Forgotten Europe
An Old World Surprise in the Heart of the Continent  Page 56

CHICAGO
The Greening of a City  Page 72

The Lost World
Deep in Peru’s Amazon Rainforest  Page 80

Bus to Antarctica
10 Weeks, 14 Countries, and 10,000 Miles  Page 66

Exotic Stays in Marrakech  Page 36
London for Little Ones  Page 39
Finland’s King of Madventures  Page 18
AMERICA'S GREEN CITY

FROM AGING INDUSTRIAL CAPITAL TO MODEL OF LIVABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP, CHICAGO IS BECOMING OUR KIND OF TOWN.

BY JAMES CONAWAY
Photographs by Melissa Farlow
PHIL. PONCE, local TV news anchor, peers at the amazing array of sausages dangling from overhead racks in Gene’s Deli in north Chicago’s Lincoln Square. “Chicago’s not the city of big shoulders,” he jokes, referring to poet Carl Sandburg’s early-20th-century characterization of what was then America’s industrial capital, “but rather the city of pig shoulders.” (And that refers not just to actual pork, he later explains, but also to the long line of Chicago politicians convicted of taking bribes.)

It’s Sunday afternoon, and the sidewalks are jammed in this longtime enclave of sausage-loving Germans and Eastern Europeans. Recent years have seen a growing ethnic diversity among residents, as well as an influx of shops and galleries. Yet, a steel archway labeled “Lincoln Square” lets the world know that pride in the neighborhood—pig shoulders and all—is stronger than ever.

“A few years ago people here decided they didn’t want big developments,” Ponce says, explaining that condos were prevented from taking over the local movie theater, though locals welcomed new residents moving into renovated apartments. “There are more than 50 neighborhoods in Chicago just as distinct and as cherished as this one,” he adds, vital components in the overall good vibe of this historic Midwestern metropolis.

Chicago is a big city—approaching three million in population—but has been called the Second City since the 1950s, when a New Yorker article by the late A. J. Liebling asserted that Chicago could never measure up to New York, period. By then, Chicago had already given the world the car radio, large-scale mail-order sales, and a futures and options exchange (where contracts for pork bellies, for example, are still bought and sold). This past decade, Chicago’s livability and environmental stewardship have earned it a more modern street cred. Nonetheless, last year the city lost an important popularity contest, being passed over as the site for the 2016 Summer Olympics.

I’ve come to see for myself what the Olympic committee missed. Plenty, I’m discovering. For starters, the sun does shine here, despite frequent cloud cover that forms over adjacent Lake Michigan. The city’s public transportation functions, its parks are almost as ubiquitous as those sausages, and the architecture is breathtaking—literally, if you ascend America’s tallest building, the Willis Tower, and stand on a platform of Plexiglass looking down 103 stories.

What’s more, the museums are fabulous, the arts scene—symphony, opera, Art Institute, Museum of Contemporary Art—is rhapsodic, and the food...well, I’ll get to that. In short, there’s a lot here. As Ponce puts it: “We have the necessary critical mass for vibrancy.”

That includes three major sports franchises—the White Sox, Cubs, and Bears—and a rowdy politics that Ponce calls “the real blood sport.” At the city’s political heart is Richard M. Daley, currently in his sixth term as mayor. Daley proclaimed Chicago the “city of the future” in both opportunity and quality of life. To him, the latter meant going green, and a decade ago he ordained that the roof of City Hall be transformed to reflect the city’s motto, Urbis in Horto (City in a Garden).

City Hall sits within the Loop, the historic downtown area encircled by the El (short for elevated train). But the famous rooftop garden, I discover, isn’t open to the public. The closest view I can find is from a nearby office building, whose windows are among the thousands around here that look down on what was the first green patch of its kind in the Midwest.

“Now there are four million square feet of rooftop gardens in Chicago alone,” says David Yocca, who designed City Hall’s, determining how much soil was needed and which native trees, shrubs, and grasses to plant. “The garden insulates the building and conserves energy,” he says, “making it cash positive.”

Mayor Daley also created the Chicago Center for Green Technology (CCGT), housed in America’s first rehabilitated municipal building to receive a LEED Platinum rating for its use of green technology. There’s even vegetable oil in the elevator’s hydraulic system.

Clockwise from left: A classic movie house turned live-performance venue, the landmark Chicago Theatre dates to 1921. Cocktails are shaken at the Frontera Grill, one of chef Rick Bayless’s three Chicago eateries. Mayor Daley’s vision for Chicago’s “second shoreline” (after Lake Michigan’s) includes the Chicago Riverwalk. Opening pages: The Nichols Bridgeway extends over the world’s largest green roof to Millennium Park.
Chicagoans go to the CCGT for advice on ecological building and landscaping. Lead architect Doug Farr shows me around, talking enthusiastically about "sustainable urbanism," his dream that every part of the city be "walkable, served by public transportation, and have a high percentage of green buildings."

