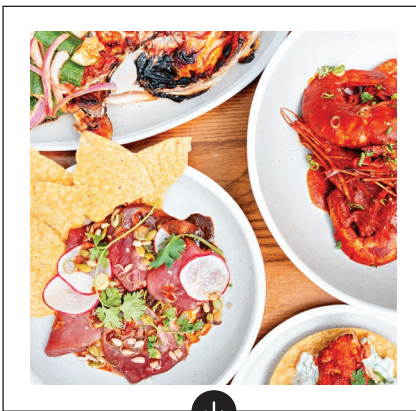


the buzz

Hot off the minds of Midwest travel writers: a fresh look at where to eat, drink, play and stay around the region.



EAT & DRINK



Postcard from the Beach CHICAGO

As you savor the patio sunshine, your margarita, and the sizzling aromas emanating from the kitchen, you might start mistaking Ogden Avenue traffic for ocean waves. Big Star Mariscos has that effect. This new venture from established Chicago restaurateurs stays true to the taco-and-bourbon roots of its sister restaurant, Big Star, but shakes things up with a seafood-centric menu and a chill palette of blue and white.

“Everybody loves Big Star—the sportos, the motorheads and the geeks,” says executive chef Paul Kahan. “So why not do something different and see if it sticks? We’re having a lot of fun at our new spot doing coastal seafood the Big Star way.”

That means tuna tostadas, sea bass ceviche, scallops, clams and, of course, fish tacos. Top them off with a prickly pear margarita; the vacation vibes, like the drinks, are strong. bigstarmariscos.com

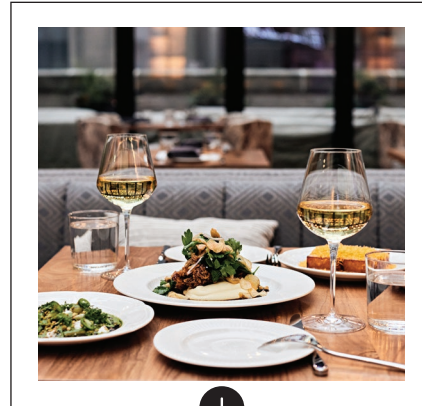
Drive and Dine ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

The Dixboro Project started as a daydream. Years ago, when Sava Farah drove by the leafy acreage she now owns, she would fantasize about launching a destination restaurant. The property, located in an unincorporated village outside Ann Arbor, had seen dining concepts come and go. When new buyers wanted to change the focus from hospitality to office space, Farah and her husband swooped in with an offer.

Now, there are two restaurants to visit. The Dixboro House, in a reclaimed 1880 barn with floor-to-ceiling windows, is the fine-dining spot Farah had always envisioned. Next door, The Boro specializes in wood-fired pizzas, gourmet takeaway meals, coffee and pastries best enjoyed next to the creek or over shared picnic tables on the lawn. thedixboroproject.com

“We wanted a fun, ’90s energy, *Miami Vice* feel in the decor—something that caters to a new generation of hotel guests.”

**DANIEL DEL PRADO,
BLONDETTE**



Bonjour, Miami MINNEAPOLIS

Blondes aren’t the only ones having fun at Blondette, a sleek restaurant in the Rand Tower Hotel. “We wanted a fun, ’90s energy, *Miami Vice* feel in the decor—something that caters to a new generation of hotel guests,” says chef Daniel del Prado. Cue the neon purple lighting, tropical foliage and retractable roof.

Dishes, however, skew French, utilizing ingredients from the Pacific Northwest. Beef tartare comes with fried capers and country bread; nutty Mimolette cheese tops crispy layered potatoes; seasonal grilled chicken comes with foie gras jus. Cocktails—both boozy and nonalcoholic—have delightfully Francophone names, like Pomme Pomme (apple apple) and Chouquette (cutie, named for fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld’s famous cat). And you can guess which country anchors the wine list. Bon appétit! blondettempls.com

Three’s Company MADISON, WISCONSIN

Talk about a triple threat. Northstreet brings together three businesses with a shared patio and mindset. Cafe Domestique delivers artful espresso; Bloom Bake Shop delights with brownies, doughnuts and other pastries; and Young Blood Beer Company pairs sours, ales and stouts with inventive sandwiches—like focaccia topped with chicken thighs and Cool Ranch Doritos. Add a cold brew and an almond croissant to pay equal favor to each venture. northstreetmsn.com



Spirited Away WESTFIELD, INDIANA

Ever heard of a whiskey thief? It’s not a robber with grain alcohol on their breath. Rather, it’s the tool used to sample spirits straight from the barrel—and a cool tour experience at West Fork Whiskey Company.

