception. (155 West Van Buren St.,

tavernaux.com)

The extravagantly appointed **Marchesa** offers four unique event spaces spread over 6,500 square feet. The Art Deco-style Main Salon features a marble fireplace, brass bar, and room for 150 guests at a cocktail-style reception or 100 seated. The intimate first-floor Savarin room, with brass-and-bamboo chandeliers and a malachite ceiling, offers a front-row seat for two to 12 diners to watch **Marchesa's** pasta chef at work through a picture window that overlooks the kitchen. The second-floor Apartment space, modeled after a Parisian pied-à-terre, with hand-stenciled walls, silk damask drapes, and a baby grand piano, fits 80 cocktail reception guests or 50 people for a seated dinner. Hosts can also opt to hold their event in the lower-

level Cave room, decorated with a gilded torchiere that evokes the limestone caves that lie below fine wine houses in France's Champagne region, which can hold 50 people for cocktails or 30 for a seated meal. (535 North Wells St., marchesachicago.com)

The menu at **Casini's**—a new Lincoln Park restaurant, comes from chef Christian Fantoni, who's logged in time at Le Bernardin and Le Cirque in New York and RPM Italia and Phi Stefano's 437 Rush in Chicago—includes pizza-de-glassa, comprised of an Italian flour blend and more water than traditional crust, giving it less calories, carbs, and fat than traditional pizza. According to the eatery: Open since mid-August, the venue has a 2,900-square-foot dining room and bar area, which features a wood-paneled ceiling, olive trees, and gold and traditional spirals. Lined with white brick walls, the bright, airy eatery's private room seats 32 guests or holds buffet-style receptions for 40. The entire venue holds 70 seated or 100 standing guests. (1335 West Wightwood Ave., w1.us)

French Mediterranean restaurant **Le Sol** opened in September, with space for private and semiprivate events. Salle Du Soleil, a private dining room, overlooks Roscoe Street and includes details such as Juliet balconies, as well as its own bar and bathrooms. It seats 45 guests or holds 50 for receptions.

Semiprivate gatherings for 20 seated guests can be held in space located off the main dining room separated by a half-curtain. A rooftop patio is in the works that would provide an area for small events. (2301 West Roscoe St., lesolchicago.com)

Avil Taverna, which opened last spring at Lincoln Park, offers Greek food fans reinvigorated Greek cuisine, giving it less calories, carbs, and fat than traditional pizza. According to the eatery: Open since mid-August, the venue has a 2,900-square-foot dining room and bar area, which features a wood-paneled ceiling, olive trees, and gold and traditional spirals. Lined with white brick walls, the bright, airy eatery's private room seats 32 guests or holds buffet-style receptions for 40. The entire venue holds 70 seated or 100 standing guests. (1335 West Wightwood Ave., w1.us)

also include meeting and event space and expand its guestroom count from 254 to 321.

A new **Hyatt House** location is under way in Chicago's West Loop neighborhood for 2020; the extended stay hotel will have 220 apartment-style

guestrooms and approximately 2,000 square feet of meeting space.

Developers also broke ground in July for a yet-to-be-named, 222-room **Navy Pier** hotel, which is slated to open in spring 2020 with private event space.

CHICAGO

CHICAGO

HOTEL HOT SPOTS

Grab a drink at these stylish bars at new and renovated properties.

The Peninsula Chicago's **Z Bar**, which debuted in June, features indoor and outdoor space, including a rooftop terrace with stunning views of Lake Michigan, the Hancock Building, and Chicago's historic Water Towers—paired with cuisine that incorporates elements from Asia, Europe, and the Americas. (Think tater tots reimagined with a bone marrow filling and pork ribs made with beef tendon.) The venue also includes a private dining room, decorated in earth-toned hues, that offers a terrace and space for 25 guests at a reception-style event or 10 to 12 guests for a seated dinner. The entire bar, with its everyday configuration intact, is also available for full buyouts of 200 standing or seated guests. (108 East Superior St., zbar.chicago.com)

