



FARE GAME

Matthias Merges brings vintage spirit — and spirits — to Wrigley

BY ELLE CASHIN

Long before Jon Lester or even Kerry Wood, there was Mordecai Brown, a pitcher who turned the potentially huge obstacle of missing parts of two fingers into an advantage: It gave him a natural curveball grip, and he helped lead the Cubs to back-to-back World Series wins in 1907 and '08.

"We put a lot of attention and time into the name early on," says Matthias Merges, chef and proprietor of Folkart Restaurant Management, which opened Mordecai in the Hotel Zachary this month. "We did some deep dives at the Chicago Historical Society and, [when we came across Mordecai Brown], it gave us a lot of depth for storytelling and really wrapped together our focus on the vintage aspect."

Here's what to expect at Mordecai:

Elevated fare: While there are a number of nods to stadium favorites (goat bratwurst, \$14; crackerjack doughnut, \$7), most of Executive Chef Jared Wentworth's menu leans toward gourmet. Porchetta in pea risotto with barbecue carrots (\$25) is a must for meat-eaters, while vegetarians will love the beet tartar with egg yolk jam and puffed rice (\$13). (Take note: The restaurant offers an abridged menu on game days.)

Vintage vibe: Designed by fcSTUDIO inc. — which is co-owned by Merges' wife, Rachel Crowl — the two-story restaurant has a "Mad Men" feel, with midcentury modern furniture and brushed gold finishes. "[Rachel and I] do all our projects

together," Merges says, laughing. "She makes me look good!"

That's the spirit: While their kegged cocktails are delicious — try the Improved Shandy, a carbonated bourbon drink with a hint of chocolaty porter (\$12) — the spot is known for its lengthy list of vintage spirits. On the pricier side (a glass of 1950s Gordon's Orange Gin of London for \$50, say) these are meant to be sipped and savored.

Alfresco dining: Snag a seat on the small upstairs patio during a game — there's an unobstructed view of the jumbo TV in Gallagher Way — or during a concert to hear the music.

3632 N. Clark, (773) 269-5410; Mordecai.chicago.com



Clockwise from top: Moredecai burger, \$16, cheese fries, \$10, and Old Mills cocktail being poured PHOTOS BY FRANCIS SON (INTERIOR) AND MATTHIAS MERGES