Launched by three Hoosier natives who already operate a cocktail bar in Indianapolis, this massive agritourism destination sits just north of the city. On-site ventures include a bottle bar with walk-up tastings; a cocktail lounge with leather couches and plenty of nonwhiskey options; and The Mash House, a family-friendly restaurant

PHOTOGRAPHS: (BIG STAR) KELLY SANDOS, (BLONDETTE) CANARY GRAY, (DISTILLERY) COURTESY OF WEST FORK WHISKEY COMPANY

with outdoor seating and bar fare like nachos, wings, burgers and corn puppies. Coming months will bring live music and mixology classes. westforkwhiskey.com

From Adzuki to Zongzi

EDEN PRAIRIE, MINNESOTA

Southwest of Minneapolis, a massive new food hall and grocery store is a wonderland of East Asian dining, ingredients and snacks—like adzuki (pea-size beans boiled with sugar to make red bean paste for sweets) and zongzi (sticky rice stuffed with filling and wrapped in bamboo leaves). Asia Mall is the first of its kind in Minnesota, but if you've read the vivid superstore scenes in Michelle Zauner's bestselling memoir, *Crying in H-Mart*, you can imagine the scope and scale.

Our advice? Come hungry. Dig into roast duck from Home Taste, sample a beef and noodle soup from Pho Mai, or sip on bubble tea from Uni Uni while perusing the grocery aisles. And if you want to take home something über-fresh, don't miss the seafood department. asiamallmn.com

Door County After Dark

FISH CREEK, WISCONSIN

Notwithstanding the fiery spectacle of a fish boil, Wisconsin's Door Peninsula isn't exactly known for hot nightlife. But Hill Street, a new restaurant in Fish Creek, stays open as late as midnight or beyond, depending on the season. The menu features tiki cocktails and comfort foods like grilled cheese and burgers (which, co-owner Karin Watts says, some people are calling Door County's best). Summer revelers congregate at an outdoor bar, while the mood inside invites slowing down. "Sip on some whiskey," Watts says, "and watch *Magnum P.I.* reruns." hillstreetdoorcounty.com



PLAY



Get Your Kicks

INDIANAPOLIS

The sign may have said Closed, but Carl Bradley's friends knew they could stop by after hours. Bradley co-ran a resale sneaker shop and spent his evenings restoring rare, luxury pairs. "One good time turned into repetitive nights of fun and fellowship," Bradley says. "That's when it hit me." He decided to open Kicasso Sneaker Art Bar, where patrons unleash their creativity on canvas—canvas sneakers, that is. "You don't have to be an artist, and it's fun for all ages," Bradley says. "Our classes are self-guided with cool instructors leading the way."

The class fee includes a blank pair of Kicasso kicks, which can be upgraded to Converse All Stars with advance notice. The iconic shoe was created by Indiana native Charles "Chuck" Hollis Taylor, so our suggestion? Wear your new one-of-a-kind sneakers to the Indiana Historical Society's new exhibit, *Chuck Taylor All Star*, which includes a virtual reality basketball experience. kicassoindy.com

Color Me Happy

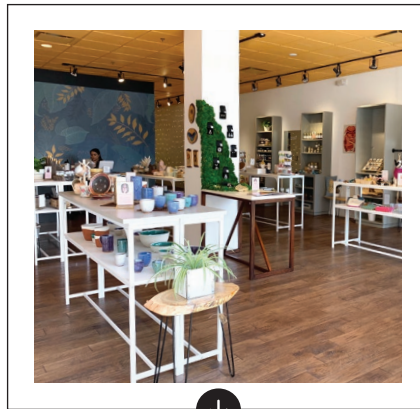
CHICAGO

Bright walls in shades of marigold, seafoam, baby blue and coral greet visitors to Ponnopozz, a hybrid studio-boutique helmed by artist Adrienne Hawthorne in Ravenswood. With its bubblegum pink rug, racks of rainbow-hued clothes and vibrant tea towels, Ponnopozz exudes joy.