The entire recently renovated **Le Bar** at the Sofitel Chicago Magnificent Mile space can be rented out for private events. Along with floor-to-ceiling glass walls, the venue's leather, faux fur, and metal accents provide a metropolitan vibe. A crackling fireplace is on hand to help warm visitors at parties held during Chicago's chilly winter months, or guests can gather around a large communal table. In addition to French-themed specialty cocktails and an extensive wine and champagne selection, Le Bar offers room for 30 seated guests, or as many 50 for reception-style events. (20 East Chestnut St., sofielchicago.com)



Blue Plate (blueplatechicago.com) is putting a twist on the traditional bread service for seated dinners. At each setting, the restaurant's menu is printed on a bread slice containing an individual baguette. A trio of butters—including flavors like garlic and herb, honey pecan, and goat's milk—is placed on the table and served family style for everyone to share. —A.C.



Thinking Big

For large gatherings, these venues fit the bill.

All of the meeting and event space at **Chicago Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile**—a total of 65,000 square feet—was updated during a multimillion-dollar renovation completed in February 2018. Local design firm Zimmerman Weintraub Associates used Chicago's history as an architecture, city planning, and transportation hub to create the city's a garden concept. The hotel now sports decor fashioned from man-made and natural materials, including recycled brick and patterned metal gation screens. The hotel's meeting and event space options range in capacity from 15 people to 2,000, including 26 meeting rooms and larger venues, such as the 13,000-square-foot Chicago Ballrooms, which seats as many as 1,400 guests or holds 1,000 guests for receptions, and the Grand Ballroom, a 19,000-square-foot room with 2,200-person seated capacity and space for 2,000 at a reception-style event. (150 North Michigan Ave., marriott.com)

The sports bar **Bounce Sporting Club** in River North can hold 650 guests for buyouts, with guests spread throughout the venue in spaces including a 3,000-square-foot rooftop. Without the roof, the venue holds 500 guests for reception-style events. Opened in the summer, the seasonal rooftop offers views of downtown Chicago

and is decked out with faux greenery, café lights, and natural wood elements. Used alone, it holds 90 guests for cocktails or seats 70. (324 West Chicago Ave., bouncingsportingclub.com)

While some modern elements were added to the interior, the building that houses the **Daly**, which dates back to 1887, was left structurally unchanged. The space's original brick walls, arched windows, and other design elements. At 6,000 square feet, the private event hall is Lettuce Education You's largest in Chicago; there's room for 300 seated guests or 500 standing, with a number of potential seating options, including a meeting-friendly classroom configuration and a crescent-style layout that can be used for award dinners. Catering options include small plate dishes such as beef tenderloin with a cauliflower puree and pan-roasted halibut inspired by the Mediterranean-infused Avila eatery also located in the building, which has a rooftop featuring skyline views that can be rented for a reception-style event involving as many as 220 guests. (302 North Green St., thedaly.com)

IN THE WORKS

RPM On the Water, a four-level restaurant and event venue slated to debut in September. The event space will be divisible into three separate areas and will hold 200 seated guests or 300 for cocktails.

Upcoming 88-room **West Loop/Hullon Market** hotel the **Hoxton** will offer meeting and event space on its mezzanine level when it opens this spring opening in April 2019; the revamped **Hotel Essex** in the South Loop, previously the Essex Inn, will

HISTORY LESSONS

These venues all come with an interesting backstory.

When designing its upstairs private event space, **Tied House's** owners sought to infuse it with elements that reflected the building's history. Guests can now gather around a 15-foot-long table crafted from speakers and boom boxes, a nod to Schuba's. The live music venue next door from the same owners. Because the building originally housed a Schlitz taproom, artifacts that relate to the brewmaker have also been incorporated into the space, which seats 100 or holds 200 for a reception. The first-floor dining room, bar, and three-season patio, featuring glass doors that can be opened to create one large space, are available for events of 400 standing or 250 seated guests. It can accommodate another 250 guests by adding Schuba's space and stage. The space opened in February 2018. (157 North Southport Ave., tiedhousechicago.com)

