

# Phil Vettel recommends

## College-farewell restaurants

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So, your kid's going off to college. There's time for one last dinner out before you pack up the minivan.

Where to go? The main goal should be to ensure the little brat misses you. So treat him to a meal that he won't be able to find near campus. A good steak, for instance; most campus-area steakhouses, if any, are lame or unaffordable. Perhaps an experimental restaurant, for cutting-edge memories that will sustain your child through ramen-noodle weekends. Or dinner in one last elegant dining environment before weeks of cafeteria meals.

Yeah, it'll be a little expensive, but put the receipt next to the tuition bill and it won't seem so bad.

### **Bonsoiree** 2728 W. Armitage Ave., 773-486-7511.

Once an underground restaurant — you still have to be on the e-mail list to dine on Saturday nights — this cozy Logan Square BYO is now legit, but hardly run-of-the-mill. Chef/owner Shin Thompson dazzles with exciting, creative American dishes with Pacific and Japanese flourishes. He'll be playful with some courses, such as a pork-cheek, quail egg and maple syrup concoction that's like an American breakfast in diorama form, then offer a "duck, duck goose" creation that's pure French technique. There are no menus at the table — simply choose between the four- and seven-course meals — but the dishes are posted online, a handy resource when deciding which wine to bring. Recommended: an open mind. Open: Dinner Tuesday-Sunday. Prices: Four-course menu \$58, seven-course \$85. Credit cards: A, M, V. Reservations: Required. Noise: Conversation-friendly. Other: Wheelchair accessible, BYO.

### **Mastro's Steakhouse** 520 N. Dearborn St., 312-521-5100.

Everything about this [California](#)-based chain (Chicago is Mastro's sixth steakhouse location) is big. Big dining room, big lounge (live music nightly), big steaks, big drinks, big tab. Yes, you pay a lot at this River North outpost, but the value's there in the top-quality steaks and the beyond-generous cocktail and wine pours. Steaks are dry-rubbed before cooking and dabbed with butter after, brought to the table on plates so hot you can feel the warmth on your face. There are some great side dish and raw-bar offerings, over-indulgent desserts and excellent service. No wonder this place is popular. Recommended: Lobster-mashed potatoes, veal chop, lamb chops, warm butter cake. Open: Dinner Monday-Sunday. Entree prices: \$25-\$51. Credit cards: A, DC, DS, M, V. Reservations: Strongly recommended. Noise: Conversation-challenged. Other: Wheelchair accessible, valet parking.

### **Ing** 951 W. Fulton Market, 855-834-6464.

Homaro Cantu experiments with Asian flavors in this concept, which is far more grounded than its molecular, how-do-I-eat-this sibling, Moto, but shares the same outside-the-box ethic, evident when the menu (and amuse) arrive as an origami box. But if you can get past the wordplay (every category ends in "ing") and the occasionally over-precious dish, there are some nice treats in store. Order a la carte or "by the hour," the latter essentially a prix-fixe in which the customer decides among 4-, 8- and even 12-course meals. Ordering matching beverages is key to maximizing this experience. Recommended: Oyster, baozi buns, la mien with pork belly, duck breast. Open: Dinner Tuesday-Saturday. Entree prices: \$22-\$24. Credit cards: A, DC, M, V. Reservations: Strongly recommended. Noise: Conversation-friendly. Other: Wheelchair accessible; valet parking.

### **Henri** 18 S. Michigan Ave., 312-578-0763.

It's almost as though Billy Lawless, owner of the raucous (though excellent) gastropub The Gage next door, set out to prove he could create a civilized, soft-spoken restaurant with Henri. Though nominally named for architect Louis Henri Sullivan, the 60-odd-seat dining room achieves a classic neutrality, seafoam and chocolate tones amid gleaming white trim. Chef Dirk Flanigan, who also oversees The Gage, creates updated versions of classic dishes — steak tartare with cold-smoked beef, or lobster Wellington as a trio of pastry puffs. Daily plats du jour include a duet of rabbit and a dazzling bouillabaisse. A lengthy list of biodynamic wines leads the impressive beverage program. Consider Henri for lunch, too, tucking into a croque monsieur in the sun-drenched interior. Recommended: Dover sole, lamb tenderloin for two, dark-chocolate tarte, berry mille feuille. Open: Dinner Monday-Sunday, lunch Monday-Friday. Entree prices: \$22-\$38. Credit cards: A, DC, DS, M, V. Reservations: Strongly recommended. Noise: Conversation-friendly. Other: Wheelchair accessible; valet parking available.

### **The Florentine** 151 W. Adams St., 312-660-8866.

Todd Stein, the chef who put *Cibo Matto* on the map, took his game to the newly opened JW Marriott on the other end of the Loop. Florentine is a dining room built with comfort and timelessness in mind, but Stein's Italian food remains thoroughly contemporary, and arguably more enjoyable in a quieter, less-distracting venue. Recommended: Caramelle pasta, veal tenderloin, swordfish puttanesca, baba. Service is very good, and the large lounge has some intriguing after-5 options. Open: Breakfast, lunch, dinner daily. Entree prices: \$21-\$42. Credit cards: A, DC, DS, M, V. Reservations: Recommended. Noise: Conversation-friendly. Other: Wheelchair accessible; validated valet parking.

**Quince** 1625 Hinman Ave., Evanston; 847-570-8400.

Andy Motto has done good work at the now-shuttered Le Lan and briefly at Old Town Brasserie, but he seems to have come into his own at this Evanston address, formerly home to Trio and Cafe Provencal. Motto's French-informed cooking favors nuance and complexity over lapel-grabbing power flavors, a good fit for the restaurant's understated good looks and the unfailingly correct but unobtrusive service. The Sunday three-course menu, \$35, is a great deal. Recommended: Liquid-cauliflower ravioli, "duck duck jus," pork loin, chocolate assortment. Open: Dinner Monday-Sunday. Entree prices: \$23-\$35. Credit cards: A, DC, DS, M, V. Reservations: Strongly recommended. Noise: Conversation-friendly. Other: Valet parking.