

WHERE TO EAT NOW

MAY 2008

# Chicago

## BEST NEW RESTAURANTS

From hot spots to hidden treasures—our critics name the year's top rookies

21 WINNERS



MIXING IT UP AT OTOM

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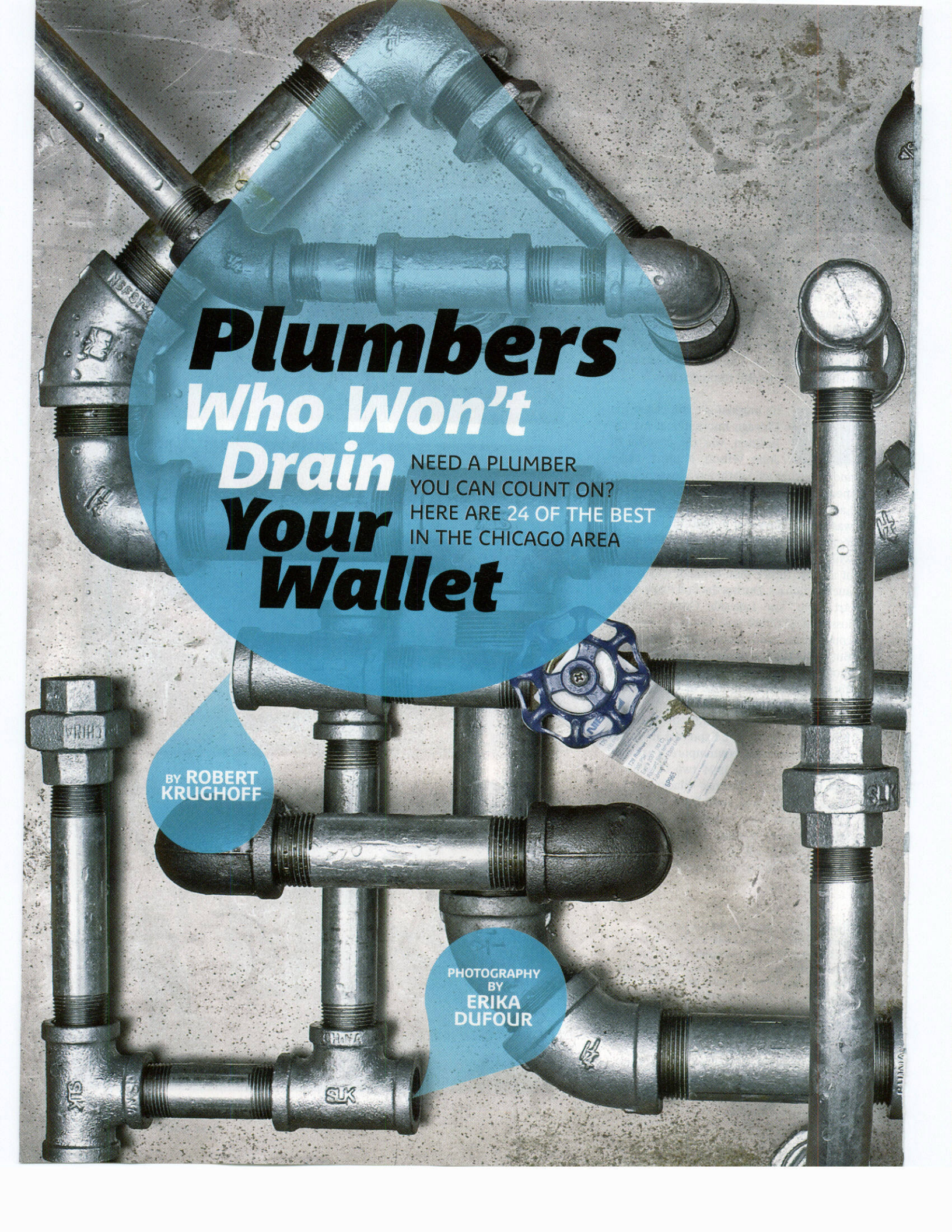
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SPRING FASHION \* RELIABLE PLUMBERS