Named for the ladies luncheon spot that once occupied the space, the

Lunchroom is a restaurant located within the Space 519 retail boutique. The owners reconfigured the 1,500-square-foot venue, which now has a bright interior with a nod toward mid-century design. Alcovs with potted succulents and a scalloped green leather banquettes span the space. Two farm tables can be reconfigured for parties as small as six; the dining space can also be used for seated events for 40 guests or receptions for 30, during before- or after store hours. The entire store can hold receptions for as many as 100 guests, and custom shopping experiences can be incorporated into events. A 24-seat sidewalk patio, featuring black-and-white-striped European-style cafe umbrellas, white tables, and chairs imported from Italy, is also available for private events. (200 East Chestnut St., space519.com)

Fisk & Co., a Belgium-inspired mussel and beer

eatery at Kington's Hotel Monaco Chicago that opened in April, pays homage to D.B. Fisk & Company, a millinery from the early 1900s that once occupied the building. Featuring nautical elements from coasters adorned with fisherman to mussel-themed artwork, the eatery has more than 1,500 square feet of private dining space, with three distinct areas. The Parlor, a living room-like space with velvet furniture, antique rugs, and a view into the kitchen, holds 40 standing or 14 seated guests, and the Millinery—decked out in green with gold accents—seats 40 or holds 70 for cocktails. The semi-private Briston space, with banquet seating for 30, has a 20-foot hand-woven rope wall installation by Chicago artist Ricki Hill and a chandelier made of vintage bottles. The entire restaurant can be bought out for 200 guests for receptions or 100 for a seated dinner. (25 North Wabasha Ave., fiskandcochicago.com)



CHICAGO

CHICAGO

CATERING

LendonHouse Chicago's Jordan housechicago.com) new \$16-per-person Willy Wonka catering package lives up to its name. Sugar fans will love the Nerd-covered cheesecake pops, made-to-order cotton candy, and everlasting Gobstoppers, among other sweets. The menu options inspired by the classic Roald Dahl children's novel include suspended "Violet" blueberry tents with vanilla cream ready to be plucked off a wall. The LendonHouse culinary team can even create custom-wrapped chocolate bars with a select few containing "golden tickets" for raffle prizes. —A.C.



Amazing Views

Take in the sights of Wrigley Field, Lake Michigan, and the city skyline at these venues.

Hotel Zachary the Lakeview hotel from Marriott's Tribute Portfolio and Hickory Street Capital—whose owners are majority owners of the Chicago Cubs—opened in March 2018. Situated across from Wrigley Field in the new Gallagher Way entertainment district—which includes 12 restaurants, a 30,000-square-foot open-air plaza, and a conference center—the 173-room hotel contains a number of historical touches, such as original blueprints and a sketch that Wrigley Field architect Zachary Taylor

Davis made of the ballpark. The Alma Room, named after Davis's wife, serves breakfast and is available for seated events for 35 guests; with the tables removed, the space holds 100 guests. (160 North Clark St., hotelzachary.com)

Since April, the Lakeview outpost of the popular Mexican street food-inspired eatery **Big Star Wrigleyville** offers views of the ballpark. Planners can buy out the entire 2,000-square-foot restaurant, which holds 300 seated guests or 350 for a reception, or the

1,500-square-foot upstairs level, which holds 150 guests for a reception. The smaller Patterson Room seats 50 or holds 70 for cocktails. (1640 North Clark St., bigstarchicago.com)

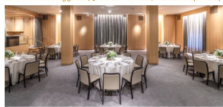
The redeveloped **Theater on the Lake** complex, a partnership between Lakefront Hospitality Group and the Chicago Park District, debuted in early 2018 on a scenic section of Chicago's lakefront in Lincoln Park. The building includes the Lakefront Restaurant, a tavern with seating for 125 and a seasonal patio that

seats 80 and overlooks Lake Michigan and the Chicago skyline. Three other rooms each hold 150 for a seated dinner or 200 for a reception. For buyouts, the entire venue seats 450 or holds 800 for receptions. (2020 North Lake Shore Drive, theateronthelake.com)

Flight Club, a social arts venue designed by the London-based Russell Sage Studio, incorporates a 1,900-sq-ft English fairground theme. The second floor, dubbed the Midway, offers 2,000 square feet of event space, complete with views of the city and the Chicago River. It seats 80 or holds 300 for a reception. The entire 3,000-square-foot venue is available for events of as many as 500. (111 West Wacker Drive, flightclubdrinks.com)

