

• Walking Tour 5 •

The Gold Coast

Start: East Lake Shore Drive, across from the Oak Street Beach (behind the Drake Hotel).

Public Transportation: Your best bet is the no. 145, 146 or 151 Michigan Avenue bus; get off between Walton and Oak streets. Or take the Red line subway to Chicago and State; walk east a couple of blocks to Michigan, and then north to Oak Street.

Finish: Bellevue Place and Michigan Avenue.

Time: 2 hours.

Best Times: Sunday is the ideal day for this walk at any time of year. On weekdays, before or after the morning rush, the streets are empty enough for you to enjoy unjostled solitude. On a bright day, set out when the sun is low in the sky and casts flat and even light.

Worst Times: Whenever crowded beaches or streets make the walk heavy going.

The Gold Coast is the silk-stocking district of Chicago. It is small and exclusive, as you might expect of a neighborhood that contains some of the world's most valuable real estate. The bulk of the neighborhood lies between Oak Street and Lincoln Park, bounded on the east by Lake Shore Drive, with LaSalle Street above

Division forming the western margin between the Gold Coast and Old Town.

Until the 1880s, this land was largely vacant, with some sections serving as burial grounds (later condemned as “unhealthy”). The State Street merchant Potter Palmer broke with the norm; instead of building his mansion south of the Loop around Prairie Avenue (where many giants of industry and commerce had their homes), he went north. In 1882, Palmer built a lakeshore castle bordering marshlands in what was then a relative wilderness. This prince of Chicago retailing reportedly had a speculative scheme in mind when he chose this area. And indeed, the mere presence of the Palmers, then one of the most prominent families in Chicago society, served as an instant magnet, drawing the carriage trade north in droves. The value of Palmer’s extensive north-side holdings escalated rapidly, as the price of land rose 400 percent in a few short years. Whether wittingly or by chance, Potter Palmer had spun his marsh grass into gold.

Our itinerary combines a leisurely stroll on Chicago’s downtown strand along Lake Michigan with a walk among the fine town houses that line the tree-shaded interior streets of the Gold Coast.



Take the underpass beneath Michigan Avenue to reach the:

1. **Oak Street Beach.** Enjoy the luxury of a walk in the sand smack in the middle of downtown Chicago; it may not be Copacabana, but neither New York nor Los Angeles can claim such a bonny downtown amenity. If the sand doesn’t suit you, stick to the concrete path, making sure to stay alert to avoid being run down by a speeding bicyclist or blader. On your right is the sweeping vista of the great inland waterway, Lake Michigan. At some distance, you are almost certain to see signs of the stolid commercial shipping that plies these waters, as vessels crawl along the horizon. While you’re ambling, there’s nothing to prevent you from admiring the residential behemoths on the opposite side of Lake Shore Drive. (Or you may choose to follow the pedestrian tunnel under the

78 • Memorable Walks in Chicago

drive at Division St. for a closer inspection.) Among the giant structures, take note also of the few remaining mansions, the relics of a gilded age.

Beginning just above Scott Street, you will see a cluster of four such exemplars of that privileged past, including the:

