

# Charlie Trotter's

816 WEST ARMITAGE AVE.

CHICAGO

773.248.6228  
charlietrotters.com

dinner  
Tue thru Sat

20% TIP

How food is brought from the kitchen is just as important as the food brought to the dining room. As stated in the Edmund Lawler book "Lessons in Service from Charlie Trotter," Charlie Trotter's is built on four fundamental pillars: food, wine, ambience and service. The chef professes that even the most exquisite food can't make up for lackluster service.

That's why I was excited when my business afforded me a recent trip to Chicago to experience the service and see if the restaurant lives up to its reputation of providing the ultimate dining experience. I made reservations for dinner two months in advance and was fortunate to get an evening in the kitchen. My guests and I were greeted by the valet, who led us up the steps to the front door. In the foyer, several staff members extended their welcome, addressed each of us as sir or madam, took our coats and escorted us to the kitchen table. We entered chef Trotter's house and knew we were special guests for the evening.

The table is tucked into a corner of the bustling kitchen and can seat from four to six people. Chairs were pulled out for guests; after being comfortably settled in, we were asked about any dietary restrictions. An allergy to seafood was deftly accommodated.

The kitchen menu included 15 courses. The service was like a symphony. On each downbeat, the two ladies were served first and the gentlemen were served immediately after. Water and wine were poured without asking, silverware was replaced after each course, questions were encouraged and many were appropriately answered.

The answer to a question about the source of the California-raised sturgeon was vague, as the farm or locale was not identified. Unfortunately, the forks offered for eating the associated caviar were silver, not the customary mother-of-pearl or nonmetallic utensils.

For the second dinner, we were welcomed back, addressed by our names and escorted to the upstairs dining room. The evening began with champagne, compliments of the chef. The waiter gave us the choice of selecting dinner off the printed "grand" menu or having the chef prepare special courses. When we hesitated, the waiter explained that several items on the menu were the same as offered on the previous visit. We were pleased by the chef's choices.

Servers looked and acted professionally both evenings. They were dressed in suits, shirts were pressed, all were clean-cut, hair was neat and off their faces and men were

cleanshaven. The sommelier — who served food when needed — waiters and bussers assisted at any table that needed service at any particular time. We never heard them say "this is not my table." Staff members replaced napkins when guests temporarily left the table and were always present to pull out chairs.

Our experience at Charlie Trotter's was exquisite. The service, while professional and exacting, showed off the unique personalities of the staff and put diners at ease. This exceptional restaurant trait made up for any foibles that may have occurred.

Chicago, like many U.S. cities, suffers from poor service in many of its restaurants. There are, however, other area restaurants that follow Trotter's philosophy: Lou Mitchell's Restaurant & Bakery on West Jackson Boulevard and Vinnie's Sub Shop on West Grand Avenue.



The staff at Charlie Trotter's remained professional while each server was allowed to show off his or her unique personality. Unlike staid restaurants, this ambience put diners at ease.



## TIPPING GUIDE

0% = No Service, 5% = Inadequate Service, 10% = Barely Adequate Service, 15% = Good Service, 20% = Outstanding Service

*Our reviewer, who will remain anonymous, has more than 25 years of experience as a waiter, owner, manager, maitre d' and sommelier. He was trained in a four-star restaurant in upstate New York and has helped open four successful restaurants in Napa and Sacramento.*