WHERE TO HOST AN ELEGANT AFFAIR

Located in Lincoln Park's Beiden-Stratford building, a former hotel built in the 1920s that now houses apartments and French eatery *Man Ami Gabi*, Lettuce Entertain Inc.'s **Stratford** at the Park opened in the former into restaurant space in October 2017. The 3,000-square-foot venue's decor, featuring ash wood walls and moss, gray, and taupe tones, was inspired by the natural beauty of nearby Lincoln Park; guests hoping to give a speech, share a slideshow, or offer another visual presentation can use the room's LCD screen, wireless microphones, and sound system. The venue holds 150 for a seated dinner, 200 for a cocktail-style reception, or 125 for a seated dinner with a dance floor. A patio that opened in April 2018 has room for 60 seated or 100 standing guests. (2300 Lincoln Park West, stratfordonthepark.com)



RENTALS

Chicago rental company **Nimble Wall** (nimblewall.com) focuses on unique and vintage decor, and recently event planners have been enamored with its collection of colorful stemware. Nimble Wall offers 150 to 250 glasses in all the colors of the rainbow, from amber to rose to dusky purple. Prices are a la carte, ranging at \$2.25 to \$2.35 per glass. —A.C.

SOMETHING DOING

These activity venues are suited for fun-loving groups.

With 11 regulation-size blue shuffleboard courts, bathrooms with flamingo wallpaper, and cocktails served in mason jars, the 30,000-square-foot **Royal Palms Shuffleboard Club** design combines a cruise feel with Florida flair. Open since March 2018, the Bucktown venue features DJs and a food trucks that pull inside the space to serve patrons. Royal Palms accepts a limited number of reservations for groups of 10 or more for its eight cabins, which include a reserved court. The 1,500-square-foot rooftop,

featuring a view of the 606 trail and Wicker Park, are available for groups of 150 standing or 50 seated guests. (1950 North Milwaukee Ave., royalpalmschicago.com)

The River North outpost of the speakeasy-style lounge **Blind Dragon**, which also has locations in California and Arizona, is situated in the basement of the Round Hotel. Open since August, the venue serves cocktails infused with lemongrass, ginger juice, and other inventive ingredients courtesy of beverage specialist Justin Campbell, who's crafted libations for Girl and

the Goat. Vintage tiki mottling decorates the walls of the 2,000-square-foot venue, which holds 80 seated or 100 standing guests. Three private karaoke rooms hold 10 to 15 guests each, and offer more than 25,000 songs. (615 North Wells St., blinddragon.com)

Chicago's 20,000-square-foot **Alice Ancient Baths** is the largest location of the candle lit thermal baths, steam rooms, and Ottoman-theme bath spa concept since it debuted in 2004. Designed to provide relaxation in big cities, the baths transform historic buildings with hot, cold,



warm, and ice baths as well as other amenities. Two-hour events—offering the use of the candle lit thermal baths, steam rooms, and an indoor-outdoor pool—can be held for as many as 25 guests. All-day events for as many as 75 people who rotate in groups through

the baths are also an option. Hosts who prefer to enjoy the atmosphere without taking a dip can also rent the entire venue for a day without use of the baths for a fashion show or other event for as many as 75 guests. (1800 West Superior St., alice.com)

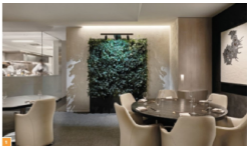
BEST FOR BOOK-LOVERS

These sophisticated venues feature literary decor.