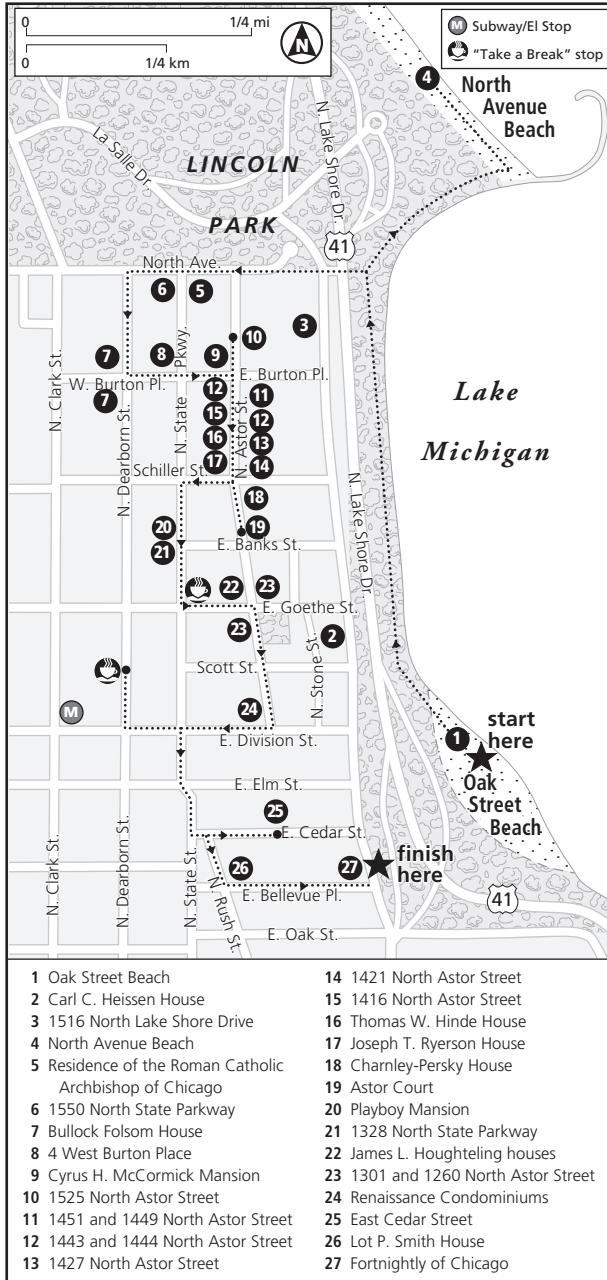
2. **Carl C. Heissen House**, 1250 Lake Shore Dr. Also nearby stand the Mason Brayman Starring House, at no. 1254; the Arthur T. Aldis House, at no. 1258; and the Lawrence D. Rockwell House, at no. 1260. Both the Heissen House (1890) and its immediate neighbor, the Starring House (1889), strongly suggest the long-standing affection of wealthy Chicagoans for the sturdy Romanesque, which soon thereafter gave way to the lighter continental lines of the Second Empire.

A second cluster of former private mansions, all vaguely neoclassical in outline and appointments, faces Lake Michigan toward the north end of this stretch of the boardwalk, beginning at:

3. **1516 N. Lake Shore Dr.** This building is home to the International College of Surgeons; its neighbor at no. 1524 is a museum belonging to the same institution. The International Museum of Surgical Science houses a fascinating collection of exhibits and artifacts that portray the evolution of medical surgery. Chicago architect Howard Van Doren Shaw designed the museum building in 1917 as a private mansion. Another reason for entering the museum (besides the collection) is to view the well-preserved interior of Shaw's creation, including the massive stone staircase and the second-floor library, with its fine wood paneling. A third structure, 1530 N. Lake Shore Dr., a creation of Benjamin Marshall, is today the Polish Consulate.

This stroll along the water should take between 15 and 30 minutes. If you have been following the inland side of Lake Shore Drive, cross back to the park using the North Avenue underpass. Follow the path to the Chess Pavilion on your left, and continue past the patch of green where the jetty leads out to a harbor light and into the parking lot. Straight on is the:

The Gold Coast



80 • Memorable Walks in Chicago

- 4. North Avenue Beach.** This is the next strand up the line, on the southern end of Lincoln Park. The beach house playfully resembles an old ocean liner. The upper deck has a grill and bar with terrific views, and the beach below is a mecca for sandlot volleyball enthusiasts.

Now double back and cross Lake Shore Drive by way of the North Avenue underpass, directly west of the Chess Pavilion. From the cul-de-sac here, continue west on North Avenue 2 blocks to North State Parkway. The imposing residence on your left, surrounded by spacious grounds, is the:

- 5. Residence of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Chicago.** The estate's official address is 1555 N. State Pkwy. This mansion (1880) is an example in red brick of early Queen Anne styling. Archbishop Patrick Feehan was the first resident of the mansion, which stands on the former grounds of a cemetery that stretched between present-day North Avenue and Schiller Street. By the turn of the century, the Chicago Archdiocese had subdivided much of this remaining Gold Coast property, providing house sites for many affluent families. A virtual battalion of chimney pots marches across the roofline of this old episcopal residence, which is one of the oldest and most familiar on the Gold Coast.

