

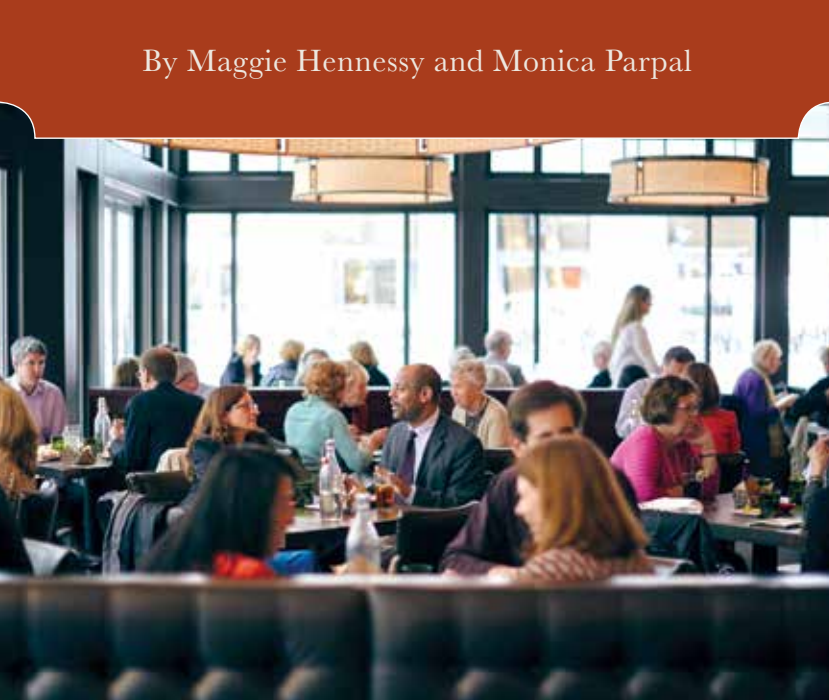
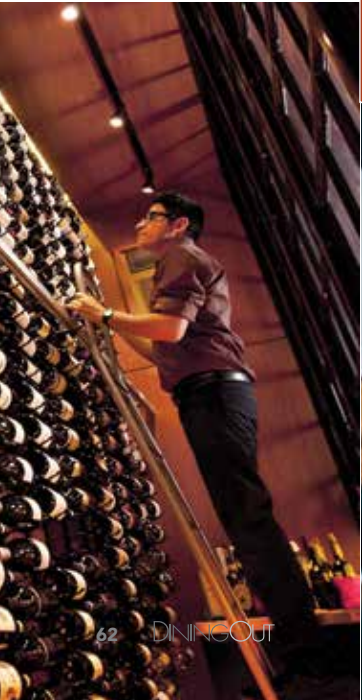


# tesori trattoria & bar

A TREASURE ALL ITS OWN



By Maggie Hennessy and Monica Parpal





Duck through a small doorway in a landmark building, and find yourself in an airy but warm space accented by wood and subway tile. A large window frames a cobalt blue tiled pizza oven, and savory aromas fill your nostrils. The social bar area buzzes with clinking cocktail glasses and jovial conversation, while comfortable wooden tables beckon groups of friends, couples, and families to linger for a rustic Italian-inspired meal.

As you take it all in, you might not know you're standing in a recently revitalized Chicago gem—the new tesori trattoria & bar.

This restaurant is actually nothing new to the Loop. It's been stationed within walking distance of the Art Institute and Millennium Park for years, originally called Rhapsody, a fine-dining restaurant. Now, tesori trattoria & bar has forged a rejuvenated identity separate from the fine-dining destination of yesteryear, with a whole new dining experience that welcomes the after-work crowd and neighborhood residents looking for an Italian restaurant to call their own.

The launch of this new iteration comes after years of operating in the 111-year-old Chapin and Gore building, which houses the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's (CSO) administrative offices. Named for the distillery that initially used it as a whiskey storehouse—and where Chapin and Gore created the original old fashioned cocktail—this building is the city's oldest mixed-use commercial structure. It has watched the Loop transform from solely a financial hub into a cultural epicenter and budding residential neighborhood—a fitting setting for the new face of a Chicago culinary icon.

At the helm of tesori trattoria & bar is Blue Plate, a catering and food service company. For almost 25 years, Blue Plate has operated as the food service arm of the CSO in this location. In 1997, Blue Plate opened its first restaurant, the French-inspired Rhapsody, primarily to serve orchestra patrons during the September-June season.

"The Loop was a different neighborhood then," says Blue Plate CEO Jim Horan. "When five o'clock came, downtown emptied. There was very little residential development and there was just a handful of restaurants and bars."

Over the subsequent 14 years, the Loop gained some 20,000 new residents and an influx of tourists as multiple downtown residential properties sprang up and the highly anticipated Millennium Park opened. But the 2008 recession left a profound impact on the city, prompting the more casual restaurants to take hold in the dining scene.

