

Five of Chicago's best rooftop bars

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Lynn Brown



(Credit: Amy Ulivieri/ NoMi Garden/ Yun Sun Park)

Local award-winning sommelier Regine Rousseau loves rooftop bars almost as much as she loves wine. Here are her top spots in the Windy City, from low-key hangs to ultra luxe champagne lists.

Known as the "Windy City" and notorious for its frigid winters, Chicago might not seem like a natural location for open-air bars. But for sommelier, media personality and events planner **Regine Rousseau**, it's a perfect pairing.



The SpecialList

An award-winning writer, speaker and entrepreneur, Regine Rousseau is the founder and CEO of Shall We Wine. She is frequently featured as a wine expert on WGN Chicago and other local television broadcasts, and was named one of the top "40 African-American Tastemakers". She holds a Level II certification from the International Sommelier Guild.

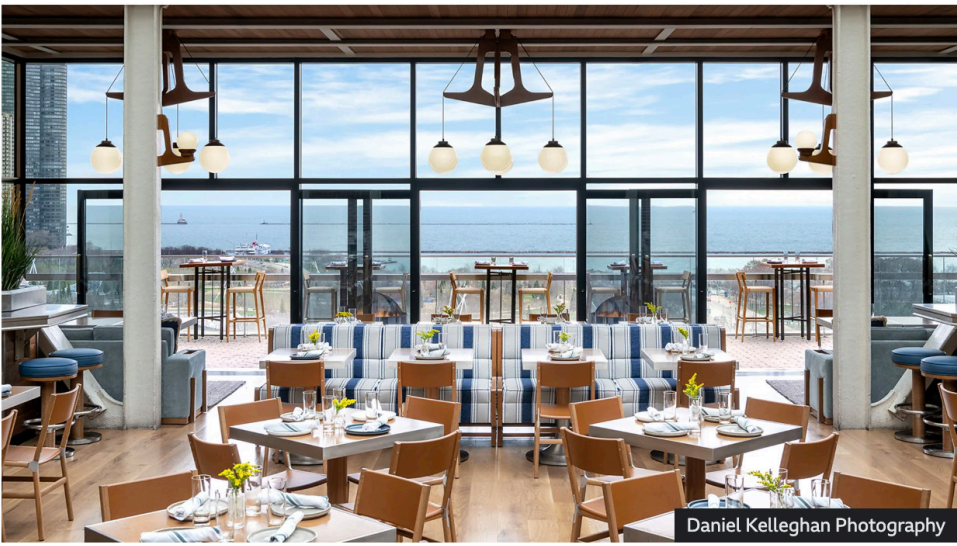
(Credit: Nora Canfield)

"We Chicagoans appreciate a rooftop because we have to deal with the winter," she told BBC. "As soon as it's nice outside, even if you have a winter day where it's sunny... we put our shorts on, we're going outside. And if a restaurant happens to have a patio or rooftop that can be open during the winter, we go in."

The city's rooftop culture is pervasive and enthusiastic: "I don't know if I've ever been to any other city where people talk about 'let's go to a rooftop' like they're talking about a sporting event. It's serious here." A self-proclaimed "sky-hopper", Rousseau frequently scouts the city's rooftops – and their wine lists – to find the perfect backdrop for her clients' mile-high luxury events. "We have such a gorgeous view [in Chicago], so if you can be on the rooftop [where] you can see the view of downtown, that's something that even we natives [appreciate]."

When she's not planning sky scraping soirees or sharing her wine expertise on **local media**, the Chicago-born Rousseau is a tireless champion for her hometown beyond its nightlife.

"Chicago is the greatest city in the world," she said. "It's a friendly city. You can stop and ask people questions. You can ask someone for recommendations, like, 'Oh, I'm walking down the street; any place good to eat?' We're still that kind of town where people talk to you and people are excited to have you as a tourist."



Daniel Kelleghan Photography

Unwind from an afternoon of shopping with a relaxed rooftop lunch at Cindy's on the 13th storey of the historic Chicago Athletic Association (Credit: Daniel Kelleghan Photography)

4. Best for a post-shopping lunch: Cindy's

Overlooking Millenium Park with its famous **"Bean"** sculpture, and surrounded by downtown shopping opportunities, **Cindy's** is Rousseau's top pick for a delicious post-shopping lunch.

"[It's] super cool because there's a specific [lift] that goes there," she said. "It's in a historic building, the **Chicago Athletic Association**, so right when you walk in, it's all about Chicago history." The structure, built in 1890, was once home to one of the city's most exclusive members clubs. "They preserved the wood and all the details. You're automatically walking into a space that you feel like something special is about to go down."

High up on the 13th storey of the historic site, Cindy's serves elegant New American cuisine featuring locally-sourced dishes like Pink Moon Oysters, truffle fries and rainbow trout with braised cannellini beans, arugula pistou and chevril. "They have great salads. I know that it sounds boring... but it's hard to find a really good salad to me. They [also] have a grilled cheese and tomato that is delicious."

Rousseau offered an insider tip: "If you can, get a seat on the balcony that overlooks Michigan Avenue and Lake Michigan... You know how you walk into a space and all of a sudden your attitude changes? If you were kind of slumped over, you're like, 'Wait, I'm at Cindy's.'"