Across the street on the opposite corner of North Avenue is:

- 6. 1550 N. State Pkwy.** Each apartment in this 1912 vintage luxury high-rise, known locally as the Benjamin Marshall Building, originally occupied a single floor and contained 15 rooms spread over 9,000 square feet. The architects were Marshall & Fox, highly regarded in their day as builders of fine hotels. There was once a garden entryway at the ground-floor level. Among the noteworthy architectural features adorning the exterior of this beaux arts classic are the many small balconies and the bowed windows at the corners of the building.

Continue west for 1 block on North Avenue and turn left, following Dearborn Street to Burton Place and the:

- 7. Bullock Folsom House.** As its mansard roof reveals, this landmark 1877 home on the southwest corner, at

The Gold Coast • 81

1454 N. Dearborn St., is pure Second Empire. That roof, incidentally, is shingled in slate, not asphalt. Neighboring houses at nos. 1450 and 1434 have some of the same French-influenced ornamentation and styling. Across Burton Place just to the north, at 1500 N. Dearborn St., is another example of a rival architectural fashion of the day, the Richardsonian or Romanesque Revival.

Now return to the east along Burton, but before crossing North State Parkway, stop at:

8. **4 W. Burton Place.** Built as a private residence in 1902 by Richard E. Schmidt for a family named Madlener, this striking continental structure today houses the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts. There is something very modern about the appearance of this former home; the clean, sleek lines of its ornamentation seem to foreshadow the Art Deco styling still 2 decades off.

Now continue 1 block farther east to Astor Street. On the northwest corner, at 1500 N. Astor St., is the former:

9. **Cyrus H. McCormick Mansion.** New York architect Stanford White designed this building, which was constructed for the Patterson family in 1893. Cyrus McCormick, Jr., bought it in 1914, and David Adler's north addition doubled the size of the building in 1927. Like so many of New York's Fifth Avenue mansions (also influenced by White and his contemporaries), the McCormick palazzo is an essay in the neoclassical. Square and grand, like a temple of antiquity, the construction combines Roman bricks of burnt yellow with touches of terra-cotta trim. The building has been divided into condominiums.

The tour loops north briefly on Astor Street to take in a home of historical interest:

10. **1525 N. Astor St.** This attractive town house was once the residence of Robert Todd Lincoln, the only surviving child of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln. The younger Lincoln took up the private practice of law in Chicago after the Civil War. He remained in Chicago for much of his life, leaving twice during the 1880s and 1890s,

82 • Memorable Walks in Chicago

to serve under presidents James Garfield and Chester A. Arthur as Secretary of War, and later under Benjamin Harrison as minister to Britain. On the death of George Pullman, one of his major corporate clients, Lincoln assumed the presidency of the Pullman Palace Car Company in 1897.

Reversing direction again, walk south along Astor Street. Notice the houses at:

11. **1451 and 1449 N. Astor St.** The former, occupying the corner lot, is the work of Howard Van Doren Shaw, built in 1910 according to the so-called Jacobethan fashion. This obscure term combines the words “Jacobean” and “Elizabethan.” It describes a revival form of certain 16th- and 17th-century features of English architecture, including narrow, elongated windows, split-level roofs, and multiple chimney stacks. The house at no. 1449 was built around the turn of the century, but the architect of this glorious château remains a mystery. Guarding the home’s entrance is a somewhat intimidating stone porch, seemingly out of scale. Among the home’s other unique characteristics are the big front bay and the frieze below the cornice, a scroll of stylized shells.

Two other neighboring homes of interest, facing each other across the street, are:

12. **1443 and 1444 N. Astor St.** According to one Chicago author, the May House at no. 1443 “bears a resemblance to H. H. Richardson’s Glessner House,” the historic landmark south of the Loop at 1800 S. Prairie Ave. Across Astor Street is no. 1444, a true sampler of the Chicago Art Deco style, built in 1929 by Holabird & Roche. Next, walk to:
13. **1427 N. Astor St.** The dean of Chicago architects and pioneer of the earliest skyscrapers, William Le Baron Jenny, designed this structure in 1889. A few years ago this home was on the market for \$3 million. Many neighboring homes are valued in this range (give or take a million). This will give you some idea of why they call this neighborhood the Gold Coast.