Farr's partner designed what was the first "net zero" home in the Midwest, producing as much energy as it uses. The four-bedroom house in the Ravenswood neighborhood has a butterfly roof, solar panels, and a lot of windows, recycled concrete, and sustainably forested wood. The $1.6 million structure serves as a testing ground for innovative architecture, right down to the specially vented kitty litter box equipped with an occupancy sensor.

Even Chicago's restaurant scene is going sustainable. Farr sends me to Xoco, a mile north of the Loop, which he designed for Rick Bayless, a chef renowned for his Mexican dishes. Xoco is a bright, narrow space smelling wonderfully of chiles and slow-cooked meats. It's packed with people waiting for sumptuous caldos and tortas baked in the wood-fired oven.

Bayless keeps electricity costs down by combining LED lighting with incandescent bulbs, achieving efficiency without losing the friendly glow. And the stove vents are designed to reduce heat loss, a revolutionary step: "People don't get lectures on environmental ethics here," Bayless is quick to add, "just good food."

The chef, who owns two nearby restaurants as well, supports the "locavore" notion of sourcing his food from within a 500-mile radius, including buying veggies from Chicago's own City Farm, started by social activist Ken Dunn in the impoverished Cabrini-Green neighborhood. Dunn invites me to visit, picking me up in his little red Honda. He wears a studded leather jacket and a goatee and proudly points out that "this was once among the poorest tracts in the nation." Now it's an intensely cultivated urban farm next to a housing development, a viable \textit{korto in urbs.}

"It will stay this way as long as we can sell hand-grown arugula, Brussels sprouts, and rainbow chard to upscale restaurants," he says.

For contrast I check out a couple of Chicago's old-line eateries not known for their ecological concern. The one favored by polo and sports stars, Gibson Steakhouse, is famed for its red meat and ten-ounce martinis. "Take your pick," says the waitress, showing me a tray arranged with slabs of raw protein. I choose the "W.R. Chicago Cut," an extra-thick rib eye with bone attached. It arrives charcoal broiled, some of the best beef I've ever tasted.

Along with the steak comes a twice-baked potato the size of a small football smothered with melted Wisconsin cheddar. I finish with a wedge of Texas pecan pie too large for the dish. "Don't worry," a woman sitting nearby says, "food hanging over the edges of plates is very Chicago."

The Chicago food scene, I discover, is rife with traditional favorites having their own spin and fierce devotees: the Reuben egg roll from a local vendor in the Richard J. Daley Center; the strong, creamy cappuccino from Intelligentsia cafes; crispy fried Lake Erie perch at the airy Terzo Piano restaurant at the Art Institute; enchiladas with pork and red chile sauce at Nuevo Leon in the Latino quarter known as Pilsen, south of the Loop; and sausage in most any guise, most anywhere.

BACK IN 1959, an offbeat theater group was founded in a former Chinese laundry in Old Town. It called itself Second City. Since then, Second City has become one of the most successful, long-running live shows in America, combining comedy and social commentary. Its alumni include the likes of Mike Myers, Tina Fey, Stephen Colbert, and the late Chris Farley.

I remember a Saturday Night Live skit in which Farley and other football fans sit around a table in Chicago eating sausage and cheese in great quantities. Farley has a couple of simulated heart attacks and is revived by electric shock so he can continue eating and praising "da Bears."

This image of Chicago as a haven of cholesterol and sports fanaticism persists, but the city's sophistication and progressiveness are gaining ground. I drop by Second City, still going strong just a few doors from the old location, for a performance of \textit{Studs Terkel's Not Working}, a fast-paced, edgy revue about life in the city today.

A decidedly younger audience sips beer while a statuesque blonde takes the stage and says, "Organizers of the Southside Irish Parade cancelled the event for 2010, citing public safety risk. In order to prevent acts of lèved behavior, the city of Chicago will also be shutting down The Taste of Chicago, Wrigleyville, the Red and Still shiny white 90 years after construction, the Wrigley Building \textit{(right)}, built by the chewing gum magnate, stands on the north bank of the Chicago River with its contemporary, the Tribune Tower, in the background. Restored homes \textit{(left)} lend gentrified elegance to the old Wicker Park neighborhood.
The great fire of 1871 created a blank slate upon which a new city arose in a rich medley of architectural styles. The transformation continues.

Later, I take a cab to North Pond, a café surrounded by parkland. Its natural wood interior and prairie-style hanging lamps reflect the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright, who got his start in Chicago apprenticing with famed architect Louis Sullivan in the era that began after the great fire of 1871.

