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weekly nightlife section in



# the DISH

Weekly Dining Guide in  
WINDY CITY TIMES

## SAVOR

### Mago Grill & Cantina; Pokeworks; State and Lake

BY ANDREW DAVIS

There are authentic Mexican restaurants—and there are spots that say they're "Mexican" but are actually more "Mexican-American."

**Mago Grill & Cantina** (various locations, including 1010 S. Delano Ct., in Chicago; MagoGrill.com) falls squarely in the latter category, although it makes sure to have all the bells and whistles in place, including sugar skulls and luchador masks.



**Chicken Azteca at Mago Grill & Cantina.**  
Photo by Andrew Davis

However, that doesn't mean the food can't be good. Overall, Mago's cuisine is pretty tasty.

The meal began with a couple delicious drinks, including an horchata that I could've drunk all day. These were followed by empanadas that were mostly on the mark—as well as guacamole that a woman named Delores made at tableside, and that was pretty delicious.

The lunch entrees include chicken Azteca, which my dining companion really liked, and a jibarito that, for me, was the meal's one true misfire. The skirt steak was expertly cooked; however, instead of bread, fried plantains were used—and they were unpalatable to the point where I just ate the rest of the sandwich as a salad and removed the fruit.

Fortunately, dessert was a high point, with an appropriately moist (and large) slice of tres leches cake. BTW, this holiday season, Mago is offering pumpkin cream-cheese flan and eggnog tres leches—compelling (albeit non-traditional) reasons to visit Mago.

#### Pokeworks

**Pokeworks** (79 E. Madison St.; Pokeworks.com) has a stated mission to serve "high-quality, healthy food in a convenient and responsible

way"—and succeeds, deliciously.

For those not in the know, poke (which originated in Hawaii) is a salad containing raw fish. My experience has been that's made primarily with tuna, although Pokeworks has expanded that concept to include salmon, chicken or even tofu—which almost sounds like an "Americanizing" of traditional Hawaiian food, even though Hawaii is part of the United States.



**Salmon shiso at Pokeworks.**  
PR photo

Pokeworks takes what I call a Chipotle-like approach, with patrons choosing menu or customized options. From there, people select the base (e.g., bowl, burrito or salad), protein, "mix-ins" (like diced mango, edamame and ogo seaweed), flavor/sauce, toppings and even crunch (leading to my current addiction to toasted rice puffs).

The result was a pretty tasty salmon shiso (shiso being a Japanese herb that's similar to basil, according to manager Matt). And as for anyone who's worried about raw fish and what I call the "E. coli factor," Matt clarified to me that the fish is kept no longer than one day.

#### State and Lake

I have visited **State and Lake Chicago Tavern** (201 N. State St.; StateAndLakeChicago.com) several times, and enjoyed the cuisine each time—and a recent dinner visit, done in conjunction with an overnight stay at a nearby hotel, only confirmed how pleasant this restaurant is.

In a spot with warm woods and an artfully decorated bar, State and Lake offers cold appetizers like smoked trout dip (with trout, mascarpone, lemon, house hot sauce and crackers) and a succulent golden beet salad (roasted golden beets, avocado, napa cabbage, hard cider vinaigrette, hazelnuts and spices) as well as some tasty hot apps like pork meatballs and crab fat-braised pork belly, which is worth



**State Lake Chicago Tavern.**  
Photo by Andrew Davis

the price of admission alone.

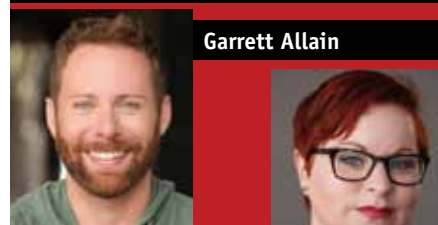
The entrees are just as indulgent, if not more, than the appetizers. A perfectly cooked tavern chicken (actually, a half-chicken) was accompanied by spaghetti squash, pickled ginger and root-vegetable panzanella. Unfortunately, my dining companion was not too keen on the cauliflower risotto (the only non-meat entree), which she said was a bit flavorless—and I had to concur. However, there are other options (for carnivores, anyway), including Faroe Island

salmon and grilled New York strip. Desserts are sufficiently creative and delicious, with items such as maple banana croissant bread pudding and pumpkin cheesecake parfait.

Also, State and Lake has a late-night menu (11 p.m.-2 a.m.), with big-bite items (like the Diner Burger and the SLCT House Bratwurst) that are no more than \$9 each.