Several doors down is:

The McCormicks of Chicago

Cyrus H. McCormick Jr. was the son of the man credited with the invention of the reaper, perhaps the single most important mechanical advancement of its day in agriculture. The reaper made it possible to farm huge tracts of wheat on the fertile prairie without depending on seasonal labor for its harvest. The senior McCormick, a native of Virginia, built his first factory in Chicago in 1847. Wiped out by the fire of 1871, the McCormicks were able to rebuild easily. The demand for the company's farm implements was firmly established, and the family fortune already made several times over.

So many members of the McCormick family once occupied homes near Rush and Erie streets, just south of the Gold Coast, that the neighborhood was known as "McCormicksville." Cyrus Jr. became the first president of International Harvester when the McCormick Harvesting Company merged with several of its former competitors in 1902. The McCormicks were no friends of the working class; their plant was an ongoing target of labor agitation during the 1880s. A rally at the McCormick plant in 1886, during which police killed a worker, fueled the infamous Haymarket affair on the following night.

14. **1421 N. Astor St.** This somewhat fanciful but appealing "cottage" was once the base in Chicago of a Catholic missionary order, the Maryknoll Fathers.

Across the street is:

15. **1416 N. Astor St.** This was another Gold Coast residence belonging to the McCormick clan.

The neighboring structure at 1412 N. Astor St. is the:

16. **Thomas W. Hinde House.** This 1892 home, created by Douglas S. Pentecost, is a study in the Flemish architecture of the late Middle Ages. The facade has been altered, but some of the original stone ornamentation

84 • Memorable Walks in Chicago

remains, as do such dominant features as the multipaned, diamond-shaped windows.

On the same side of the street at 1406 N. Astor St. is the:

17. **Joseph T. Ryerson House.** David Adler designed this 1922 landmark home in the manner of a Parisian hotel; it evokes the scale and delicacy of the buildings that to this day line Left Bank streets. Adler himself supervised the 1931 addition of the top floor and the mansard roof. Woven into the wrought-iron grillwork above the entrance are the initials of the original owner.

The next house to warrant our attention is also a landmark, one that incarnates the collaborative genius of three giants of American architecture. At 1365 N. Astor St., on the southeast corner of Schiller Street, stands the:

18. **Charnley-Persky House.** Shortly before he left the firm of Adler and Sullivan, a then-obscure draftsman, Frank Lloyd Wright, played a major role in designing this 1892 home. The house seems suitable to our modern world, though it's in this fairyland neighborhood where most residences have borrowed their shapes and forms from antiquity. This is either because Wright was so in tune with the special needs of the American domestic landscape, or because there is something timeless, even universal, in his ideas. The **Society of Architectural Historians** (☎ 312/915-0105) gives tours on Wednesday and Saturday. Charles Persky donated the building to the society in 1995.

Continuing down the block, pause before 1355 N. Astor St., known as:

19. **Astor Court.** Row houses are not common in spacious Chicago, so this multiple unit is rare on that account. It's also noteworthy as a window on Georgian formality, which is much more characteristic of parts of London. Because of the ornament above the central drive, which leads to a formal inner court surrounded by residential units, the building is sometimes referred to by its nickname, "The Court of the Golden Hands."

Now walk back to Schiller Street. Cross the street and turn left on North State Parkway, continuing south until roughly the middle of the block, where you'll come to the:

20. **Playboy Mansion.** This bulky mansion at 1340 N. State Pkwy. was built in 1899 for an upright Calvinist named George S. Isham. Although *Playboy's* Hugh Hefner lived here during his Chicago heyday, the place, now condos, still has the whiff of the countinghouse about it. Here old Hugh romped with his bunnies, the commodities around which he made his fortune, and perfected the airbrushed version of erotica and cracker-barrel hedonism that once made him the nation's reigning purveyor of soft-core porn.

