

# Lincoln Square: Turn on your way-back machine

What does Lincoln Square stand for, you ask?

**Homeland Security:** Now, don't underestimate me. I am not campaigning as an ethnic restaurant haven. Or a German enclave with a few new tricks. I am campaigning as the most qualified candidate. If Chicago represents comfort and change

simultaneously, then Lincoln Square, long the home to an impressive array of Thai and Mexican (the nuevo Briosio, 4603 N. Lincoln Ave.; 773-989-9000), embodies this, this durability throughout change. Let other neighborhoods groan about sustainability. We have stability.

The other day, sitting in Cafe Selmarie (4729 N. Lincoln Ave.; 773-989-5595), watching a slow snow spiral out of the sky, flake by flake, eating French toast made of the wispiest brioche, I wondered: Where are the hipsters? The skinny black jeans? Is it before noon? I thought, wait, no hipsters! Then I overheard a waiter and a customer. "Pilates, today?" he asked. "No, the opera, actually," she replied. "Ah," he said.

Yes ... *ahhhh*. I spoke with Melissa Flynn, executive director of the local Chamber of Commerce, and excited as can be to point out "the number of older restaurants we have is remarkable," from the 42-year-old Chicago Brauhaus (4732 N. Lincoln Ave.; 773-784-4444)

to the homespun grandma-tablecloth Italian of La Bocca della Verita (4618 N. Lincoln Ave.; 773-784-6222), which turns 18 in May. Jury's Food and Drink (4337 N. Lincoln Ave.; 773-935-2255) has been serving a good charred burger at the southern end of Lincoln Square since 1979, and the legendary Lutz Cafe & Pastry Shop (2458 W. Montrose Ave.; 773-478-7785) celebrates its 60th anniversary this year.

**Experience:** The food in Lincoln Square is not extravagant or gentle but brings with it the professionalism of life lived, of dishes honed to perfection. Look to the graceful Italian of Erba (4520 N. Lincoln Ave.; 773-989-4200), less than a year old. And Bistro Campagne (4518 N. Lincoln Ave.; 773-271-6100), only 5 years old but serving a fresh organic French that carries the weight of decades. A year and a half ago they built a cottage onto the building—squint and it looks like a stony Gaelic farm house, complete with courtyard. It feels at home.

**Development:** Despite all that, Lincoln Square is not a neighborhood to resist change. It just wants change to be smart. Of course, there is a Starbucks, and a Cold Stone. But there is also The Grind (4613 N. Lincoln Ave.; 773-271-4482), the big generous windows of this coffeehouse steamed with conversation on a January night. As for the demon gentrification: Take the closing of the specialty market Bouffe last year. It was quickly replaced with Provenance Food & Wine (2312 W. Le-



Tribune photo by Abel Uribe

**Tank Sushi may look like a hipster haven, but it exudes family values and is a favorite of neighborhood kids who know their lobster rolls.**

land Ave.; 773-784-2314). And there's the March closing of Delicatessen Meyer, a 53-year old German-American institution. Very shortly the spot is expected to be occupied by Gene's Sausage Shop and Delicatessen (4750 N. Lincoln Ave.). I spoke with Derek Luszcz, son of Gene. He's been operating on Belmont for decades and chose Lincoln Square as the location for his expansion because "that area is so culinary." One tradition for another.

**Family values:** Friends, I entered Tank Sushi (4514 N. Lincoln Ave.; 773-769-2600) expecting the hipster exception to the Lincoln Square rule. The negihama popped with flashes of freshness, and the togarashi-seared tuna, speared with asparagus and served over a grilled Fuji apple, briefly gave off a vibe that I had left the confines of Lincoln Square. Then children arrived, and arrived, and arrived, accompanied by parents, bundled into snowsuits. Across the street, Gilbert Langlois, the Chicago impresario behind the not-quite-

year-old Chalkboard (4343 N. Lincoln Ave.; 773-477-7144), awaited the evening rush. He spoke of Lincoln Square as the perfect spot for Chalkboard, "a place you wouldn't mind eating if you couldn't find a baby-sitter." His tomato bisque with brioche blue cheese sandwiches should represent Lincoln Square in a neighborhood Olympics, so ideally suited it is to the tradition of its nearby streets.

Friends, I leave you this: The other day I received an e-mail from Cheryl Aponte. She works for the Nature Conservancy. She felt the need to testify for Lincoln Square, though she does not live there. "It's not hip at all, which is fairly cool," she said. They say it takes a village to raise a restaurant scene. I say, we are a village, so who needs a scene? Lincoln Square No More! Lincoln Square No More!

YEHHRRRRGH! (Apologies to Howard Dean.)

—Christopher Borrelli