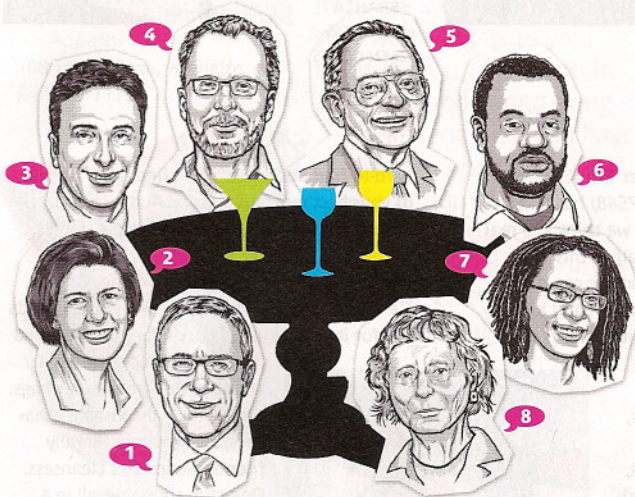


BEST DINNER PARTY

Our all-star table of Chicago conversationalists

We have all encountered the species: vertebrates who with no visible exertion flow from conversation to conversation, throwing off fascinating stories like sparks from a wheel, bathing the gathering in a warm and gracious ambiance. In other words, the perfect dinner party guest. We came up with a fantasy team of Chicago's best.



(1) Michael Bauer

Democratic fundraising consultant and gay activist

Style: No-holds-barred

Knowledge Bank: The social scene, gossip, intrigue

Ignition Point: Closeted gay Republicans

(2) Amy Dickinson

Advice columnist, Chicago Tribune

Style: Confiding

Knowledge Bank: Relationships, the Beltway

Ignition Point: Bad dates

(3) Mark Giangreco

Sports anchor, WLS-TV

Style: Gentlemanly

Knowledge Bank: Sports, celebrities, news of the weird

Ignition Point: Messiness

(4) Tracy Letts

Actor, playwright, and Steppenwolf stalwart

Style: Droll

Knowledge Bank: Theatre, poetry, show-biz chatter

Ignition Point: Stupidity

(5) Leo Melamed

Chairman emeritus of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange

Style: Guru-ish

Knowledge Bank: Financial derivatives and futures markets, world history, culture

Ignition Point: Free-market interference

(6) Hamza Walker

Artist and curator

Style: Loud and funny

Knowledge Bank: Jazz, wine, parenting, the contemporary avant-garde

Ignition Point: Politics

(7) Laura Washington

Professor and commentator

Style: Reasoned, gossipy

Knowledge Bank: Politics, Chicago

Ignition Point: Corruption

(8) Lois Weisberg

City of Chicago culture czar

Style: Instant familiarity

Knowledge Bank: News, cities, George Bernard Shaw

Ignition Point: Boredom