“The fire created a blank slate upon which to raise up a new city,” explains Lori Kolb as I walk with her the next day. She’s an unpaid docent for the Chicago Architecture Foundation who’s leading me up windy Jackson Street and away from Lake Michigan.

“By the 1880s, this was a boom town. Ten thousand people a week were arriving; there were more railroad tracks passing through here—and more port activity—than in any other city in the world. This was the grain center of the country, with slaughteringhouses, packing plants, tanneries, and huge lumberyards making it the place to be if you wanted a job.”

Momently drowned out by the clattering El, she continues, “That meant new buildings to contain all the activity, but what kind of buildings?”

Chicago’s comeback from the fire was marked in 1893 with its World’s Columbian Exposition, including the “White City” exhibition that can still be visited, with its surviving Museum of Science and Industry. The new city’s architecture evolved over the coming decades, the first attempts tending toward neoclassical restraint, a so-called Beaux Arts bonanza favored by prominent architect Daniel Burnham and illustrated by the hotel named for him at the corner of Washington and State.

Other styles followed. Today’s downtown remains a wonderful medley: John Wellborn Root’s Monadnock Building (an example of the Chicago School), which is the world’s tallest commercial building made of brick; Mies van der Rohe’s Federal Building (in modern style), with its spectacularly open ground floor; Philip Johnson’s 190 South LaSalle building (postmodern) with a gold-leaf cathedral ceiling. Probably the best contrast of old and new is the immense Beaux Arts-style Art Institute of Chicago, housing 260,000 works of art. Neoclassical restraint meets contemporary glass and light in the Modern Wing opened in 2009. It has a specially designed “flying carpet” of moving blades under the skyscrapers that moderate the exposure to harmful ultraviolet light of the huge collection of 20th- and 21st-century art. Today the institute is awash with students of all ages courted with special exhibitions and classes.

Next, I stroll the open walkway that spans Lurie Garden to reach the 24-acre Millennium Park, a mix of open space and art that may be the city’s crowning glory. A park favorite among visitors and locals alike is the “Cloud Gate,” better known as the Bean, a kidney-shaped, stainless steel sculpture whose mirrored surface performs a unique bit of reflective magic: Skyscrapers of the lakefront rising regally in the background are captured dramatically in the artful orb, as are the surrounding groves of trees.

Behind me, Frank Gehry’s spidery steel beams overhang the Jay Pritzker Pavilion, all part of the original neoclassical footprint reinterpreted in the modern age. “It was Montgomery Ward, in that building there, who insisted that the lakefront be ‘open, free and clear,’ and it still is,” says Nathan Mason from the city’s cultural affairs department, who walked with me.

No visit to Chicago is complete without riding the El train. My favorite ride is to the Garfield Park Conservatory, a Victorian hothouse of epic proportions with an amazing array of mostly tropical flora. The Conservatory’s otherworldliness is as enveloping as its heat—with no other section of it more transporting than the Fern Room. Dense, intensely green, almost audibly growing, the interior of this room mimics what Chicago must have looked and felt, like 200 million years ago. “I lost my pruning shears,” lamens one of the horticulturists, down on her knees, searching fruitlessly under innumerable ferns and shaggy mosses.

Later, I walk south of Millennium Park, past the heroic Buckingham Fountain, one of the city’s top draws, and on to the landscaped Museum Campus, which includes the Field Museum of Natural History, with its rearing dinosaur skeleton out front; the Shedd Aquarium; and Adler Planetarium, all world-class institutions and each easily worth a day of your time.

I stand at the stone wall overlooking Lake Michigan, perhaps the single defining element of this city in a garden. Just one of its urban glories is Lake Shore Drive, with its 30-mile-long biking and walking path stitching parks and vistas as far as I can see. Under clear skies, the water is azure and the view beyond the breakwaters almost Mediterranean.

A football game is about to start at Soldier Field, where “da Bears” are playing. Fans walk along the lake toward the stadium, past all these institutions of science and culture. Some greet me with smiles, while others lift their cups in salute to the cop pedaling past, who ignores them. And I’m thinking, “It’s all very Chicago.”

Contributing editor JAMES CONAWAY wrote “Portland Reigns” in our Nov.-Dec. 2009 issue and “London Step by Step” in March 2009. Photographer MELISSA FARLOW’s last feature assignment for TRAVELER was “Tweet Me in Miami” in our April issue.

Patrons revel in conversation and drinks before comedians take the stage at The Second City (above, left), an improvisational comedy venue where such stars as Dan Aykroyd and Daniel Castellaneta got their start. The shoreline of Lake Michigan (left) sparkles when viewed from the Hancock Tower at dusk.