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3 Chicago restaurants pick up 2021 Michelin stars, including 2 stars each for newcomers Ever and Moody Tongue

FEEDBACK

By JOSH NOEL
CHICAGO TRIBUNE | APR 29, 2021



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Three Chicago restaurants were named first-time recipients of Michelin stars Thursday, and four restaurants dropped off the esteemed list after a turbulent year for the restaurant industry.

The three restaurants picking up stars all opened since Michelin last handed out honors in September 2019. The four losing their status have all closed during the last year.

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Among the new winners, Michelin awarded two stars to Ever, [launched last summer](#) by celebrated chef Curtis Duffy. Two stars also went to Moody Tongue

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work — particularly at Longman & Eagle — has been regularly honored by Michelin.

Spanish and Portuguese seafood restaurant Porto, [which also opened in late 2019](#), was given one star.

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Chef Jared Wentworth, left, and brewmaster Jared Rouben at Moody Tongue. The restaurant and brewery received two stars from the Michelin Guide. (Iohn I. Kim / Chicago Tribune)

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Alinea remains Chicago's only restaurant with a three-star rating from the Michelin Guide, whose annual ratings play a significant role in anointing restaurant industry royalty, especially among travelers, tourists and suburbanites exploring the city.

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In addition to Ever and Moody Tongue, three other Chicago restaurants maintained two star designations: Smyth, Oriole and Acadia.

Seventeen Chicago restaurants kept their one-star ratings.

The four restaurants to fall off the list, all of which had one Michelin star and have closed, are: Band of Bohemia, Blackbird, Everest and Kikko. (Julia Momose, co-founder of the Kikko restaurant formerly housed inside the still-open Kumiko cocktail bar, said Wednesday she considers Kikko's closure to be long-term "with change on the horizon.")

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With unprecedented closures and changes in business models due to the COVID-19 pandemic — along with questions about the ability of Michelin inspectors to access restaurants to judge them — it was unclear how this year's list might be impacted by broad industry disruptions.

But the Michelin Guide erred on the side of conservatism, dropping only restaurants no longer open and letting even those that have been closed longer than most — such as Acadia, which has been shuttered since August with no announcement about a reopening — to keep their stars.

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based on a long history and experience with these restaurants prior to and during the pandemic.”

Gwendal Poullennec, international director of the Michelin Guides, said inspectors visited restaurants in Chicago in early 2020, paused in spring due to the pandemic, then started eating out again in summer.

Chicago restaurants maintaining one-star ratings in the 2021 Michelin Guide are: Boka, EL Ideas, Elizabeth, Elske, Entente, Goosefoot, Mako, Next, North Pond, Omakase Yume, Parachute, Schwa, Sepia, Spiaggia, Topolobampo and Yūgen.

Multiple stars for Ever was little surprise; Duffy’s previous restaurant with partner Michael Muser, Grace, garnered multiple years of three Michelin stars before [closing in late 2017](#) after a dust-up with their main investor. If anything, the surprise in 2021 was that Ever didn’t get three stars.

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In notes released Thursday, Michelin inspectors said Duffy and Muser “have triumphantly returned” and that Ever offers “a bespoke room where the chef’s vision of fine dining enchants palates with complex flavors, stirring textures and visual fireworks.”

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Ostera caviar, with crab, cucumber, and citrus lace, at Ever. (John J. Kim / Chicago Tribune)

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Muser said he and Duffy weren't sure the restaurant had been open long enough to merit 2021 recognition. The restaurant was open for indoor service from July until October, then pivoted to offering to-go options after a forced shutdown due to the pandemic. It reopened in February.

"We celebrated barely three months of service and then shut down, duct taped the team back together, and we're just now finding a rhythm," Muser said. "It was just a really nice thing for them to even put us in the book for three months of service. Dude, it's an honor."

Muser noted that Grace got two stars in its first year before graduating to three. He said Ever hopes to add one more star with the 2022 announcements.

"Of course, Curtis is laser beamed," Muser said. "Curtis is absolutely focused on

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The Michelin Guide's chief inspector, who remains anonymous in interviews, said no restaurants new to the Michelin selections in 2021 — which also include evaluations of the dining scene in New York City and Washington, D.C. — debuted with three stars.

