

Come On In

Chicago Architecture Center welcomes visitors to the city's annual open house.

By Kit Bernardi

Beautiful, historical and innovative architecture

draws millions of travelers to Chicago year-round.

But during fall's Open House Chicago weekend event produced by the Chicago Architecture Center, visitors get behind the closed doors of more than 250 buildings rarely open to the public.

Held the weekend of Oct. 13–14 this year, the architecture festival will welcome as many as 100,000 curious visitors inside historical mansions, iconic skyscrapers, religious sanctuaries, performance venues and Chicago brands' industrial production facilities. The free, self-guided tourism experience incorporates buildings clustered in more than 20 neighborhoods citywide.

"Open House Chicago is like architectural speed dating, giving locals and visitors alike an opportunity to learn about the city through its many diverse buildings housing unexpected surprises," said Eric Rogers, Chicago Architecture Center's manager of Open House Chicago and Community Outreach.



ISTOCK.COM/BENKRUT: JAY PRITZKER PAVILION

First-timer Itinerary Downtown Chicago, aka The Loop, harbors the largest concentration of Open House Chicago buildings.

Sites along LaSalle Street, the main artery of Chicago's pulsing financial district, are all about money. Visitors tour the restored neoclassical Wintrust Bank Building and step into neighboring Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago's stately Great Hall, adjacent to its Money Museum. Security opens the doors to the Chicago Board of Trade's sleek Art Deco lobby and clandestine basement vault protecting thousands of safety deposit boxes used by traders until the early 1980s.

Historical buildings also hold decorative discoveries within. The Rookery, one of Chicago's first commercial skyscrapers constructed by Burnham and Root in 1888, has the Light Court, a skylight-lit marble lobby remodeled by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1905. It's easy to imagine Chicago's elite doing the Charleston around the checkerboard dance floor of the elegant gold-gilt ballroom tucked inside the School of the Art Institute's MacLean Center, formerly the swank Illinois Athletic Club.

Guests peek behind the scenes of major cultural venues, including the Art Deco and Art Nouveau Civic Opera House, where Chicago's Lyric Opera performs.

In Millennium Park, guests step onto the Jay Pritzker Pavilion's concert stage, crowned by architect Frank Gehry's curlicuing stainless-steel roof. Visitors take in park, lakefront and harbor vistas aboard docked ferry *MV Abegweit*, now headquarters of the private Columbia Chicago Yacht Club, founded in 1892. Both locations host hands-on kids' architecture activities.

A Neighborhood Experience Open House Chicago also designs neighborhood itineraries. Sites on the Near West Side blend city history and creativity.

In Ignite Glass Studios' industrial workshop space, artist and hot-shop instructor Joe Waropay narrates the glass-making process as artisans demonstrate how to shape lava-like blobs of glass and blow life into them. "Watch how they let gravity do the work to stretch and lengthen the glass before using their breath to shape it into a beautiful piece," he said.



COURTESY OF THE CHICAGO ARCHITECTURE CENTER: CHICAGO BOARD OF TRADE



ERIC ROGERS: MACLEAN CENTER BALLROOM

The University of Illinois at Chicago Police Station is the city's oldest police station; it was formerly the 7th District Station, where gangster Al Capone was reportedly detained. Police officers lead tours through the restored Romanesque station's original lobby, lineup room, communications center and "sally port," a secure entryway that starred in the opening scene of the popular 1980s' television series *Hill Street Blues*. In the basement gun range, guests learn about officers' weapons, protective gear and rigorous training exercises.

Insider Tips

With so many buildings to explore, choosing is difficult, so let curiosity and personal passions guide site selection.

- Five to seven Open House Chicago sites can be visited in a full day, incorporating travel time, waiting in line, taking breaks and touring each venue an average of 15 minutes.
 - Public transportation and Divvy bike share are efficient and cost-effective, especially when visiting Loop and lakefront neighborhoods.
 - Open House Chicago's website itinerary tool lists each site's visitation days, hours and photography policies. Festival social media channels provide wait-time updates.
 - Wear good walking shoes and bring identification. Security procedures vary by site.
 - While admission is free to all buildings, a handful require ticketed access awarded through the festival website's lottery, which opens Sept. 10.
- Of 32 cities worldwide hosting public architecture festivals, London's is the biggest. Open House Chicago, now in its eighth year, ranks as the world's second-largest free event.



KIT BERNARDI: BIG MONSTER TOYS

At Columbian Model & Exhibit Works Ltd.'s loft studio, staff members explained how they use CAD drawings, laser cutting and 3-D printing technology to construct scale building models. "Before ever breaking ground, real-estate developers must get financing and presell their buildings," said President-owner Catherine Tinker. "That's where we come in." A residential tower model on display

was used in the 2008 Batman hit *Dark Knight*, filmed in Chicago.

Everyone who passes the oversize yellow door of Big Monster Toys wants to know what goes on behind it. The former trucking warehouse is a toy invention think tank that designs and builds prototypes for brands such as Mattel, Fat Brain, Goliath, Hasbro, Spin Master and Fisher-Price. A 25-foot-tall stuffed giraffe watches over the maze-like workshop. Pointing at a doll displayed in the Toy Hall of Fame, Chicagoan Jasney Richardson said to her 6-year-old daughter, Jaya, "I always wanted the Little Shopkins California Blader, and there she is!" **H&A**

Kit Bernardi is a freelance writer based in Chicago.

Planning Your Trip

Some sites included in the story were not confirmed for the 2018 event by press time. Be sure to call (312) 922-8687 or visit openhousechicago.org for a complete list of participants, available Sept. 10. The new Chicago Architecture Center at 111 E. Wacker Drive also has exhibits and festival guides. For public transportation, log on to transitchicago.com and divvybikes.com. For travel-planning assistance, contact your local AAA Travel agent or AAA.com/travel.