



■ Grilled veal chop; (below) pan-roasted walleye pike

TURNING POINT

Chicago Firehouse



In January 2000, at the dawn of the South Loop gentrification, Matthew O'Malley opened **Chicago Firehouse**—a retro steak house—in a repurposed fire station. For ten years, the place has successfully carried on Chicago's macho, beefy steak-house tradition, its menu packed with wet- and dry-aged prime steaks. Much to our surprise, O'Malley decided to shake things up "to modernize how we currently do the steak house." Enter Kendal Duque, a chef with impeccable credentials that stretch from classic (Everest) to contemporary (Sepia). Good call: Duque wasted no time in lightening and brightening the dishes, starting with a perfectly seared walleye pike surrounded by caramelized market veggies. But the guy clearly respects meat, too—hence a luscious medium-rare veal chop sided with tender, earthy sweetbreads. Talk about the best of both worlds. 1401 S. Michigan Ave.; 312-786-1401. —PENNY POLLACK

THE HOT LIST

10 PLACES EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT AND DINING AT IN DECEMBER (in order of heat)



- **GIRL & THE GOAT** We may as well rename this list "Girl & the Goat Plus Nine Other Places." 809 W. Randolph St.; 312-492-6262
- **DAVANTI ENOTECA** Little Italy is scorching hot, with Davanti's great grub, engaging prices, and happy vibe leading the way. 1359 W. Taylor St.; 312-226-5550
- **LILLIE'S Q** If LQ's ribs weren't so damned good, we'd ask Bucktown to wipe that smug grin off its face. 1856 W. North Ave.; 773-772-3500
- **CHICAGO CUT STEAKHOUSE** Proving once again that macho luxe and skimpy black dresses are de rigueur for Chicago steak houses. 300 N. LaSalle St.; 312-329-1800
- **DEL SECO** If we were to name one can't-miss business plan, it would be this: Korean tacos in the heart of Lincoln Park. 2568 N. Clark St.; 773-248-4227
- **OWEN & ENGINE** Who knew that what Fat Willy's Korean-born rib mistress wanted all along was a British gastropub? 2700 N. Western Ave.; 773-235-2930
- **VINCENT** Educating Chicago on the joys of Dutch cuisine, one zaansemosterdsoep at a time. 1475 W. Balmoral Ave.; 773-334-7168
- **CHIZAKAYA** Slowly, surely, we're finally understanding the tremendous breadth of Japanese cuisine. 3056 N. Lincoln Ave.; 773-697-4725
- **NABUKI** Last year, downtown Hinsdale hit the trendy Italian jackpot with Il Poggiolo. With this hip new Asian spot, looks like lightning strikes twice. 18 E. First St., Hinsdale; 630-654-8880
- **M. HENRIETTA** M. Henry's younger sister lives farther north and stays up later. Of course, she also loves brunch. 1133 W. Granville Ave.; 773-761-9700

—PENNY POLLACK AND JEFF RUBY