

## FIVE TO TRY

## Choice cafes

**KEY:** \$ \$15 and under; \$\$ \$16-\$30; \$\$\$ \$31-\$50; \$\$\$\$ \$51+ (per person, excluding drinks, tax and gratuity)

**CAFE CENTRAL**

455 Central, Highland Park;  
(847) 266-7878

**Vibe:** People refer to this classy bistro as "Carlos' light" — if you are not up for the haute at Carlos' a few miles away (same owners), this is the perfect lower-priced alternative. Cafe Central can be noisy when full but the roar of the good food drowns a lot of it out. Service is snappy.

**Flavor:** Start with the steamed mussels and frites or the gloriously garlicky escargots. For an entree, how about the roasted chicken or the grilled salmon or the whitefish? The expansive Salad Nicoise (or the Cobb salad) would work nicely as a light entree. The lunch menu offers a nice choice of soups, salads (the poached chicken salad is a signature dish) and sandwiches.

**Kids:** Yes

**Cost:** \$\$

**CAFE IBERICO**

739 N. LaSalle, (312) 573-1510

**Vibe:** Cafe Iberico has become one of the best tapas restaurants around. A rather large second dining room was added several years ago. In either dining room, don't expect anything fancy; this is dining without a lot of atmosphere drama.

**Flavor:** I am fixated on a select range of cold tapas here that include tuna cannelloni, tortilla Espanola, jamon Iberico, and the mixed seafood salad. On the hot end, I focus on beef tenderloin skewers, grilled octopus and grilled shrimp. Now bring on the *raciones*, or entrees. Paella, without a doubt (four styles, but I rather enjoy the "paella Iberica").

**Kids:** Maybe.

**Cost:** \$\$

**CAFE SELMARIE**

4729 N. Lincoln, (773) 989-5595

**Vibe:** When the umbrella tables are pitched on Fountain Square, this is the place to be on a summer's eve; a taste of Europe without crossing the pond. Almost 25 years old, Cafe Selmarie is steeped in casual at-



The Salad Nicoise makes a great starter or light entree at Cafe Central.

RICHARD A. CHAPMAN/SUN-TIMES

**Kids:** Yes

**Cost:** \$\$ (dinner); \$ breakfast and lunch

**CAFE BORGIA**

17923 Torrence, Lansing,  
(708) 474-5515

**Vibe:** This fine trattoria will be moving this summer (a firm date has not been set) to Munster, Ind. I will miss the Romanesque facade and the intimate charm here, but when you have to grow you have to grow. I hope the family-friendly staff follows owners Mike and Karen Jesso to the new location!

**Flavor:** Hopefully, the bread slathered with eggplant and caramelized onion, the mussels marinara, the insalata Caprese, the baked penne, the chicken Vesuvio, and the veal limone will make it to the new digs. The *zuccotto* (chocolate cake stuffed with chocolate mousse and pistachios) is a good way to end a meal.

**Kids:** Definitely

**Cost:** \$\$

**CAFE BERNARD**

2100 N. Halsted, (773) 871-2100

**Vibe:** Cafe Bernard was one of the first bistros on any block (and with a chalkboard menu, too) around town. What's really nice is that the feel of the place has not changed all that much. Casual yet efficient service blends right in with the comfortable atmosphere. The Red Rooster in the back is a romantic hideaway, perfect for a snack and a glass of wine.