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

## Sidetrack's OUTspoken! Series: January's featured storytellers



Garrett Allain



Sarah Alexander



George David Elrod



Bill McMurray



Jeff Sams



Kelly Suzanne Saulsberry



Laura Stempel

The January edition of **OUTspoken!** LGBTQ storyteller series takes place Tuesday, Jan. 2, at Sidetrack, 3349 N. Halsted St. Doors open at 6 pm, stories begin at 7.

See [www.outspokenchicago.com](http://www.outspokenchicago.com) for more info.

—**Garrett Allain** has been writing and performing sketch comedy for over four, and he just closed his first one-man show, *Altered Boy*. He's also participated in storytelling series at iO comedy theater and *We Have Questions* at the Second City Training Center. He is also a member of Team Sidetrack

—**Sarah Alexander** works as a librarian at the Chicago Public Library. Before that, she was a middle school teacher, a professional singer, and a really, really bad waitress. Her academic and creative work has appeared in journals, blogs, and anthologies including *B-Sides*, *Teen Librarian Toolbox*, and *I'm from Driftwood: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Stories from All Over the World*. Alex also has a background in music and theater and has previously performed in Chicago with *2nd Story* and *OUTspoken*.

—**George David Elrod** was born and raised in Little Rock, Ark., and is a Chicago-based comedian/actor. George performs on the iO Harold team *Comet*, founded in October 2015. In June 2017, he co-produced iO's first LGBTQ pride fest, and premiered his solo sketch show titled "Guppie."

—**Bill McMurray** is a classical/opera singer with more than thirty opera roles to his credit with opera companies all over the country. He is currently with Chicago Opera Theater and sings regularly with the Chicago Symphony Chorus. This past summer, he was the bass soloist in the final movement of Haydn's *The Creation* at the Ravinia festival. When not singing, Bill enjoys Crossfit, reading, movies, watching sports and cooking.

—**Jeff Sams** has appeared in two movies (one with Gene Hackman) and several commercials over the years. Jeff is currently working in education and holds a Master's in International Business.

—**Kelly Suzanne Saulsberry** is the Director of Policy and Outreach at the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, the City's civil rights department. She serves as Co-Chair of the Pride Action Tank's Leadership Advisory Council and as a board member of SHE100, an engaged group of LGBTQ women in Chicago that amplifies and supports the work of queer women in Chicago's LGBTQ communities. She lives in the Bronzeville neighborhood with the love of her life and their two dogs, Bella and Ozzie.

—**Laura Stempel** is a writer, activist, and independent consultant with a particular interest in the queer community and youth homelessness. She's read and told stories around Chicago, published a wide range of things for academic and general audiences, leads a storytelling workshop that's part of the Goodman Theater's *Ge/Narrations* program and is trying to bake cookies at home instead of buying ice cream every time she goes to the grocery.

# What are YOU doing New Year's Eve?

Should you find yourself at a loose end, here are our suggestions for the best bars and parties to ring in '18

—**Sidetrack: New Year's Eve Party with The Legacy Project** \$30 general admission ticket includes guaranteed entry, party favors and a complimentary champagne toast at midnight. \$30 advance at [www.sidetrackchicago.com](http://www.sidetrackchicago.com). 3349 N. Halsted St.

—**Loose Ends: The Man's Country Closing Party** Presented by Harry Cross & CPR Events. At the end of this edition of Loose Ends, Man's Country will close its doors forever. Come add your energy and fluids to the space one last time. Celebrating the life of this historic gay bath house by welcoming all genders and gender non-conformists to a 13-hour party with full access to all three floors, including the disco hall,



sauna and steam room. Featuring music from Eris Drew, Jeffrey Sfire (Detroit), Michael Serafini, Dee Diggs (Boston), L.A. Olympics and Harry Cross. Performances by The Vixen, Lucy Stooles, Bambi Banks and Abhijeet. Free clothes check. Lockers and rooms available to rent. BYOB: venue will provide ice, water, mixers and cups. No glass or bottles allowed inside (transfer any alcohol in glass to a plastic container). Tickets \$30-\$130. 11 pm-noon on New Year's Day. 5017 N Clark St., Tickets: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/loose-ends-the-mans-country-chicago-closing-party-tickets-40854451765?aff=eac2>

—**Phoenix: New Year's Eve 2018 at Phoenix** Elegant dinner buffet by Chef Raul, complimentary champagne toast, \$500 balloon drop, hosted by Lilly White Towers and Keisha Foxxx. DJs: Alex-Q (7-9 pm); Ron G (9-11 pm); Laura B (11 pm - 2 am). \$25 cover. 1932 E. Higgins Rd., Elk Grove Village, Ill.

