



WINTER DINING

Dining expert **Steve Dolinsky** shares his preferred way to shake off the cold—at one of these cold-weather foodie favorites.

Steve Dolinsky has been reporting on Chicago's food scene for almost 20 years and has tried nearly every restaurant out there. And while Chicago has an abundance of delicious offerings, Dolinsky—aka ABC-7's "Hungry Hound"—has specific requirements for winter dining: "I want two things in winter," says the Bucktown resident. "I want warmth and comfort, but also a reminder that there is summer down the road and light at the end of the tunnel." Such are the guiding principles that keep him coming back to these seasonal food and drink favorites.

"I will only eat cassoulet in the winter, and the first place I go is **Chez Moi** (2100 N. Halsted St., 773-871-2100; chezmoichicago.com). Chef Dominique Tougne is French, and cassoulet is in his DNA. He uses pork, lamb, and duck and serves it in a cast-iron skillet. You're essentially eating his childhood comfort food, but in Lincoln Park instead of Lyon. **Maude's Liquor Bar** (840 W. Randolph St., 312-243-9712; maudesliquorbar.com) also has great cassoulet. It's a shallower pan, with three different types of sausage, red wine, and garlic. It's a soul-satisfying, rib-sticking dish. It's a different vibe at Maude's. At Chez Moi, you're in a neighborhood restaurant; at Maude's there's the brick, the votives, the candles, the music. The atmosphere is very cool, but they don't compromise on ingredients.

"I cannot live without hot chocolate in the wintertime. Growing up I had Swiss Miss, but now my tastes are slightly more sophisticated. At **HotChocolate** (1747 N. Damen Ave., 773-489-1747; hotchocolatechicago.com) theirs is outstanding—hence the name.

It's rich, thick, and intense. It's more of a European hot chocolate. There are a lot of different flavor options, but I grew up in Minnesota, so I like standard milk chocolate. The restaurant is best known for its desserts, but I love it for brunch in the winter, too. They have the best pancake in the city—it's just one artisanal pancake. It's not a flimsy one that needs to be stacked; it's like a beautiful UFO saucer that's crispy and soft. And I'm not even a huge pancake person.

"The new **Xoco** (1471 N. Milwaukee Ave., 872-829-3821; rickbayless.com/xoco) in Wicker Park is great for winter—it's three times the size of the original, so you can really spread out and stay awhile. It's the only place in the city that does hot chocolate from bean to cup—roasting the cacao beans, winnowing them, conching them. They grind them for two days and make three different hot chocolates—authentic, Aztec, and classic. It's got a thick, almost tarlike consistency that is great for dipping churros into.

"**Tank Noodle** (4953-55 N. Broadway, 773-878-2253; tanknoodle.com) in Uptown is another



Maude's Liquor Bar serves up French classics in a stylized bistro setting.



Quaint North Pond, tucked away in Lincoln Park, offers a roaring fire and comfort food to warm you.

ultimate comfort food [destination]. The pho—Vietnamese noodle soup—is like the ultimate facial in a bowl. It's got sliced brisket and a really intense broth that's been simmering for hours. This is where you go to eat like a local—you're getting home cooking. The pho here is as good as any in Houston or Orange County or anywhere with a thriving Vietnamese community.

"**North Pond** (2610 N. Cannon Dr., 773-477-5845; northpondrestaurant.com) is so Chicago—you're tucked into Lincoln Park, and it's one of the only restaurants you can't

drive up to. They've got a great fireplace for winter, and they always have some kind of soft-boiled egg with sweet potato or mushroom that is cooked perfectly.

"In winter, I love ordering drinks that remind me of summer. I refuse to give up! So I try to drink daiquiris. **Billy Sunday** (3143 W. Logan Blvd., 773-661-2485; billy-sunday.com) is a great throwback cocktail lounge, and their daiquiri transports me. It's nice to occasionally have that reminder that it's warm somewhere. The rums rotate but they have fresh lime, fresh grapefruit, bitters, and a



Spiked hot chocolate at HotChocolate... what could be better?



Decisions, decisions: a selection of desserts at Avec.

little bit of maraschino liqueur. It comes in a big goblet with crushed ice and an umbrella—the whole shebang without the 1970s shortcuts. No grenadine, no artificial anything—this is how it was supposed to be made.

“For dessert, **Avec** (615 W. Randolph St., 312-377-2002; avecrestaurant.com) is great in winter. It’s extremely cozy and communal, so it has lots of body warmth. It can be too loud to do a full meal, but they always have one or two sweets that are perfect. Not too much; no overkill. I like to sit at the bar for a treat at the end of the night.”

SUPER SIPPER

When it comes to winter, warm drinks are where it’s at for **Bridget Albert**, mixologist at **Southern Wine & Spirits** and the author of *Market-Fresh Mixology*. Other **Hot Apple Crisp** cocktail, which blends cognac with seasonal flavors like cider and ginger, Albert says, “The hot tea–cider [combination] highlights the warmth and flavor of the cognac and ginger liqueur; it’s the perfect drink to get you warm and cozy on a cold Chicago day.”

- Hot Apple Crisp Cocktail
- 1 oz. Pierre Ferrand ambre cognac
- 1 oz. Domaine de Canton ginger liqueur
- 1 oz. fresh lemon juice
- 1 ½ oz. hot apple cider
- 1 ½ oz. hot double-strength orange ginger tea

Add all ingredients to a cinnamon-and-sugar-rimmed coffee mug. Stir. Garnish with an orange wheel and candied ginger on a pick.

COMFORT FOOD CHIC

A hearty dish can warm the soul in winter like nothing else. Dig into these four grown-up twists on childhood favorites.

Alaskan king crab black truffle gnocchi at

Mastro’s Steakhouse: It’s like mac and cheese but even more addictive—a skillet of gnocchi, smothered in cheese, and topped with bread-crumbs. (520 N. Dearborn St., 312-521-5100; mastrosteakhouse.com)

Grilled cheese at Little

Goat: This isn’t your mom’s Kraft singles concoction. *Top Chef* winner Stephanie Izard uses Gouda and Montmore cheese, pork guanciale, and smoked tomato. (820 W. Randolph St., 312-888-3455; littlegoatchicago.com)

Meatloaf at The Local:

Dry-aged prime beef, wild mushroom jus, and tobacco onions ratchet this meatloaf up a few notches from what you’re used to. (198 E. Delaware Pl., 312-280-8887; thelocalchicago.com)

Pistachio s’mores bar at State and Lake Tavern:

The toasted marshmallow fluff and graham cracker crunch satisfy your inner child, while pistachio custard and Valrhona chocolate mousse cater to any sophisticated adult. (201 N. State St., 312-239-9400; stateandlakechicago.com)



Little Goat’s grilled cheese.