

# SUPPER

GLOBAL HOTEL F&B

ISSUE 9



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On bringing boutiques to Britain  
and life with The Pigs

## Malcolm Lee

Singaporean food for today,  
inspired by tradition

## Tim Mutton

When it comes to design, why he's  
happy to be a Blacksheep

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## City Mouse

### Ace Hotel, Chicago

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Words: Emma Love

Randolph Street in Chicago's West Loop is nicknamed 'Restaurant Row' and, with several blocks full of buzzing eateries and bars, it's immediately obvious why. Less than five minutes walk away is the Fulton Market neighbourhood – slightly quieter but with a fast growing foodie reputation. It's here, opposite the Google offices, that Ace Hotel Group has chosen to open its tenth outpost and the first in the Midwest. In another first for the group, which usually renovates old buildings, this is a newly constructed glass and concrete space from GREC Architects that references the neighbourhood's industrial past. The facade of the former cheese factory that once stood on the south side of the site still remains.

LA-based Commune Design (which had already worked on three other Ace hotel properties) was tasked with the interiors and began by asking the question: if Mies van der Rohe were to create a hotel today, what would it look like?

"We decided to tap into Chicago's history of Mid-century Modern architecture and design, specifically Mies van der Rohe and the Bauhaus," confirms Commune Design's

Creative Director Roman Alonso. "The building is industrial in feel but rooted in modernism."

Within the ground floor F&B spaces – the 160-seat City Mouse restaurant and bar, plus the lobby lounge – this is evidenced in the black terrazzo floors and forest green-stained plywood panelling (informed by van der Rohe's buildings at the Illinois Institute of Technology); custom-designed furniture by LA-based Michael Boyd; and the woven wall hangings by artists Tanya Aquiniga and Christy Madsen – inspired by Anni and Joseph Albers – that hang behind the host stand and the reception. Seating in the restaurant is a combination of upholstered plywood banquettes and chrome tubing dining chairs; the table tops and bar are green Forbo linoleum and brass. The plates, glassware and cutlery are sourced from Steelite USA.

Other F&B outlets consist of the front patio, which has an additional 60-seats and a fire pit, plus the seventh floor Waydown bar. "The most important thing for the restaurant was to bring in natural light and make the spaces, which were vast in plan, feel intimate," continues Alonso. "We



Milk Toast: chocolate, cashew, coconut, stonefruit jam



Photography: Spencer Lowell

wanted it to be timeless, a place where you can dress up or dress down.”

It’s a relaxed design ethos that is reflected in the menu itself, which has been devised by chef Jason Vincent, a Chicago native whose Logan Square restaurant, Giant, has garnered numerous accolades.

“Ace has a philosophy of partnering with a chef or group that is up-and-coming or perhaps only has one or two restaurants, rather than a big established brand,” says City Mouse’s Director of Food and Beverage Lucas Chapman. “Both Jason and our Executive Chef Patrick Sheerin, who was previously at Trencherman restaurant in Wicker Park, are on the cutting edge of the Chicago food scene and very well known. I think that lends itself to a successful restaurant much more than if they were not from the city.”

The menu concept at City Mouse – named after Aesop’s fable The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse – is clearly designed to be fun and to draw in diners not just from the hotel, but local workers and residents too. “Over the past few years brunching has become a real thing in Chicago so we decided to offer brunch seven days a week, to appeal not only to our guests but to the neighbourhood that we’re in. If you want to come in and get pancakes at 2pm in the afternoon, you can,” explains Chapman. “We could price everything a few bucks higher but that’s not going to bring our guests back three or four times a week.”

Alongside brunch specials such as a smoked salmon and cream cheese pretzel bagel, and a ‘Gas Station Sandwich’ (hash brown, egg, cheese, grape jelly, sausage, Michigan grown fruit), there are a handful of salads and a lunch section on the all-day menu: think burger and fries, corn and coconut soup with grilled corn relish and a burrata chopped salad with arugula, cherry tomatoes and crispy prosciutto. The dinner menu features crowd-pleasing dishes such as handmade tagliatelle with shrimps and chilli butter, skirt steak with sweet corn elotes and smoked

chicken with cashew rice. The dessert list is mostly American classics from apple pie to whipped cheesecake with blueberries.

“There are similarities to Giant in the seasonality of the ingredients, the preparation and finesse behind the food, and the quality,” says Chapman, citing Mick Klug Farms in Michigan as one of the key suppliers of produce for the kitchen. Just as the Midwest’s influence can be tasted in the food, so it is also found on the drinks menu. Many of the beers – such as Great Lakes Porter by the Great Lakes Brewing Company in Cleveland, Ohio – are from the region.

Music is important too, both in the rooms (many come with guitars or a record player and a selection of vinyl sourced from second hand shops) and the F&B areas. In the Waydown bar, DJs play seven nights a week, while downstairs City Mouse has two music playlists curated by DJ Michael Antonia, and a record player behind the host station with a stack of around 1,500 vinyls. “We have a cultural engineer who makes sure the brand is represented well when it comes to music,” says Chapman. “There is everything from The Supremes to offbeat instrumental stuff. This weekend we had a guest bring down a record from his room that he hadn’t had time to play, so we put it on in the restaurant.”

Ace Chicago might be barely six months old – the final F&B offering, an outpost of Stumptown Coffee Roasters only opened in December – but already it seems to have found its place in this in-flux, foodie neighbourhood. “We want to make the north part of the West Loop a more attractive area and do good by the city,” concludes Chapman. “That comes from approachable pricing, authentic, humble service and really good food.”

[www.acehotel.com/chicago](http://www.acehotel.com/chicago)

IN A BITE C220 (dining room, lounge and seasonal patio) • Operator: Ace Hotel • Developer: Sterling Bay • Architecture: GREC Architects • Interior Design: Commune Design • Executive Chef: Pat Sheerin • Beverage Manager: Caitlin Laman • Director of F&B: Lucas Chapman • Tableware and Glassware: Steelite USA • Menu and Uniform Design: Atelier Ace