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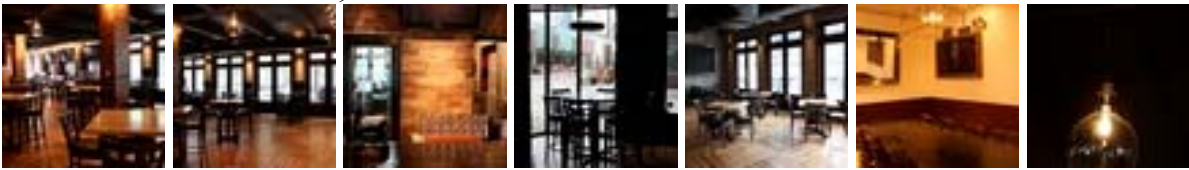
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First Look: The Scout



The interior of the Scout, from the back.





[The Scout](#) may be exactly what the South Loop needs - a comfortable, upscale bar. While we're not huge fans of the scads of big-screen TVs, sports watchers will love it. And we are definitely partial to the beautifully-renovated space, the reclaimed wood bars, the wonderful natural light and the huge beer list. The Scout took over the space that formerly housed Opera, the Jerry Kleiner-designed temple to over-the-top red velvet and mosaic tiles. The new owner, Chris Bravos, has done such extensive re-building that even Opera fans will hardly notice that it's the same space.

We were particularly intrigued by the back bar. Bravos told us that he "wanted to let customers see the inner workings of a bar," and so he turned the iconic Opera "dining vaults" into a giant walk-in cooler. The bar, which fronts the cooler, is lined with glass doors that allow bartenders to grab stock. They also, incidentally, allow patrons to watch all the activity in the back - kegs being restocked, ice being refilled. Bravos hopes it will keep the space energized, while giving bar patrons something to watch. That is, if they're not watching one of the more than 30 televisions.

The bar itself is a beauty. Made from reclaimed 100-year old pine, it just begs you to rest your elbows on it. In fact, The Scout does more with wood than we've seen a restaurant try in a long time. The gleaming hardwood floors warm up the space, and the "bricks" which make up the wall behind the back bar are actually blocks of old Lake Michigan piers. When the woodwork is combined with the amazing light fixtures (hand-blown and hung from hemp rope) and the walls of copper sheeting, you get a space that is more than just another bro-ish sports bar. If you're not into the scene, check out the private room, which can be sealed off from the bar with a giant sliding door. It even has its own sound system, so you can drown out the DJ and plug in your own iPod.

The food hasn't started coming out of the kitchen, but a couple of dishes from the menu caught our eye. Try one of the "signature" foot-long grilled cheese sandwiches - we're gonna scarf down "The Wolf," covered with applewood-smoked bacon and roasted jalapenos. The rest of the menu looks like pretty standard bar fare, at reasonable prices. The beer list includes brews from Goose Island, Magic Hat, Dogfish Head, Two Brothers, and New Belgium, and they will be serving plenty of Iowa-distilled Templeton Rye.

The grand opening is August 19th and 20th, but if you happen to be in the neighborhood, a little bird told us there may be some soft openings over the next couple of weeks.

The Scout is located at 1301 S. Wabash Ave. Ignore the website, it's not opening in June.

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[Anthony Todd](#) in [Food](#) on Aug 4, 2011 1:40 pm

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