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“To debut at two is a remarkable feat,” the chief inspector said.

A star also seemed likely for Moody Tongue; Wentworth was repeatedly honored with one Michelin star for his work at Longman & Eagle and Dusek's Board & Beer. But Moody Tongue founder and brewmaster Jared Rouben said two stars stunned him.

“When I got the call and I heard the word ‘two,’ it sounded so different from ‘one’ — I had to think about it for a second, and then my smile was so big it hurt my face,” Rouben said. “This has always been the goal — to bring beer and food together and to be recognized by Michelin.”

FEEDBACK When Moody Tongue moved from a smaller brewery in Pilsen [to its current home on the Near South Side](#), Rouben, who is also a trained chef, recruited Wentworth to run the kitchen. Moody Tongue opened its dining room and [launched a \\$155 beer pairing menu](#) in October 2019. It also operates a bar serving high-end pub fare from the same kitchen.

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The beer selection at Moody Tongue includes aperitif pilsner, from left, roasted cocoa oatmeal nitro stout, sour raspberry framboise, hazy mango pineapple IPA, salted gose, sliced nectarine IPA and bourbon barrel aged 12 layer cake imperial stout. (John J. Kim / Chicago Tribune)

Michelin inspectors were impressed by the pairing menu, saying the beers are “seamlessly woven into the kitchen’s compositions.”

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“The fact it’s a working brewery and the fact that it’s a beer pairing makes it really distinct and adds a lot of personality to the overall restaurant, but at the end of the day the food that chef Wentworth is putting out is so incredibly impressive,” the chief inspector said.

After an eight-month pause due to the pandemic, Moody Tongue will serve its 12-course beer pairing menu again starting May 20. The cost has been boosted to \$225 per person — due to the price of ingredients, Rouben said — plus tax and tip.

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Though employing food as an ingredient in beer has become common, Rouben was among the first brewers to embrace the trend in Chicago, all the way back to his days brewing [for Goose Island's Clybourn Avenue brewpub](#).

“We started Moody Tongue with a focus on bringing food and beer together, and this is the culmination,” he said.

Band of Bohemia, which had been given one Michelin star every year from 2016 until 2019, was the nation's only starred brewery, with [a particularly unique approach to pairing beer and food](#) that included dishes growing out of the flavor profiles of the beers. Band of Bohemia announced in October that [it would close permanently](#); however, Moody Tongue's two stars mean Chicago is still home to the sole starred brewery in the United States.

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Porto was opened by Daniel Alonso of the Bonhomme Hospitality Group, inspired by his family's home in Galicia, Spain, where he spent summers as a child on the northwest Spanish coast. The restaurant group's Mama Delia, a Spanish restaurant in Wicker Park, also garnered accolades from Michelin this week, scoring a Bib Gourmand award as [one of 58 restaurants in Chicago](#) singled out for offering quality food at a reasonable price.

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Porto restaurant's executive chef Marcos Campos, left, pastry chef Shannah Primiano, and Chef de cuisine Erwin Mallet on April 28, 2021. The restaurant, which focuses on Portuguese and Spanish cuisine, has been awarded a Michelin star. (Abel Uribe / Chicago Tribune)

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Marcos Campos, Bonhomme's executive chef, said the recognition for Porto was a surprise, but greatly appreciated after a difficult first year for the restaurant that opened in December 2019. After being closed from March 2020 through late July due to the pandemic, Porto became primarily focused on survival, Campos said.

"We were pushing to survive, not pushing to focus on a Michelin star — just pushing ourselves to be better," he said.

Michelin recognition is likely to make survival much easier, bringing fresh attention and curiosity to the restaurant.

"I'm excited, but also nervous too," Campos said. "I think and I hope it'll give us a little boost and to let us show people what Porto is all about."

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Josh Noel
Chicago Tribune



Josh Noel has worked for the Chicago Tribune since 2005, and covered beer and the beer industry since 2009. He is author of the 2018 book, "Barrel-Aged Stout and Selling Out: Goose Island, Anheuser-Busch and How Craft Beer Became Big Business."

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