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# **Plumbers Who Won't Drain Your Wallet**

NEED A PLUMBER  
YOU CAN COUNT ON?  
HERE ARE 24 OF THE BEST  
IN THE CHICAGO AREA

BY ROBERT  
KRUGHOFF

PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY  
ERIKA  
DUFOR



The 24 plumbers on page 105 rated highest among the 199 companies evaluated in *Chicago Consumers' Checkbook* magazine and at [checkbook.org](http://checkbook.org).

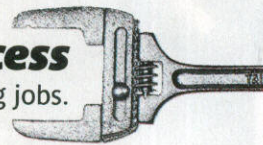
In analyzing Chicago-area plumbers, *Checkbook* asked area consumers to rate several aspects of their service experience as "inferior," "adequate," or "superior." More than 8,000 surveys were compiled over a six-month period from February to July 2005. Each of the plumbers listed was rated by at least 16 customers. The percentage of customers who rated the overall performance of a company as "superior" is given on our list.

*Checkbook* also considered complaints on file at the Better Business Bureau for a recent three-year period and with the Office of the Illinois Attorney General for a recent two-year period. Between the two offices, none of those listed here had more than one complaint on file.

To compare prices, *Checkbook's* shoppers, without revealing their affiliation with *Checkbook*, contacted plumbers and requested price quotes for specific jobs. Prices were then compared among companies. Our table shows how each plumber's prices compared with the average, which here is scaled to \$100. For example, a company with a price of \$90 on the list quoted prices 10 percent lower than the average quoted price.

## Eight Steps to Remodeling Success

Want a smooth-sailing redo? Here's how to get good results on big jobs.



**1 Get competitive price quotes.** Even among relatively sophisticated consumers, only about half get written estimates for substantial remodeling jobs (jobs of about \$2,000). But those who do are much more likely to be satisfied with their companies' performance than those who do not. Get at least two or three quotes, and get more if you find big differences among the first ones.

**2 Think of the companies as your free consultants.** When getting quotes, discuss options on types of materials, makes and models of fixtures, placement of fixtures, and other matters. After talking with several businesses, you will be in a better position to decide exactly what you want and can then contact those that have bid to let them tailor their bids to your final specifications.

**3 Try to get a fixed-price contract.** Companies may argue that they will have to bid high to protect themselves in a fixed-price contract and that you might get a break if you pay by the hour and the job goes quickly. Don't buy that argument. If a company knows you'll be getting several bids, it can't take the chance of bidding high, and the fixed-price contract will spare you possible surprises later.

**4 Specify in advance exactly what you want done.** Your specifications should include makes and model numbers of all fixtures and appliances; what kind of pipe will be used; where fixtures are to be put and where pipes are to run; and who is to break up the floor, cut holes in the wall, patch floor

and walls, hang the sink, do the carpentry, and haul away the debris.

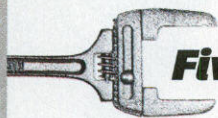
**5 Specify what permits you want the company to secure.** Some homeowners don't insist on permits, but there are strong reasons for getting a permit: It is often legally required; it buys you an impartial government inspection of the adequacy and safety of the finished job (especially important in gas heating systems); and it protects you from having to have code deficiencies corrected if they are discovered during an inspection of other work at a later date.

**6 Specify when work is to begin and approximately how long it is expected to take.**

**7 Negotiate for the best possible warranty.** On any remodeling job, you should get at least a one-year written warranty on materials and workmanship. (Even on a repair job, you might be able to do that well if you explain you are aware that some plumbers offer such terms.)

**8 Ask the company how much of the contract price it will let you hold back until the job is completed.** Don't pay a substantial amount, or anything for labor, in advance. Many plumbers will let you pay all or most of the price after the work is complete, even in the case of a several-thousand-dollar job. That gives you leverage to prod the plumber to do the job right and gives you some protection if the company happens to go under before completing the work.

