



BellyQ serves up Korean fusion with flair.

moment of zen

THE WEST LOOP WELCOMES A NEW DREAM TEAM. BY MEG MATHIS

BellyQ, Bill Kim's third fast-casual effort after Belly Shack and Urbanbelly, is all about harmony. A collaboration with Michael Jordan and Cornerstone Restaurant Group, the Asian barbecue restaurant blends natural and industrial elements with lofted ceilings, wooden benches, and infrared tabletop grills, where would-be chefs can test their skills on house specialties such as Korean short rib or banana-leaf-wrapped salmon with jasmine rice. Although the stripped-down interior reveals the former One Sixtyblue space's past life as a pickle factory, a mural of galloping horses, a karaoke

den, and the adjacent BQ2GO takeout space foster a decidedly modern, interactive vibe; the wood-burning oven remains to churn out savory Asian pancakes in varieties like double-smoked bacon and kimchi, which Kim serves with a black-vinegar-sesame soy sauce. Meanwhile, the beverage program from former Sepia mixologist Peter Vestinos strikes a balance of bold and light. Choose from a selection of sakes and five culinary-inspired cocktails including the refreshing Serpentine, a mix of sudachi soju, coconut vinegar plum infusion, and cucumber. 1400 W. Randolph St., 312-563-1010; bellyqchicago.com



Carriage House offers traditional fare with a bit of soul.

country gentleman

MICHAEL SIMON OFFERS SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY IN A GLASS.

TO ECHO EXECUTIVE CHEF MARK STEUER'S soulful menu at Wicker Park newcomer Carriage House (think skillet corn bread and a South Carolina clam boil), mixologist Michael Simon is serving traditional and reimagined rum- and whiskey-centric cocktails as well as a selection of punches. Simon overachieves with the Lazy Man's Old Fashioned, laboriously mixing The Scarlet Trinidad Ibis rum and allspice with orange skins that he systematically blanches in coconut palm nectar, shocks with ice, and purées with a mango vinegar for a potent reduction. Meanwhile, the Lionel Hutz—which Simon and Carriage House general manager Michael Velo named in honor of *The Simpsons*—blends Four Roses Single Barrel bourbon, creole lemonade, and agave with the house specialty, a homemade sweet tea infused with peaches. "These drinks are meant for relaxing on the porch on a hot day," says Simon of his Charleston-with-a-twist recipes. "You'd never know how super-involved it is behind the scenes." 1700 W. Division St., 773-384-9700; carriagehousechicago.com **MA**



Young Walnut, introduced by Koval Distillery.

WALNUT ROOM

Koval Distillery gives Chicagoans a taste of the Alps.

Ravenswood-based boutique distillery Koval has won awards for more than a dozen of its spirits, including a gold medal at the 2012 International Whisky Competition for its Lion's Pride 47th Ward whiskey. This month, Koval founders Sonat and Robert Birnecker introduce Young Walnut, a dark brown, spicy, Austrian-style liqueur made with certified organic and kosher nuts from Oriana's Orchard & Nursery in Skokie. "It's lovely after duck and hearty meats," says Koval president Sonat Birnecker of the traditional European digestif, which she and husband Robert make by cleaning, cutting, and macerating the soft nuts with white whiskey using a traditional recipe Robert inherited from his grandparents. Adds Sonat, "It's nice to bring that tradition to Chicago." 5121 N. Ravenswood Ave., 312-878-7988; koval-distillery.com