

Me and You and Everyone We Know: South Loop's The Scout Is Crowded Already

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The Scout lights up the South Loop corner last occupied by Jerry Kleiner's Opera.

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The interior of The Scout, which is in soft-opening mode now in advance of its grand opening on August 19, is done in a style I'd call post-Kleiner: nary an inch of velvet, an ounce of wrought iron, or a dash of primary color anywhere in sight. Instead, the bar follows the formula of a lot of newer Chicago places I've visited over the past couple of years: a big, well-scrubbed version of the typical neighborhood pub. There's wood—and lots of it—in various textures. There's a chandelier made entirely of the industry's lighting darling of the moment, the Edison bulb. Giant flat-screens line the walls as far as the eye can see. It all makes me a little nostalgic for Kleiner's brand of outlandishness. That circus look may have grown dated in the end, but at least the rooms asked us to step into *his* world rather than trying so hard to create one he thought everyone could live in.

But The Scout is clearly doing something right. When The Creative Director and I arrived around 9 p.m. last night, the place was packed: with people, conversations, bustling waitstaff, baseball and soccer on upwards of 30 screens—the whole shebang.

As we stalked a pair of bar stools near a column outfitted with a handy drink shelf, I watched triumphantly as a man and a woman went through the motions of signing their check. But when another couple began to inch in the same direction, I flashed a worried glance at TCD.

“Should I say something?” I hissed.

He shrugged. “Maybe.”

I sidestepped toward the interlopers, who gazed at the bar, stony faced and silent.

“Oh, hi,” I said, a sheepish smile plastered on. “Do you two by any chance have your eye



Though The Scout won't celebrate its grand opening until August 19, Wednesday night saw a packed house.

on that spot? Because—”

“No. We don’t,” replied the girl, barely swiveling toward me in her very tight jeans. I scurried away.

“Wow, that was an acid look if I ever saw one,” TCD said.

Still slightly abashed when we finally claimed the seats, I hid behind the menu and tried to avoid further interaction with my fellow drinkers—a cinch when there are so many sporting events playing out above your head.

For all of the hubbub, The Scout is already a well-oiled machine. Bartenders refilled our glasses quickly (a vodka soda, \$7, for me, and a Magic Hat Number 9, \$5, for him), and our food order arrived promptly (a huge brisket sandwich, \$12, and a burger, \$10). We spent a respectable hour chewing and allowing ourselves to be mesmerized by the screens.

“What do you think of the crowd?” TCD asked after a long interlude.

“High-rise dwellers, first-time condo buyers, newlyweds, XSport members,” I ventured.

On our way out, I spotted Chris Bravos, The Scout’s owner and a former partner in Lake View’s The Pony, and he confirmed my assessment: “When you’ve got 40,000 people living within one square mile of a place, they’re going to find out about it.”



Illuminated beer taps look festive from a distance but are less pleasant for the drinkers basking in the glare.