

# DINE WITH SARAH LEVY

## PROVINCE

**The Scene** This sleek West Loop restaurant features modern American cuisine, drawing inspiration from Central and South America, as well as Spain. Executive Chef Randy Zweiban executes farm-to-table cooking.

**The Food** Start with bites like the spicy seared tuna taquito, raw items like the fluke ceviche or the market oysters on the half shell with a phenomenal cocktail sauce. The Nichols farm acorn squash soup, with crème fraiche, cilantro and crispy croutons, is a warm and tasty starter. The menu is then broken into “Small, Big & Bigger.” For small, try the grilled herb flatbread with acorn squash, mozzarella and sherry dressed greens. For big, try the Becker Lane farms slow-roasted pork ropa vieja, with vanilla mashed sweet potatoes. And finish it off with the biggest thing from the bigger section – 10-hour braised lamb with roasted eggplant, house-made chorizo and cornbread.

**The Drinks** Signature cocktails will knock your socks off, like the Province martini with Death’s Door gin or vodka, and house-stuffed Noilly prat-cured Spanish olives, or the Champagne cocktail – Charles Lafitte Brut Prestige, market spiced pear syrup, Domaine de Canton and orange bitters.

**The Sweets** The peanut butter and chocolate flan “sandwich” with chocolate sorbet, meringue crisps and peanut crunch is sensational.

**The Bottom Line** A fun restaurant with adventurous and eclectic dishes.  
161 NORTH JEFFERSON STREET, 312.669.9900,  
WWW.PROVINCERESTAURANT.COM

## LILLIE’S Q

**The Scene** Casual, fun and young. A place to frequent if you’re not afraid to roll up your sleeves and get a lil’ dirty.

**The Players** Charlie McKenna, whose past includes three years as sous chef at The Peninsula’s Avenues, goes back to his roots here with his family’s secret BBQ recipes. The restaurant is named after his grandma, Lillie.

**The Food** Good ole’ fashioned BBQ. Start

with hush puppies and fried pickles but save room for the main event, some of Chicago’s tastiest BBQ. I ordered the Taste of LQ, choosing the baby back ribs, pulled pork and tri-tip as my three. The tri-tip was fresh off the smoker, and, oh my, was it delicious. The tri is a cut from the bottom sirloin and reminds me of brisket. Each table is adorned with several bottles of house-made sauces including BBQ sauces with a variety of heat factors. Load up on sides like the sweet potato fries, stone ground grits with house-made bacon and baked beans.

**The Drinks** Choose among several moonshine-based specialty drinks – strong enough to knock you off your chair.

**The Sweets** Try comfort dishes like seasonal fruit cobbler and banana pudding with Nilla wafers, pudding and vanilla meringue.

**The Pros** Delicious food, stiff drinks, super friendly service.

**The Cons** One bite of that tri-tip, and you’ll want to smack a hand-made authenticity award on their front door.

**The Bottom Line** Good ole’ fashioned down ’n dirty BBQ in a relatively more polished and new spot than I’m used to having BBQ, but downright delicious!  
1856 WEST NORTH AVENUE, 773.772.5500,  
WWW.LILLIESQ.COM

## PICCOLO SOGNO

**The Scene** Piccolo Sogno broke out of the gate with a fury, and two years later, they’re maintaining this incredible pace because they consistently prepare exquisitely simple and delectable food in a warm environment.

**The Players** Owner/Wine Director Ciro Longobardo and Chef/Owner Tony Priolo have poured heart and soul into this restaurant and you can taste it in every bite, and feel it in every smile from the friendly staff.

**The Food** Rustic Italian at its best. Piccolo is home to some of my favorite pizza in Chicago – like the crisp crust *Bianca con rucola* with arugula, olive oil, mozzarella, and shaved Parmesan Reggiano. Start with the *griglia mista* – grilled calamari, shrimp, octopus, arugula, lemon and caper infused olive



Lillie's Q

oil. The pasta course features hand-made pasta that makes you feel like you’re in Italy. My favorite is the *stracci di farro*, featuring farro flour pasta triangles, asparagus, leeks, garlic and truffle oil. The *pesce intero*, wood-fired fish of the day, baked with Sicilian sea salt crust, braised fennel, citrus and caper reduction, is often the Branzino (a European sea bass). The light, roasted fish is presented tableside, then deboned in the kitchen.

**The Drinks** The knowledgeable team will help you select the perfect Italian wine from a list of 500 to pair with your meal.

**The Sweets** The *Tortino di Giandua*, a chocolate-hazelnut warm cake with gooey center and hazelnut gelato, is to-die-for.

**The Bottom Line** There’s a reason I have this restaurant’s number programmed in my phone – I could visit this wonderful spot three times a week and it would never get old. ■  
464 NORTH HALSTED STREET, 312.421.0077,  
WWW.PICCOLOSOGNORESTAURANT.COM

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