

An inside look: a weekend at Open House Chicago

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Last weekend, the annual architectural festival known as Open House Chicago opened the doors to many of the great structures in this city that are usually inaccessible to the public. In addition to this, volunteer guides provided insight on the history and construction of those buildings and how they are used today. Famous skyscrapers such as the Willis Tower, the Aon Center, and Lake Point Tower opened their private observation decks and restaurants free of charge. Other sites included the conference rooms at the Hard Rock Hotel, the Blue Cross Blue Shield Building mid-floor meeting rooms, apartments and amenities at 1001

State Street and Marquee at Block 37, the London House Hotel's rooftop restaurant, the Seventeenth Church of Christ, Scientist organs and auditorium, and the Kemper Building's recently renovated observation deck. Even on the Illinois Tech campus, Carr Memorial Chapel and Crown Hall were open to the public so they, too, could observe and learn about the architecture of Ludwig Mies Van de Rohe.

Some locations, like Union Station, had little to offer to guests due to the ongoing renovations being done in backrooms, and other sites, like the Hard Rock Hotel, were unable to show much of their space due to the management wanting to respect the privacy of the guests staying there. Other sites, however, allowed a much more wide and free roaming

experience to visitors. Sites like the Willis Tower and Aon Center allowed guests to look throughout an entire floor of the building, with no fear of security stopping them from getting their fill of the views.

Another such site open last weekend was at the House of Blues, located just off State Street between the Marina Towers. The Foundation Room in the upper floors of the restaurant provided exclusive access to the balconies above the stage and a private bar and seating area decorated with religious icons from around the globe. Several celebrities such as former president Bill Clinton and Katy Perry (and almost every band or group that has performed at the House of Blues) has relaxed before and after shows in this iconic, members-only VIP lounge.

Though the event lasts only one weekend a year, many of these locations will reopen on select dates for special events and for ticketed happenings throughout the year. Though numerous sites are clustered together in downtown Chicago, the event also stretches across much of Chicagoland, opening little known sites all over communities not commonly known for their architectural or historical treasures. Open House Chicago will return next October and the Chicago Architectural Society will reveal next year's lineup of locations a month in advance so that visitors can clear their schedules for the weekend and decide on the sites they want to visit. With a little planning, this event can be one to make a regular day living in Chicago one to remember.



Photos by Steven Milan Moreno

CTA Station Review: Garfield Green Line

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Located at the split between the Ashland and Cottage Grove branches of the Green Line, the Garfield stop is a mainstay for a wide variety of CTA customers. Located at Garfield Boulevard (55th Street) and Prairie Avenue, the station straddles the line between the northeastern boundary of Englewood and the western edge of Washington Park, with the University of Chicago beyond it. Originally constructed in 1892 as part of a southern extension of Chicago's then-new L system that reached the World's Columbian Exposition, it has since been part of the CTA's South Side Rapid Transit line, North-South Route, and now, the Green Line, first established in 1993. Condition – 14/15

As part of the creation of the Green Line, all stations along the elevated route were thoroughly renovated starting in 1994. Garfield is one of the largest stations on the route's southern stretch, and is maintained to fairly

high standards. Its glass-paned station house at the street level is sunny and generally spotless, and the platform above exhibits few signs of the fifteen years that have passed since station renovations concluded. The Garfield station's PA system is clear and understandable, and its lobby doesn't suffer from any of the water drainage issues that some other Green Line stops have seen struggled with. That said, the station has not seen any significant upgrade work since 2001, and some of its infrastructure is beginning to show age in dust and dirt buildup and fading paint. Appearance – 7/15

The original 1892 station was located on the opposite side of Garfield from the current building, and that station was still in use until the completion of renovations at the turn of the millennium. The 1892 station house on the southern side of Garfield, despite being retired from use, is the oldest public transit entrance remaining in Chicago, and perhaps in the entire United States.

On the northern side of the road, the

station largely follows the design language of the majority of the Green Line, with white and red tile covering its two elevator towers and off-white paint on most of its metal surfaces. The aesthetic is relatively dated at this point (and has begun to be replaced at stations like Morgan and Cermak along the same line), but it's presented well here. Since Garfield is significantly larger than most stations along the Green Line, its scale allows for some variations on the CTA's 1990s design themes, and it presents well as a whole. However, there is no significant public art on exhibit in the station house, and the stop comes across as rather forgettable on the whole. Convenience – 17/20

Despite the relatively low density of its immediate vicinity (the southern portion of the Grand Boulevard community area exhibits plenty of urban pasture where a more populous neighborhood once stood, and Washington Park is literally just a big park), Garfield is actually a remarkably useful station. There's a reason that it was built to handle

more people than most other Green Line stops, and that's because it's an access point for so many different neighborhoods. The 55 bus and the University of Chicago's own private transit system bring thousands of people over from Hyde Park, which isn't serviced by any of its own L stops, and a large park-and-ride lot at the station's northwestern corner services a different kind of commuter, one of a few such integrated park-and-ride facilities in the entire CTA system. In addition, the Garfield station has had a Divvy bike station installed in recent years, and a small cluster of buildings on the opposite side of the boulevard contains a vibrant café, an arts incubator, and other brand-new signs of a long-overdue economic and artistic revival in the area that consistently brings in people who would otherwise never find themselves so far south in the city. Garfield's status as the last Green Line station before that route's southern split is significant as well, cementing its status as an important local transit point.

TOTAL – 38/50



Photo by Soren Spicknall