

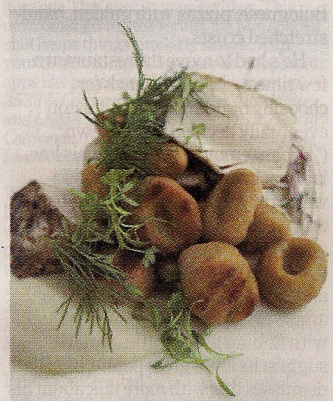
Three-way

What local chefs are doing with **kraut**

► The beauty of sauerkraut lies in the purity of the process—vegetables simply sit and ferment in salt and their own juices over time. Fermenting everything from apple to fennel, **Paul Virant of Vie** takes full advantage of the process to add sweet-sour complexity to his winter dishes. For his braised short ribs, he sought City Farm's white Japanese turnips, which take on a sweeter flavor as kraut and counter the dish's horseradish-infused crème fraîche. "Vegetables that can be harvested around the same time seem to have a natural flavor affinity toward each other," he says. (4471 Lawn Ave, Western Springs, 708-246-2082)



◀ **Blackbird chef Mike Sheerin** is a sauerkraut purist by nature—his Polish grandmother cured the stuff beneath her front porch steps, for starters. But there's definitely progress in his latest creation. Sheerin measures salt in precise ratio to paper-thin green cabbage and agitates it daily during the two-week fermentation period. Then, he dehydrates the resulting kraut, grinds it and incorporates the end product into his gnocchi and serves it with grilled California sturgeon, celery-root puree and a salad of Anjou pears and red onion. (619 W Randolph St, 312-715-0708)



► Probiotic-laden sauerkraut can be an underappreciated health food. **Fred Markoff of fRedhots** takes his kraut one step further for what he considers one of the healthiest dogs on the menu. Encased organic buffalo meat is grilled and topped with a kraut that's simmered overnight in antioxidant-rich pomegranate juice until the cabbage adopts a beet-red hue. Served with whiskey brown mustard atop a whole-wheat bun, it's enough, Markoff says, to win over customers who swear they don't normally like the funky stuff. (1707 Chestnut Ave, Glenview, 847-657-9200)—Tracy Evans



Top nosh



BACON JUICE BLTs are supposed to be all about the tomatoes, and they're supposed to be made when those tomatoes are so ripe and juicy that the bacon, lettuce and mayo only serve as backup. But tomatoes like that are nonexistent in the middle of winter, which is why at **Juicy Wine Co.'s Tuesday night BLT and pinot noir promotion**, it's all about the pork. The sandwich is made using two hefty slices of Red Hen sandwich bread, a pile of crunchy lettuce and some decent tomato slices, but none of that manages to make a dent in the intensely smoky, addictively salty thick-cut bacon from Germany. To celebrate the sandwich, Juicy owner Rodney Alex is offering every bottle of pinot noir at half price that night. He claims that pinot and bacon just have an affinity for one another, and that's hard to argue with: the wine is ripe and juicy where the tomatoes are not. 694 N Milwaukee Ave at Huron St (312-492-6620).—David Tamarkin

Just opened

A MOVEABLE FEAST Like Dorothy's Kansas farmhouse, Tapas Valencia has been transported from west suburban Bloomingdale (where it shuttered two months ago) to the magical land of the South Loop (where it's slated to open Monday 23). Little has been displaced en route: Tapas vary from popular staples—bacon-wrapped dates, *patatas bravas*, seafood paella—to more straightforward fare like baked salmon with goat cheese and grilled filet mignon. An all-Spanish wine list and cocktail lineup featuring a "sangriatini" should go over better in the city, where getting home involves only a click of the heels (and a CTA pass). 1530 S State St (312-842-4444).—Julia Kramer



Eat Out

Bites & benders

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THURSDAY **26**

Fasten your seat belts, it's going to be a boozy week. Tonight, **Lush Wine & Spirits** introduces a **new monthly wine-tasting class** based on its "School of Lush" classes. The classes are just like "School of Lush"—they'll get progressively advanced—but there are two important differences: (1) They're held at Belgravia Group's Union Row properties. (2) They're free. **Every fourth Thursday, 7–8:30pm. 644 W 16th St (312-738-1900).**

SATURDAY **28**

With just more than two weeks till **St. Paddy's Day**, it's time to flex and stretch your liquor-consuming muscles. And there's no better training ground than **Streeterville's St. Practice Day pub crawl**. The crawl starts at **Timothy O'Toole's Pub** and ends at **Grape Street and Vine**, hitting four bars in between. Green attire is encouraged (yes, seriously). **Free (reservation required), 8pm. 622 N Fairbanks Ct (312-642-0700).**

TUESDAY **3**

Local sommelier **Henry Bishop** has served wine at Spiaggia, Salsipicon and even clad in pajamas and a bow-tie when feeling festive. Just currently he's battling breast cancer. Spiaggia hosts a **Special Night for the Crooked Sommelier in the World** with food from an all-star cast and a wine auction, with proceeds to help cover the costs of Bishop's care. **\$200, 7–11pm. (henrybishop.wine@708-246-2082 for reservations)—Alex Foster**