Continue south on State. A renowned contemporary architect had his hand in our next stop:

21. **1328 N. State Pkwy.** Bertrand Goldberg, who was responsible for Marina City—the corncob-like mixed residential, commercial, nautical towers across from the Loop on the Chicago River—remodeled two separate homes into this property. The 1938 vintage dwellings were connected in 1956 to serve as studio and home for Goldberg's mother-in-law, sculptor Lillian Florsheim.

Our tour now swings one block east, back to Astor Street by way of Goethe Street. Turn left, and at 1308–1312 N. Astor St. look at the:

22. **James L. Houghteling Houses.** Here's an eclectic cluster of town houses built by Burnham and Root between 1887 and 1888. Originally there were four dwellings, but no. 1306 was torn down. John Wellborn Root, who is credited with the design of the buildings, lived with his family in no. 1310. Here the brilliant architect died of pneumonia at the age of 40.

On opposite corners diagonally across Goethe Street are apartment towers that represent the trend toward high-rise living on the interior streets of the Gold Coast, which began in the 1930s:

23. **1301 and 1260 N. Astor St.** Constructed by Philip B. Maher in 1932 and 1931, respectively, these apartment buildings are classics of the sleek modernism that characterized American commercial architecture after World War I. At 1300 N. Astor St. is a 1960s version of the high-rise apartment house, by Bertrand Goldberg, in a form that seemed avant-garde in that period (like the fins on Detroit gas guzzlers) and today seems dated.

86 • Memorable Walks in Chicago

Now we get a chance to stretch our legs a bit on this quiet lanelike street, which seems protected behind the wall of towering condominiums on Lake Shore Drive. Walk 2 blocks south on Astor Street to the corner of Division Street. The old building on the right is the:

24. **Renaissance Condominiums.** The address is 1210 N. Astor St.; the building, a Holabird & Roche design, dates from 1897. This is one of the rare examples of a Chicago School building on the north side. Notice its similarity in construction to the buildings of the same vintage that remain in the Loop along Dearborn Street, especially the brickwork and the window bays.

Turn right on Division Street.



Take a Break If you need sustenance, continue two blocks to Dearborn Street, turn north, and walk to the **Third Coast**, 1260 N. Dearborn (☎ 312/649-0730), below street level. This cozy coffeehouse has a devoted neighborhood following and is practically always open (until 3am most nights, 24 hr. on summer weekends). On a brisk fall day, it's an ideal spot for a cup of soup and a sandwich.

Return to Division Street and walk 1 block east to State Street. Turn right, staying on the east side of the street where State and Rush merge, and proceed 2 blocks south to:

25. **East Cedar Street.** This long block between Rush Street and Lake Shore Drive deserves a look, because much of its turn-of-the-century scale has been so well preserved. Some of the homes of later vintage are unique and elegant. See in particular the two clusters of “cottages,” nos. 42–48 (1896) and 50–54 (1892). These homes illustrate the once-widespread popularity in Chicago of the Romanesque Revival style in domestic architecture. State Street merchant prince Potter Palmer built the first group.

Return now to Rush Street, walk to the next block south, and turn left on Bellevue Place. At 32 E. Bellevue Place stands the:

The Gold Coast • 87

26. **Lot P. Smith House.** It took a certain kind of chutzpah, even in 1887 when this delightful place was built, to name your child “Lot.” In any event, this Lot had both the righteous good fortune and the good sense to have had his home designed by John Wellborn Root.

At the end of the block, not far from Lake Shore Drive, is our final stop in the Gold Coast: 120 E. Bellevue Place, the:

27. **Fortnightly of Chicago.** New York architect Charles F. McKim, a partner of Stanford White’s, built this mansion while sojourning in Chicago as a lead designer of the World’s Columbian Exposition. It helped introduce the Georgian fashion in architecture that would replace the Romanesque Revival throughout the Gold Coast. A woman’s social club has occupied the premises since 1922.



Winding Down Another venerable Chicago hotel, the **Drake** (☎ 312/787-2200), offers the perfect haven for post-walking-tour refreshment—afternoon tea or cocktails in the swank surroundings of the Palm Court, or a sandwich and ice cream in the Oak Terrace. Just continue down Bellevue Place to Lake Shore Drive and cross to the hotel entrance, 2 short blocks south at Walton Street.