



Going in Circles

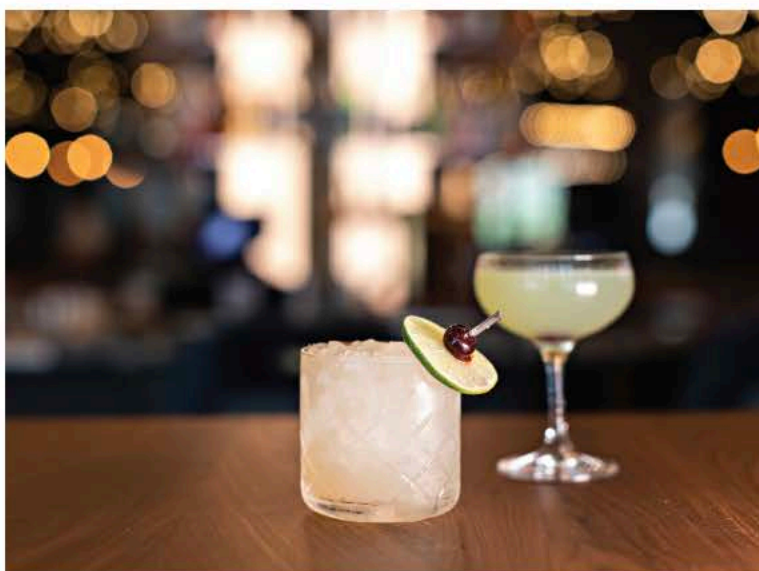
A NEW LOOP RESTAURANT AND BAR CONCEPT PUTS A WHIMSICAL NEW SPIN ON HAPPY HOUR.

BY JACQUELYN LUMLEY

“Another round of drinks” takes on a new meaning at the Loop’s latest hot spot. From the minds behind neighborhood staples Cochon Volant and Taureaux Tavern, Francois Frankie (222 W. Randolph St., 312.600.9659, francoisfrankie.com) beckons with classic cocktails, chef Mike Sheerin’s brasserie-inspired eats (think blackened redfish and chopped steak sandwiches), and, fronting the space, a grand carousel bar that isn’t just for show—it’s there to take you on a ride.

Inspired by the famous rotating carousel bar at Hotel Monteleone in New Orleans and executed by award-winning Chicago-based studio 555 International, the glittering 21-seat bar is adorned with six oil paintings and spins at about one rotation an hour. “We wanted it to feel like you were outside in a courtyard sitting next to this beautiful carousel, day or night,” says 555 International founder James Geier. In the dining room, that translates to twinkling lights cast across an exposed ceiling and plaster wall panels the color of a dusky night sky “suggestive of an abstract landscape,” says senior designer Jennifer Whang. The result? An ambiance that’s “fantastical but informal,” explains Geier. “Elevated but not.”

Executing a full-size carousel in the middle of a major business district was no easy feat. “Mechanically, it’s a huge challenge. Motors, raceways, wheels, you name it. Nothing like this has ever been done in the city of Chicago,” adds Geier, whose firm has the unique ability to design, manufacture and deliver each element. The final product melds two worlds and transports city dwellers into an imaginative space where a seat at the bar means a ride (or two) around the room.



From top: The carousel bar at Francois Frankie spins at the leisurely rate of about one rotation per hour; the craft cocktail selection includes classics like the Hemingway Daiquiri and Last Word; twinkling lights give the feeling of sitting in an alfresco courtyard.



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