



Fresh Fare

A once-deserted section of Lincoln Park is now a full-blown dining destination with the opening of a speakeasy meets supper club.

By Lily Hansen | Photography by Ellen Averick Schor

BOTTLE SERVICE
A view of the dining room and bar area of the new Ada Street lounge in Lincoln Park

If you build it, they will come. The new Ada Street restaurant, situated in an industrial desert, (previously frequented solely by dumpster divers on their way to the steel processing plants or hipster fans of hole-in-the-wall The Hideout bar) introduces duck confit and quail to an area where greasy spoons were the only dining options. And come they did—just try to get a reservation more than a few weeks out for a Wednesday through Saturday evening.

Turns out, the interiors upgrade, along with the furnishings and fixtures, is as refined as the food. Architect Bill Bickford—whose seven-year-old design-build firm Northworks (nwks.com) is conveniently located one floor above—offered to lend a hand with the build-out as a “welcome to the ‘hood” present. “The

space was an office, and many years before that, a metal shop and foundry,” Bickford explains. “We kept a lot of the original details, including steel channels, Chicago common brick, timber beams and the concrete floor, so it still has an industrial vibe.”

Bickford being no stranger to historic renovation (Northworks just completed the restoration of Holabird & Roche’s 1888 Graceland Cemetery Chapel in Uptown), he approached the project strategically, deciding what to repurpose and what to remove. By allowing some of the original elements to stick around—the existing garage door and freight elevator are examples—Ada Street gives guests a rare glimpse into an early 20th century manufacturing facility. The floor plan’s twists and turns up the anticipation for guests entering the restaurant, as does the dim mood lighting. “The layout was designed as a series of individual rooms, providing a progression of space with the restaurant as the final **CONTINUED...**

...CONTINUED destination,” says Bickford.

Interior designer Jodi Morton (also responsible for the kitschy seaside decor at Fish Bar in Lincoln Park) played up the dining room’s utilitarian aesthetic with concrete countertops, geometric plywood tables and banquettes upholstered in Surplus Store army blankets. “There’s nothing in the space that doesn’t need to be there,” explains Morton. “We tried to use a lot of warm woods and candlelight.” Adding harmonious pops of color to an otherwise neutral palette are abstract prints and a dizzying alphabet mural by Jason Pickleman of JNL Graphic Design. Vintage Raak smoked globe pendants sourced from Amsterdam Modern in L.A. lend a mellow glow to the dining room. In terms of the lounge, Morton hunted flea markets to create speakeasy-style vignettes so guests can sip handcrafted cocktails in a room echoing the Prohibition era (which also happens to be the period in which the building was constructed).

Applying his LEED certification knowledge to the back courtyard, Bickford chose an eco-conscious faux grass—Synlawn—as the backdrop for picnics, Ping-Pong tables and the roaring glow of the fire pit. Conveying a laid-back barbecue atmosphere and serving a rotating menu of delectable bites and drinks, there’s no question whose backyard locals will be hanging in during the city’s warmer months. And after the turning of the fall leaves, the candlelight and cozy fabric-clad indoor accommodations will continue to make this dining destination worth the cab fare. ■

WHERE HOUSE
Clockwise from right: One of the Jodi Morton-designed furniture and lighting vignettes, perfect for drinks for two; concealed lighting and an alphabet mural greet guests in the long entry hall; the tranquil back courtyard features Ping-Pong and picnic tables.