In 2012, Blue Plate decided that it was time to revamp their restaurant, letting go of its fine-dining roots while keeping the time-honored traditions of warmth and hospitality. It was time to create a more relaxed and approachable dining experience with a new version of the restaurant: tesori trattoria & bar.

Meaning "treasures" in Italian, the name "tesori" lends itself well to the restaurant's future as a neighborhood gem. The new tesori trattoria & bar is a fun meeting place and urban eatery serving seasonal, straightforward, and delicious rustic Italian dishes alongside food-friendly wines, creative cocktails, and craft beer.

"The name is about treasured food, wine, and—most importantly—treasured friends," says Vice President of Marketing Michael Kristofka. "'Tesori' is also a term of endearment in Italian culture, meaning 'darling' or 'sweetheart.' So the name is as much about fostering that sense of endearment or fondness as it is about creating treasured moments."

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— VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING MICHAEL KRISTOFKA





As part of this transformation, Blue Plate gutted the old restaurant down to the studs—aside from the kitchen, where the only major modification was the addition of a hulking pizza oven. One might say that this oven serves as a symbol of the restaurant's warm and welcoming new identity.

To emphasize that friendly and unpretentious feel, tesori shed the white tablecloths to expose new tables made from reclaimed barn doors—complementing the rustic wooden beams that overlook the 120-seat restaurant. Servers traded their uniforms for jeans, and the music got a little louder and more modern, including live jazz on Wednesday nights.

The 90-seat bar has been spruced up with a new draft system, installed to accommodate eight rotating craft beers and two house tap wines—including a delightful house rosé. The fresh, seasonal craft cocktail menu is dotted with whiskey-based drinks, which pay homage to the restaurant's distillery forebears.

What's more, tesori hired local talent Danny Sweis to take on the role of executive chef. Sweis curates the seasonal menu, focused on simple, rustic Italian dishes like antipasti, pizzas, pasta, and salads.

"We emphasize the foods that are shared at the table," Sweis says, referring to antipasti plates with cured meats and cheeses from different regions of Italy, alongside accompaniments like mostardas, pickled vegetables, and olives. Small plates and bar bites are offered at accessible price points, encouraging guests to try several different items. "We offer a variety of shareable platters you can eat with your hands," Sweis adds. "This is the way I grew up eating, with plates spread out on the table, and people sharing everything. It lends itself to interaction."

*"We're here to help people come together and foster good conversation and memories over really great food..."* — EXECUTIVE CHEF DANNY SWEIS

Other items, like the selection of handmade pizzas, spotlight high-quality, simple ingredients, like fresh tomato sauce, oven-roasted garlic, and olive oil on the seasonal Marinara Pizza. The Funghi Misti is piled high with mozzarella and Caciocavallo cheeses, topped with wild mushrooms and a drizzle of truffle oil.

Part of tesori's reincarnation came through its deep connection to the neighborhood. The location, within walking distance of Union Station and shouting distance of the Adams and Wabash El stop, is uniquely positioned as a tempting choice for professionals heading home from the office, or residents meeting friends on the weekend.

"We aren't catering to the nightlife crowd," Horan says, "but the after-work crowd, as well as local residents. When people are done working, they want to find a place to grab something to eat and enjoy a cocktail or glass of wine." The soon-to-be-added quaint sidewalk café on Adams will further entice alfresco dining-starved Chicagoans and tourists, especially during warmer months.

This is where tesori trattoria & bar shines. It's a place where locals can come as they are, enjoy a drink at the bar, or stay for a full dinner. And while the restaurant still accommodates multi-course dinners for theater-goers like Rhapsody before it, tesori can now serve a myriad of tastes. Guests can order a takeout pizza or luscious antipasti selection on the way to Millennium Park

for a movie or concert, stop in for a drink and a bite after a show in the nearby theater district, or enjoy a late lunch after visiting the Art Institute.

"We're here to help people come together and foster good conversation and memories over really great food," Sweis says.

This makes the restaurant's connection to "treasured friends" particularly apt, with its connection to local residents, as well as its outstanding service honed by years of fine-dining hospitality. At tesori trattoria & bar, the staff retains their friendly and welcoming ways, reinforcing the warmth and comfort of the revamped space.

"Most of all, we want people to feel comfortable," says Sweis. "When you walk in, you are greeted with happy faces. You're taken care of. It's about being in a comfortable environment, and enjoying the company you're with. That's what leads to good memories and experiences."

With seasonal menus, rotating beverage selections, and a fun, comfortable, urban experience, there is always something new to discover at tesori. Like a polished gem, tesori trattoria & bar shines with a new light—a gleam that reflects a bright future of treasured friends, old and new.