Three chic spaces are available for private events in **Walton Street Kitchen & Bar**, which opened inside a luxury Gold Coast condo building in September and offers views of nearby State Street. Bookshelves and green plaid wallpaper line the first-floor lounge, where guests can sink into leather couches or wingback chairs in some 450 square feet of space; the lounge seats 18 or holds 25 for receptions. Upstairs, the Walton Room, designed for private events, seats 30 guests. Hosts can reserve both the Walton Room and the 1,200-square-foot main dining room for 132 seated guests—or both those spaces, along with a second-floor bar area, for a 250-person reception-style event. (192 North State St., waltonstreetchicago.com)

The 98-room **Sophy Hyde Park** hotel on the city's South Side opened in October. Located near the University of Chicago and the future Barack Obama Presidential Center, the boutique hotel features Mesler, a 60-seat New American restaurant. Decor meant to echo an author's dining room includes bookshelves carved into columns and a wall gallery of book covers, along with original pieces by local artists inspired by Hyde Park literature. Mesler offers an intimate 350-square-foot private dining area that seats 14 guests. Although the outdoor living room-like Sanctuary space isn't set up for seated events, when combined with the adjacent Patio, 85 guests can mingle in a 1,500-square-foot area. (141 East 53rd St., sophyhotel.com)

The **Darling**, which began serving dinner and drinks on Randolph Street in November, offers an upstairs ballroom big enough for 150 guests at a reception or about 80 at a lounge-style seated event. Staff wearing tweed bowties and vests are on hand to help distribute pork belly bites and other decadent eats. A semiprivate section can be arranged for groups of as many as 60 guests. For events with live entertainment, the upstairs library is a secluded spot attendees access through a secret door. The space contains two performance stages, two fireplaces, and books from 1880 to the 1950s that guests can peruse. Hosts are welcome to arrange their own performer or the venue will help book a DJ, magician, burlesque, or other entertainer. (905 West Randolph St., thedarlingchi.com)



Get a Room

Give your group its own space at these bars and restaurants with private or semiprivate areas.

Motel Bar's reimagined 2,200-square-foot interior recalls mid-20th Century roadside motels found along Route 66, with custom upholstery and vintage furniture, books, and art. Two semiprivate spaces in the back of the lounge hold 20 and 35 guests, respectively, or 55 if combined. The entire venue can be bought out for reception-style events of 120 guests or seated events for 96 guests. The redesigned space debuted in September. (600 West Chicago Ave., motelbarchi.com)

Contemporary Japanese eatery **Yugen** seats 12 in its earth-toned private dining room. Receptions for about 20 guests can take place in the Kaisho lounge, and the entire venue is available for buyouts of 70 seated or 100 standing guests. Hosts may order the current tasting

menu for events held in the private dining room or during buyouts; a la carte options are available for Kaisho, including seaweed salad made with fried oysters and an Alaskan King Crab rice dish. (662 West Randolph St., yugenchicago.com)

Located in a River North building constructed more than 45 years ago by the Chrysler Corporation, **Pacific Standard Time** opened in April. Serving California-centric cuisine, courtesy of former Nico chef/partner Erling Wu-Bower, the eatery boasts green leather banquettes, wood plank and terrazzo flooring, and millwork from Chicago-based design and fabrication firm 555 International. An 8,000-square-foot event room offers ample natural light, walnut tables, a private entrance, a dedicated

restroom, and an auxiliary bar. About 60 seated or 100 reception guests can nosh on avocado toast and other bites while observing the main dining room through large windows. (141 West Erie St., ptchicago.com)

Mediterranean- and Midwestern-influenced fare is served in the 1,500-square-foot private dining space above the West Loop's **Avec** restaurant, which received a James Beard Foundation award for best restaurant design. Upstairs, materials and aesthetics emulate elements of the winemaking process, such as oak floors and walls, a nod to wine barrels. White oak chairs and dining tables seat 40 guests; the space holds 60 people for a reception but can be reconfigured for smaller groups. (615 West Randolph St., avecrestaurant.com)

WHERE TO MEET IN THE SUMMER

Plan a beach-friendly summer bash at **Shore Club**, located on the edge of North Avenue Beach. The seasonal venue doubled its kitchen to better serve larger groups and added lighting to the open-air Patio space for nighttime events for as many as 300 guests. The club's restaurant—outfitted with floor-to-ceiling glass windows for unobstructed views of Lake Michigan—is a covered, temperature-controlled space that serves a Mediterranean-inspired menu. It seats 300 guests or holds 500 for a reception. The Oasis, offering cabanas, daybeds, and sun beds, can hold events for 200 seated or 350 standing guests. (1603 North Lakeshore Drive, shoreclubchi.com)

