

## Chicago Restaurant Week: Good for Your Stomach, Bad for Your Soul

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Every dime I make goes towards food. Street food, artisan food, foodie food, Whole Foods – I’m always looking for the next life-changing bite.

I think it’s genetic. My sister, a former chef, worked in highly-esteemed restaurants like Chicago’s Green Zebra and Washington, D.C.’s, Ripple. My aunt reacts to restaurant reviews like tabloids to a Miley Cyrus haircut (“Did you hear what Pete Wells wrote about Per Se? Just awful!”) Even my little nephew knows the difference between nantes and chanteray carrots. Gastronomy runs deep in my blood.

So, while my friends got pumped for the Superbowl, I got pumped for Restaurant Week.

Restaurant Week, aka the most magical time in winter, is when the finest dining establishments showcase their best dishes on a prix fixe menu. The idea is to lure customers out of their hibernating slump and convince them that potential hypothermia is a fair trade for Stephanie Izard’s escargot ravioli. While I probably take less convincing than someone who doesn’t dream about ways to use candied orange peel in savory dishes, I imagine the lure of a full, satisfied belly isn’t too hard a sell on any Chicagoan. We love our food.

I decided to start filling my waist (and emptying my wallet) at Sunda, the see-and-be-seen “new Asian” spot by Billy Dec, Brad Young and Arturo Gomez. The waitress approached to list the specials – a duck dish and unagi – finishing with a grinning endorsement for the Bluefin Toro.

“Seriously, it’s amazing. It’s like the best thing I’ve ever had,” she gushed.

Suddenly, despite it being eight o’clock and having skipped lunch in anticipation of a four-course meal, I lost my appetite.

“I’m sorry, I have to go.” I stuffed my notebook back in my purse and darted for the door.

Obviously, I started this article to write about the food. Instead, I’m going to write about why I no longer eat at restaurants that serve blue fin tuna.

Eating a wild predator on the brink of extinction is wrong. More than wrong, it's rapidly destroying an entire ecosystem. Had the waitress enthusiastically recommended the Bengal tiger, flown in this morning from the final vestiges of virgin rainforest, I think everyone would be horrified. Yet, Bluefin tuna are essentially swimming tigers, at least ecologically. So why was I the only person in the restaurant not smiling and ordering more?

Killing and eating any sentient animal requires a degree of violence, of course. And animal agriculture is a major contributor to climate change. I'm not arguing either of those points. Most of my foodie-friends love a great filet and I would never deprive them of that pleasure. I'm arguing that *killing and eating an endangered species should be illegal*.

For those of you who didn't watch Oceana's 2010 commercial to save the Bluefin tuna – featuring actor Adrian Grenier and his sparkling sea-kelp eyes – they were in trouble back when *Entourage* was still cool, and they're still in trouble today. Bluefin are massive, delicious and can sell into the hundreds of thousands. As a result, they're being hunted much faster than they can reproduce. They're also the top of the ocean's food chain, capable of living up to 40 years and can weigh up to 990 pounds.

In short, Bluefin are kings of the ocean. And, as kings, they're responsible for maintaining order in the kingdom. Bluefin eat mostly smaller-sized fish, such as mackerel, herring and sardines. Those fish then eat even smaller fish, as well as fish eggs and larger zooplankton. Zooplankton eat mostly phytoplankton. Phytoplankton don't eat anybody; they're the base of the chain and photosynthesize for energy, like trees or any other plant.

If Bluefin populations die out, the whole system is thrown out of balance. If there aren't enough Bluefins eating smaller fish, the smaller fish populations grow out-of-control. As these smaller-fish populations grow, they eat all the zooplankton. When there's not enough zooplankton, the smaller fish starve, leaving an ocean of top predators (such as dolphins and orca) and phytoplankton, with nothing in between. Since top predators eat the "in between," it doesn't take long for them to die out too. The ocean becomes barren.

I love food. I love eating new things. But I think even my most carnivorous friends would rather eat animals hunted sustainably or farmed, so they can continue eating those animals for years to come.