



## The Hottest New Health Food Trend: SPE Certified

Are you tired of always ordering a salad at restaurants in an attempt to stay healthy? It seems impossible these days to find low-fat meal options that actually taste good (without cooking at home). Cheeky has found the one restaurant in Chicago that satisfies *every* health-conscious person's dreams: State & Lake at theWit Hotel.

No butter. No cream. No trans-fats. These are just some of the guidelines State & Lake follows in its recipes to be granted an SPE certification.

What exactly is SPE Certified? It's a certification and consulting program that focuses on food that is both healthy and tastes good. SPE stands for "Sanitas Per Escam" in Latin, which means "Health Through Food." Some people might argue that plenty of farm-to-table restaurants focus on the sourcing of their food, but SPE goes two steps farther in also controlling the preparation of the food and enhancing the nutrients in the food. This culinary trifecta ensures the best-quality food for our bodies.

With less than two years since its launch, SPE Certified has spread throughout restaurants in New York and Miami. Thanks to State & Lake, Chicago has finally jumped on board with this trendy health program. TheWit's Executive Chef, Evan Percoco, explained how guests were always asking him about Chicago-style restaurants (think "meat and potatoes") that were healthy. He realized there was a need in the marketplace for this concept, so he took it upon himself to help transition State & Lake into this missing restaurant. The path happened to fit within the values of SPE's certification process, so the transition was easy.

Now let's talk about the food already. SPE Certified does not impose recipes into restaurants; rather, the chef adapts existing recipes to fit within SPE certification guidelines. All the dishes I tried are State & Lake's original creations.



**Butternut Squash Soup:** I have honestly never had a better soup in my life. I was stunned to find out the delicious creamy soup wasn't made with any cream or butter. The added pumpkin seed pesto and candied fennel made this dish a five-star item.



**Deviled Eggs:** When you think of deviled eggs, you usually think of mayonnaise. These deviled eggs avoid all that extra fat by filling the egg whites with a sweet potato purée. Topped with all-natural organic duck bacon, the eggs are served atop a wild rice salad. I don't usually like deviled eggs, but I devoured this entire dish.



**Seared Salmon:** Salmon is one of my favorite meals, but it's hard for restaurants to get it right. Overcooking the fish or covering it in glazes take away the health benefits. State & Lake sources its salmon from True North Salmon, where the fish are farm-raised from birth and given special pellets (from animal, plant and fish proteins) that ensure high levels of omega-3 fatty acids. This salmon is extra nutritional while remaining juicy and flavorful. The seared salmon is served atop roasted cauliflower and a mix of chive yogurt with lentils (the perfect savory addition in my opinion).



**Mustard Maple Glazed Amish Chicken:** I'm usually not impressed with many chicken dishes, but this chicken blew my mind. In the words of Chef Percoco, "Our chicken is freaking phenomenal." The chicken from Crystal Valley Chicken is individually air-chilled to ensure no cross-contamination from other chickens or extra chemicals soak into the meat. This melt-in-your-mouth chicken is atop panzanella (a salad of bread and tomatoes) with pickled onion. I highly recommend this dish.



**Avocado Brownie:** Can you believe that the only fat in this brownie comes from the avocado? It tasted even better than normal brownies, and I couldn't even taste avocado. It was the perfect ending to an assortment of phenomenal dishes.

This is just a preview of the 13 dishes on State & Lake's SPE Certified menu, which include breakfast, lunch and dinner options. TheWit Hotel will add SPE dishes to its rooftop bar, ROOF, in March when the seasonal menu changes again. "State & Lake is the Chicago tavern, using products from the Midwest. ROOF is more continental in its cuisine, so we use products from all over the world," explains Chef Percoco. "We're really looking forward to doing SPE up there."

Launched in May 2012 at Chicago's National Restaurant Show, SPE Certified founder Emmanuel Verstraeten has created an unbelievable culinary concept. By pairing chefs with dietitians, he proved that food could be healthy without compromising its taste. World-renowned nutrition experts have validated the 90-page charter of guidelines. SPE Certified's process of nutrition enhancement and science-based combinations and portions of ingredients makes this program truly unique from any other health initiatives.



"SPE is not just about eating food – it's about a lifestyle," says Chef Percoco. "You're trying to add elements of fitness in your day to help with whatever you're trying to achieve – whether it's losing weight or maintaining weight or just becoming healthy through nutrition."

Plus, the SPE lifestyle causes people to naturally shed a lot of weight! By cutting out carbohydrates and consuming more fruits and vegetables, your body will thank you. State & Lake's implementation of SPE Certified dishes has been tremendously successful. Seeing the SPE logo assures guests the dish meets exceptional nutritional values. "When a restaurant offers an SPE Certified dish, it demonstrates that in addition to taste, the chef values health, sustainability and a commitment to the greater good," says founder Verstraeten.

Cheeky ladies, both SPE Certified and State & Lake have our stamp of approval. Check out the restaurant's healthy and delicious food options as soon as you can!

<http://cheekychicago.com/spe-certified-state-and-lake-chicago/>