“Color is the main focus and inspiration at Ponnopozz,” Hawthorne says. “It informs the art that I create and the pieces we carry.” Hawthorne named the shop for two imaginary friends she had in childhood (Ponno and Pozzer), and she hopes that customers can reconnect with their own creative sides through products like Elle Créé’s paint-by-number kits, horoscope-based puzzles and jewelry in eye-popping colors. ponnopozz.com

Treasures like handmade dinnerware and bespoke dresses nestle among vintage oil paintings and Japanese quilts. Owner Jenna Zerbo, who has worked as a buyer, product designer and merchandiser, says it’s all about “objects with soul,” not a fixed time period: “The mingling between new and old products from all over the world within a historic building gives the shop a special energy.” augustshop.us

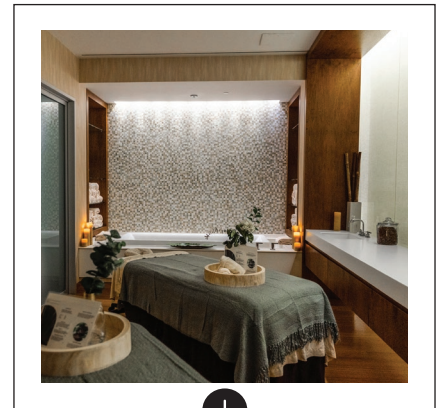
launched last year to showcase 40 local women makers and artists. With collaboration as their North Star, the participants share responsibilities like staffing the shop, creating digital content, overseeing inventory and tracking finances. “As a small-business owner, life can be overwhelming and isolating,” Merino-Franco says. “By having a strong network of like-minded people—artists, entrepreneurs, women and immigrants like myself—we have created a powerful sisterhood and a sustainable retail model.” primitivajewelry.com



All Together Now

MINNEAPOLIS

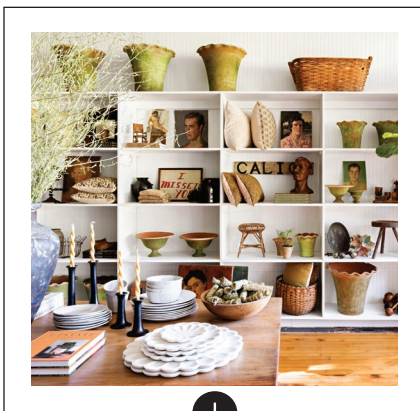
For jewelry designer Laura Merino-Franco, there’s no sense running a business unless everyone is “rowing the boat together.” Enter Primitiva Collective, the shop, online store and social enterprise she



Mother Nature’s Beauty

CHICAGO

The hustle and bustle of downtown Chicago vanishes the moment you step into Leaf Spa, which opened late last year. Located in the Fairmont Chicago Millennium Park, this oasis of calm leans into natural wellness with a rotating menu of services tied to the seasons. In summer, a honey facial sweetens the deal. The Alchemist Bar, open year-round, invites guests to design take-home scrubs, essential oils and tinctures made from healing herbs and plants. Consider these your at-home daily escape. fairmont.com/chicago/spa/leaf-spa



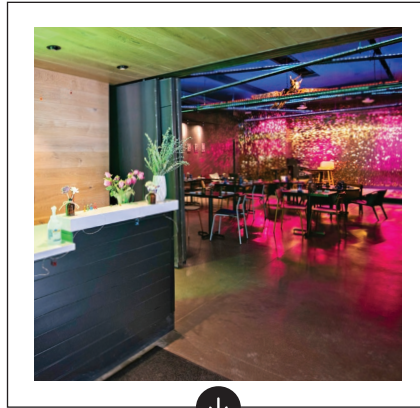
Something Old, Something New

PETOSKEY, MICHIGAN

Tin ceilings and creaky wood floors set the mood at August, an antiques store and home boutique in downtown Petoskey. It’s housed in the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad’s original postal depot. But one peek at the wares, and you’ll know this shop is not locked in the 1880s.

“By having a strong network of like-minded people, we have created a powerful sisterhood and a sustainable retail model.”

**LAURA MERINO-FRANCO,
PRIMITIVA COLLECTIVE**



Eat, Play, Rove

MINNEAPOLIS

A bar and restaurant. A speakeasy. A live music venue. A miniature golf course. It sounds like the lineup along a hip city block, but each of those ventures—and many more—reside under the wide roof of entertainment venue Arts and Rec Uptown. (And don't forget the roof itself, which hosts informal dining and a playful menu of craft cocktails.)

