



discover more

Get the scoop on a few of Chicago's lesser-known spots from Jessica Mlinaric's book.

VANDERPOEL ART MUSEUM

Inside a Chicago Park District field house, locals lob basketballs on the first floor. But upstairs, you'll find an art gallery with paintings by Grant Wood, Mary Cassatt and James McNeill Whistler. (The museum is currently closed for renovations.)

RICHLAND CENTER FOOD COURT

Sample dumplings, boba tea and hand-pulled noodles in this no-frills basement food court, an unofficial restaurant incubator in Chinatown (with at least four success stories).

BLUES HEAVEN FOUNDATION

Tour the building that housed Chess Records, where Aretha Franklin, Etta James, Muddy Waters and The Rolling Stones recorded hits. Check the schedule for occasional outdoor concerts.

REEBIE STORAGE AND MOVING COMPANY

The seven-story Egyptian-style warehouse that spurred Mlinaric's urban adventures was built in 1922 (although the business dates to 1880) and features terra-cotta beetles, lotus leaves and pharaoh sentries with the founders' faces.

hidden treasures

A Chicago transplant reveals—and revels in—her adopted city's surprising secrets.

NOT LONG AFTER JESSICA MLINARIC moved to Chicago, she came across the unusual sight of an Egyptian-themed building facade, complete with 10-foot-high pharaohs and hieroglyphics. Why was it there? How old was it? What did the hieroglyphics say? As Mlinaric hunted down the answers, she decided to start a blog—aptly named *urbnexplorer.com*—to share her curiosity-fueled adventures around the city.

“Sometimes it takes an outsider’s eye to really notice things,” she says.

Eventually, the blog grew into a book, *Secret Chicago: A Guide to the Weird, Wonderful, and Obscure* (Reedy Press, \$21). Intended for locals and visitors alike, it reveals 90 offbeat and unexpected places overlooked by typical Windy City travel guides.

Mlinaric’s finds include a candy store selling spicy peach lollipops in the shape of roasted chickens, a cattle path passing through a bustling hotel and a World War I cannon displayed in a private front yard. Each description provides historical context and

quirky details, plus the location and cost of the experience. (Most are free.)

A job in marketing, plus frequent writing and photography gigs keeps Mlinaric attuned to the city’s pulse. She also gathers intel at events, in the photo pit at concerts and by chatting with bartenders. She logs hours in public libraries and museums. And she traverses the city, shooting each place herself.

Mlinaric traces her adventurous spirit to childhood. Her family regularly road-tripped across Ohio in search of interesting events or sights, such as outdoor amphitheaters and limestone caves. “We were never the family that went to Disney World,” Mlinaric laughs.

But, she explains, traveling close to home taught her that the joy of discovery is always within reach. Twelve years in, Mlinaric’s love affair with Chicago isn’t over. Next spring, she will release a scavenger-hunt guide to the city’s neighborhoods—written in rhyme.

“The more I learn about Chicago, the more questions I have,” Mlinaric says.

We’ll be eagerly awaiting the answers.

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