



Bars & Clubs

Suite spots

Find out what's in it for you at 3 hot new hotels

By Lisa Arnett and M. Kathleen Pratt

Last year's surge of hotel launches (and relaunches) brought an enticing crop of new bars and eateries, from **Vertigo** and **Ajastek** in the Dana Hotel to **Potters** and **Lockwood** in the Palmer House Hilton. We'd only just finished making the rounds when a new wave of boutique hotels hit the scene, each with its own set of bars and restaurants. Can't keep them all straight? Here's a guide to drinking and dining at this summer's new downtown hotels.

HOTEL FELIX

Bar: The lobby bar. This nameless nook, lushly adorned with velvet sofas and glass orbs dangling from the ceiling and located right off the hotel's lobby, is a catch-all for everyone from dashing dudes with British accents to Hawaiian shirt-clad tourists. Try strong pours of modernized classics such as an acai berry Tom Collins.

Casual restaurant: None. (Room service, anyone?)

Upscale restaurant: Elate. Though it's only been open two weeks, this River North spot has serious scene potential. It's open all day; stop by in the evening and grab a table next to the huge windows that slide wide open to Clark Street. Chef Randal Jacobs' fare is affordable (nothing on the opening menu tops \$18) and accessible—think small plates and snacks such as oysters, charcuterie, gourmet pizzas and a signature burger.



ELYSIAN HOTEL (OPENING LATE SEPTEMBER)

Bar: Bernard's Bar. This leather-laden second-floor den should be a fine choice for a pre-shopping cocktail to take the edge off of dropping mad cash at the new Marc Jacobs store, opening in the building early next year.

Casual restaurant: Balsan. Refined comfort food and specialties from the wood-burning oven will be the focus at this third-floor spot serving breakfast, lunch, dinner and a late-night small plates menu. The dining room's going for an antique European look, with a marble-topped bar, antique mirrors and etched glass—plus floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the hotel's courtyard.

Upscale restaurant: Ria. Executive chef Jason McLeod will do double duty at Balsan and this adjacent dinner spot with more sophisticated air (he's overseeing all dining at the hotel, including room service and banquets). Expect a contemporary, globally influenced menu that shifts with the seasons.

THE WIT HOTEL

Bar: Roof. Line up outside the hotel's Lake Street entrance to be ushered up the elevator to this rooftop lounge,

where locals sipping blueberry caipiroskas outnumber hotel guests. Though the menu features 20-plus small plates, the kitchen seems to be almost exclusively churning out orders of crunchy fries and grilled lamb sliders.

Casual restaurant: State & Lake. It's tough to shake the hotel vibe at this comfy first-floor breakfast, lunch and dinner spot (no thanks to the robotic, corporate-sounding servers), but the well-considered tap list at the bar helps. Chef Bradley Manchester's menu provides solid options for a weekday lunch or a light bite before a show at the nearby Chicago Theater.

Upscale restaurant: Cibo Matto. Chef Todd Stein cooks modern Italian fare, including a lovely bucatini carbonara, at this second-floor dinner destination. The early crowd's a mix of travelers and curious locals. If you're not on an expense account (and who is these days?), settle into the front lounge and admire the dining room's main attention-grabber, a trippy ceiling fresco from local artist Todd Murphy, from afar.

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