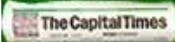


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## Culinary Clips: Hot dog!

 By **Mary Bergin**  
 December 2, 2005

Who makes the best hot dogs in Madison? If you like 'em Chicago style, head to a Home Depot food cart.

That is the opinion of Mitch Kite and Kevin Sherfinski, software quality assurance engineers for a local medical equipment company. They are so enamored with Chicago-style hot dogs that they have designed a Web site at <http://www.hotdogchicagostyle.com/> to explain their passion and guide hot dog lovers to the city's best.

What makes it a *Chicago* dog? The guys provide this assessment: It is a Vienna beef hot dog topped with chopped onions, diced/wedged tomatoes, a dill pickle spear, pickled hot peppers ("sport peppers"), pickle relish, mustard and celery salt, served on a poppy seed bun.

"A good hot dog can be a thing of beauty and a stupendous culinary experience," they contend online. Kite is a Chicago native; Sherfinski lived there as a college student. Their Web site has hot dog history, trivia and do-it-yourself dog dressing tips.

"The taste was incredible, and the pickle was perfect," the duo said of the Home Depot dog, which costs \$2. "This is probably one of Madison's best-kept secrets."

Not if we can help it.

Not all Home Depots have hot dog carts, says Dan Cece, manager of the 4550 Verona Road store. Black Diamond Concessions, owned by Tim and Pat Shirley, operates the carts at both Madison Home Depots. The carts are in business from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily; polish sausages are sold, too.

The critics' runner-up (so far) comes from Rosati's Pizza, 6644 Mineral Point Road. Points were taken away because the dog arrived with ketchup (NOT for hot dog eaters over 18, the guys proclaim elsewhere online) and round pickle slices instead of a pickle spear.

When asked to defend the hot dog, with regard to its fat content and "mystery meat" status, we got this, in an e-mail:

"We wouldn't recommend eating hot dogs every day. They are probably not the best thing for you, but like everything else, they can be enjoyed as part of a well-balanced diet that includes a variety of foods. We view Chicago dogs as a special treat and only eat them once or twice a month."

To weigh in on this frank discussion, send a note to [hotdog@hotdogchicagostyle.com](mailto:hotdog@hotdogchicagostyle.com). Kite and Sherfinski intend to add reviews of other local dogs, plus Chicago's hottest dog vendors.

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**Kim Long serves Kevin Sherfinski (left) and Mitch Kite the hot dogs that they love. (David Sandell photo)**

**Helpful reader:** Jody McIntyre writes approvingly of Escape, a new coffee shop at 916 Williamson St. "We weren't expecting much, but we really got a huge kick out of this place," she says. "It's like walking into Willy Wonka's house -- rooms everywhere, each with a different theme, art on the walls, a children's room."

We swung over on a recent Wednesday night, in the mood for a mocha, and agree with the observations. A dozen knitters were chattering and at work on easy chairs in one room. Laptop keyboards were clacking in another; there is wireless access. A bare-bones meeting room had the final credits from a movie rolling onto a big projection screen.

Ten-minute chair massages were being given elsewhere, something that Duane Erickson says are available from 6 to 8 p.m. every Wednesday. Sign up for a time slot upon arrival; payment is by donation.

Erickson and Greg Bosonetta, both age 25, opened Escape in September. How's business? Better every week, Erickson says. Art gallery space is under development. There is space for live music and poetry slams. Maybe a weekly movie night, too.

"We want to do so much," Erickson says. "It'll all come."

Food options are minimal: pastries and muffins from Lee Davenport. The tea and coffee menu is more extensive, with the latter roasted three blocks away, at Just Coffee. They are organic, fair trade products.

Local potters sell mugs for \$15. Knitted coffee cozies, for when the to-go cups are too hot to handle, are \$7 and \$8.

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