—R. K.



## Five Tips for Better Repairs

**1 Before having a plumber out for a service call, explain exactly what the problem is.** This will help the plumber bring the needed tools and parts and thus avoid extra trips.

**2 If you need to know exactly when a plumber will arrive, try to schedule the first service call of the day.**

**3 When you call, ask the company to explain how it figures its labor rates—what the minimum charge is, how**

much work is included in the minimum, what time intervals are used to calculate charges (10 minutes, 15 minutes, half an hour), how much is charged per unit, etc.

**4 Let the plumber who arrives know that you are aware of the rates.** This may enhance accuracy in timekeeping.

**5 Clear the area.** You don't want to pay \$100 an hour for the plumber to clean out junk from underneath your sink.

—R. K.

# 24 Top-Rated Plumbers

Got a leaky faucet? Overflowing toilet? These premium plumbers won't leave you in the lurch.

Amount you might expect to pay for plumbing work for which the average Chicago plumber would charge \$100

Percentage of customers surveyed who rated company "superior" for overall quality

Name	Address	City	Phone	Percentage of customers surveyed who rated company "superior" for overall quality	Amount you might expect to pay for plumbing work for which the average Chicago plumber would charge \$100
All Suburban Emergency Plumbing	322 Shadow Hill Dr.	Elgin	630-620-8233	84	\$87
Arrow Plumbing	547 North Ave.	Libertyville	847-549-9600	90	\$90
Bob Dorr Plumbing & Heating	824 W. Main St.	St. Charles	630-377-0796	88	\$83
Burmeister Plumbing & Heating	4220 W. Lawrence Ave.	Chicago	773-545-1943	89	\$99
D'Andrea Plumbing	2N630 Lloyd Ave.	Lombard	630-469-4810	100	\$93
Ernie Peterson Plumbing	2421 Delany Rd.	Waukegan	847-244-4234	90	\$74
Fettes, Love & Sieben	4325 N. Lincoln Ave.	Chicago	773-935-7260	84	\$103
Forte Plumbing	8142 Grand Ave.	River Grove	708-456-6880	96	\$90
Jack Waters Plumbing	446 W. 194th St.	Glenwood	708-798-9100	79	\$99
James H. Beutjer Plumbing & Heating	30W270 Butterfield Rd., #117	Warrenville	630-260-1773	100	\$96
Karl Meyer Expert Plumbing	333 Ridge Ave.	Elmhurst	630-530-1540	94	\$80
Larsen & Sons Plumbing & Heating	4823 N. Damen Ave.	Chicago	773-561-3580	100	\$103
Local Plumbing	23663 S. Ashland Ave.	Crete	708-748-3232	90	\$73
Michels Plumbing	225 Gale St.	Aurora	630-801-9700	93	\$89
Midcity Plumbing	321 S. County Line Rd.	Franklin Park	708-452-8680	93	\$93
Ostman Plumbing	1607 Techny Rd.	Northbrook	847-272-0276	95	\$70
Preferred Plumbing	P.O. Box 7910	Westchester	708-562-1271	87	\$94
R & S Plumbing	3850 Berdnick St.	Rolling Meadows	847-358-7530	83	\$95
R. J. Kuhn Plumbing, Heating & Cooling	585 State Rte. 31	Oswego	630-554-3336	90	\$98
S & K Plumbing	28464 N. Garland Rd.	Wauconda	847-821-8249	87	\$98
Santucci Plumbing	3021 Commercial Ave.	Northbrook	847-272-3090	90	\$99
Simon Plumbing & Sewer Service	5200 160th St.	Oak Forest	708-687-3378	90	\$74
Thompson Plumbing	625 E. 65th St.	Willowbrook	630-969-0249	94	\$90
Tim's Plumbing & Sewer	P.O. Box 55	Hazel Crest	708-799-4010	86	\$81