Art takes center stage here, and not only in the black box theater or studio. Local curators, creatives and performers partner with Arts and Rec, ensuring

“We’ve been called an apothecary, an oddities shop, an art gallery and even a workshop. In fact, we’ve taken notes from each one of those places to curate a really unique space.”

**NINA SALEM,
THE INSECT ASYLUM**

that it reflects the full cultural kaleidoscope of Minnesota and beyond. With something for everyone and new surprises each time, the list of reasons to visit (karaoke, comedy, games, drag performances!) keeps growing. artsandrecuptown.com



Bug Out

CHICAGO

Showcasing nearly 2,500 (dead) insects and other unusual specimens, The Insect Asylum is a gem—or glittering beetle, perhaps—of a museum in Chicago's Avondale neighborhood. And it's all the work of Nina Salem, a young taxidermist on the autism spectrum who has always been captivated by the details of the natural world.

“We’ve been called an apothecary, an oddities shop, an art gallery and even a workshop,” Salem says. “In fact, we’ve taken notes from each one of those places to curate a really unique space [dedicated to] showcasing and educating about the beautiful world around us.”

Special events includes painting nights with live subjects (like snakes!), daytime visits from Xena the sloth and friends, and visits with authors on topics like the history of larvae in mezcals (samples included). theinsectasylum.com



STAY

Social Hour

BAYFIELD, WISCONSIN

Past will meet present (and, if all goes as planned, travelers will meet locals) when St. James Social opens this July in northern Wisconsin. Housed in an 1884 building, the boutique hotel will have eight rooms, a rooftop lounge, a sauna, and an indoor-outdoor lobby bar and social lounge. Founder Annalisa Bermel envisions it as the kind of spot where residents and visitors cross paths over a glass of sparkling wine.

“In a world of algorithms and hashtags,” Bermel says, “I wanted to create a place where we are reminded of the beauty that happens when we slow down and become fully present in the community where we are traveling.”

In this case, that community is Bayfield, a charming town that has the good fortune to sit along Lake Superior’s Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. So after all the hikes, sailing cruises and kayak outings, everyone should have plenty to talk about. stjamesocial.com

Light the Way

BURTRUM, MINNESOTA

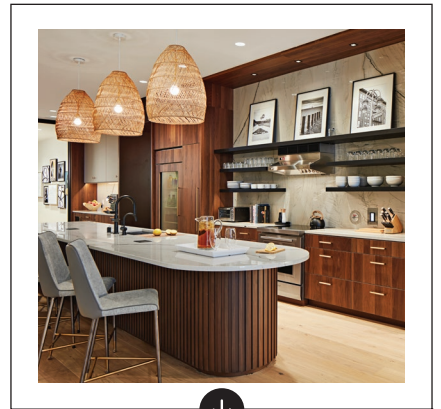
On a secluded plot of land about two hours from the Twin Cities, Stoney Ridge Lighthouse rises above the tree canopy. Why does it exist when there isn’t an ocean (or a Great Lake) for miles? The answer lies in the can-do spirit of the Lange family.

A number of years ago, the Langes built a tree house on their property and started renting it out. “We decided to expand and

share the property with more people,” Donna Lange says, “but my husband, Dean, doesn’t like to build anything twice.”

A longtime lighthouse fan, Dean decided to build his own. He visited Lake Superior’s Split Rock Lighthouse for ideas, then began collecting and processing timber. Over months and years, the seven-story vision—bookable on Vrbo—came to life with the help of family and friends.

“Now it’s ready for renters to enjoy,” Donna says, “and to reconnect with nature with the beacon light guiding their way.”



Make Yourself at Home

MILWAUKEE

Hospitality runs in Charles Bailey’s blood. For decades, his father and grandfather managed The Drake Hotels in Chicago and Oak Brook, Illinois. With Kinn Guesthouse Downtown Milwaukee, Bailey has followed in their footsteps—but with a twist.

Kinn promises luxe home-away-from-home comfort. Guests can relax in spacious rooms or prep food in lavishly outfitted kitchens on each floor. Keyless entry simplifies checking in and out. And right outside, Milwaukee awaits—the art museum, Marcus Center for Performing Arts, the Milwaukee Public Museum and Cathedral Square Park are all within a mile. kinnguesthouse.com/milwaukee