—**Back Lot Bash and The L Stop: 6th Annual NYE Black & White Party** Beats by DJ All the Way Kay, DJ Gemini Jones and DJ Octiv. Hosted by Dina Bach. Doors open at 7. VIP admission includes drink package and Mediterranean dinner buffet 7-9 pm. Champagne toast at midnight with black and white party favors. Tickets available at [BLBNE18.brownpapertickets.com](http://BLBNE18.brownpapertickets.com). The Annex at Reza's Restaurant, 1477 W. Berwyn Ave.

—**Annoyance Theatre: Steamworks: The Musical** One night only. Ring in the new year with the hilarious story of a wide-eyed young man who moves to the Windy City seeking love and stumbles into the legendary Boystown bathhouse. 8 pm, 851 W. Belmont Ave., 773-697-9693, [www.theannoyance.com](http://www.theannoyance.com)

—**Scot's: NYE at Scot's** Hors d'oeuvres at 8 pm. Balloon drop and champagne toast at midnight.

No cover. 1829 W. Montrose Ave.

—**Touche: 41st Annual Black & Blue New Year's Eve** \$10 gets you admission with a buffet, door prizes, party favors and your first drink. Champagne toast and lights out at midnight. Your ticket includes a special raffle for a Mr. Chicago Leather 2018 weekend package. 6412 N. Clark St.



—**Roscoe's Airways Flight #2018** Ready to fly you into 2018! Packages range from \$30 in the Main Cabin (with hors d'oeuvres and a midnight champagne toast) to a \$100 First-Class package (with priority check-in and boarding, luggage [coat] check, premium buffet and access to first-class bar). Tickets can be purchased by calling 773-281-3355, ext. 2, or by emailing [events@roscoes.com](mailto:events@roscoes.com). 3356 N. Halsted St.

—**Queen!: New Year, New Queen!** With smart-bar residents Ariel Zetina, Eris Drew, Garrett David, Harry Cross, Michael Serafini, Olin and Sevron. Hosted by Lucy Stooles, Jojo Baby, Nico, The Lady Ivory, The Vixen, Imp Queen, Tenderoni and Kenzie Coulee. \$35 advance, \$40 Door, \$20 after 2 am. Special packages available. Smart Bar, 3730 N. Clark St. Tickets: <https://www.etix.com/ticket/p/6572140/new-yearnew-queen-chicago-smartbarchicagoil?cobrand=metrochicago>

—**Progress Bar: The City That Werqs: NYE at Progress Bar** Hosted by Mercedes Tyler, music by DJ Avi Sic. Hosted bar 9-11 pm from Effen Vodka and free champagne bottle with purchase of ticket. Free coat check. Doors open to public at 11 pm. \$500 balloon drop and complimentary champagne at midnight, plus goodie bags. Tickets available at [progressbarNYE2018.eventbrite.com](http://progressbarNYE2018.eventbrite.com). 3359 N. Halsted St.

—**Hydrate's Dreamhouse NYE** A night full of everything Barbie. The fantasy begins at 9 pm with spotlight Barbie performances by some of your favorite Hydrate queens, including Mimi Marks and Kinley Preston. At 10:30 pm, the club transforms into a pink dance party with DJ Deanne. Champagne toast at midnight, party favors through the night. No cover 7-11 pm, hors d'oeuvres will be served 8-10 pm. VIP tickets for express entry and in-and-out privileges. 3458 N. Halsted St. Tickets: <http://www.hydratechicago.com>

—**Mary's Attic: Snow Ball: "Stranger" Retro NYE** Dust off your '80s duds and get ready for a

totally tubular New Year! Mary's Attic is turning upside-down. Retro music by DJ Grant, no cover and free champagne toast and balloon drop at midnight. Dinner in the Dining Room until 11. 5400 N. Clark St.

—**Big Chicks: New Year's Eve** DJ Mike Rytie (resident Saturday Night DJ) spinning your favorite dance hits 10 pm-2 am. Free champagne toast at midnight. No cover; free top hats, tiaras and noise makers. 5024 N. Sheridan Rd.

—**Jackhammer: Dicks On Clark Rockin' Eve 2018** Hosted by Chanel Exotique. DJs Derek James and Jerry. Whole bar open until 4 am. Champagne toast at midnight. \$5 cover. 6406 N. Clark St.

—**Club Krave: A Very Krave New Year's** Happy hour 6-8 pm with appetizers. Rainbow/Pride party favors. Champagne toast at midnight. Full catered dinner buffet. Blue Island ball drop. Party packages range from \$15 for a cash bar to \$50 for wine, soda, draft beer, well and domestic bottles. 6 pm - 2 am, 13126 S. Western Ave., Blue Island, Ill.