

TECH —

OpenTable's iPhone app makes reservations a breeze

Tired of calling restaurant after restaurant in order to make reservations on ...

JACQUI CHENG - 11/17/2008, 2:37 PM

If you live in an urban environment, reservations are key if you want to eat on a weekend night without a huge wait. (Hole-in-the wall restaurants and fast food aside, of course, although even hole-in-the-wall places tend to be packed to the gills in my neighborhood.) And, in today's society with an ever-decreasing level of human interaction, us nerds are constantly looking for new ways to get things done without ever having to hit the Phone icon on our iPhones. You can already search for restaurants in your area on your iPhone, review them, and have the restaurant chosen for you. But without a reservation, you may never be able to get into that restaurant.

Until now, of course. OpenTable's newest iPhone app (aptly named **OpenTable**) makes it possible to search for restaurants in your area and make reservations right from your iPhone without ever calling a soul. The free iPhone app is an extension of the company's **online service**, which works in a partnership with tons of restaurants to let you make reservations online. We took the app for a spin and immediately fell in love.



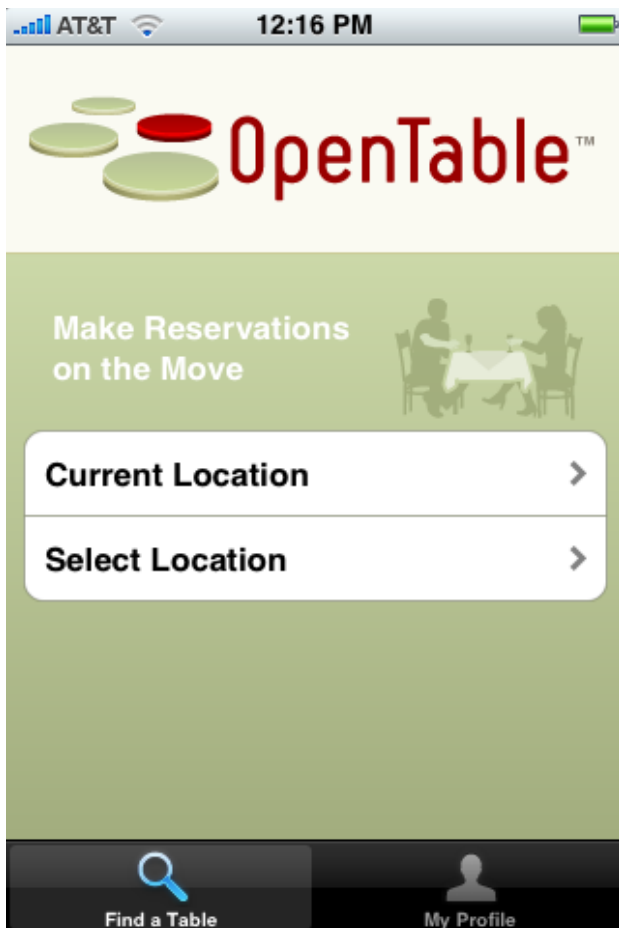
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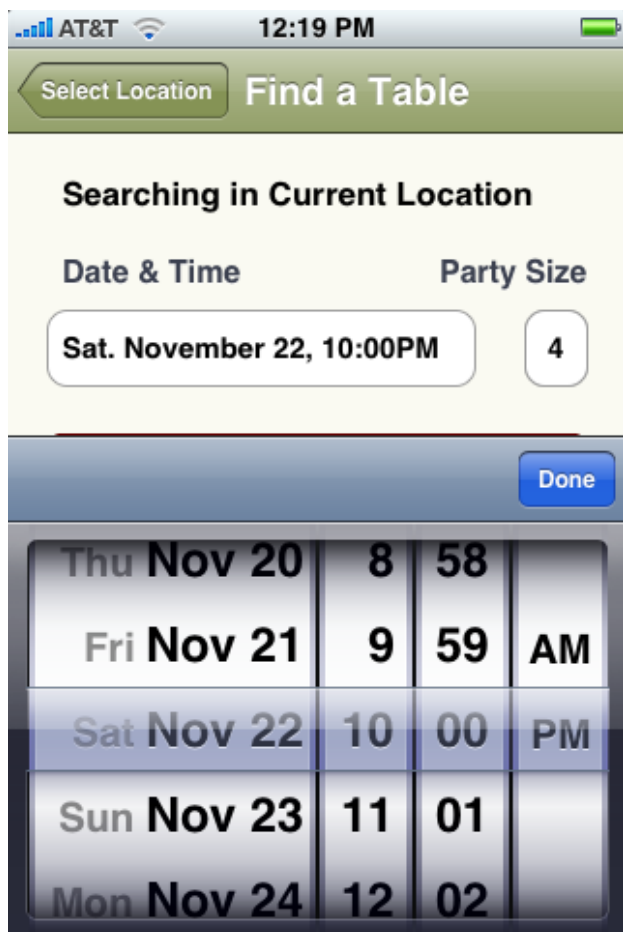
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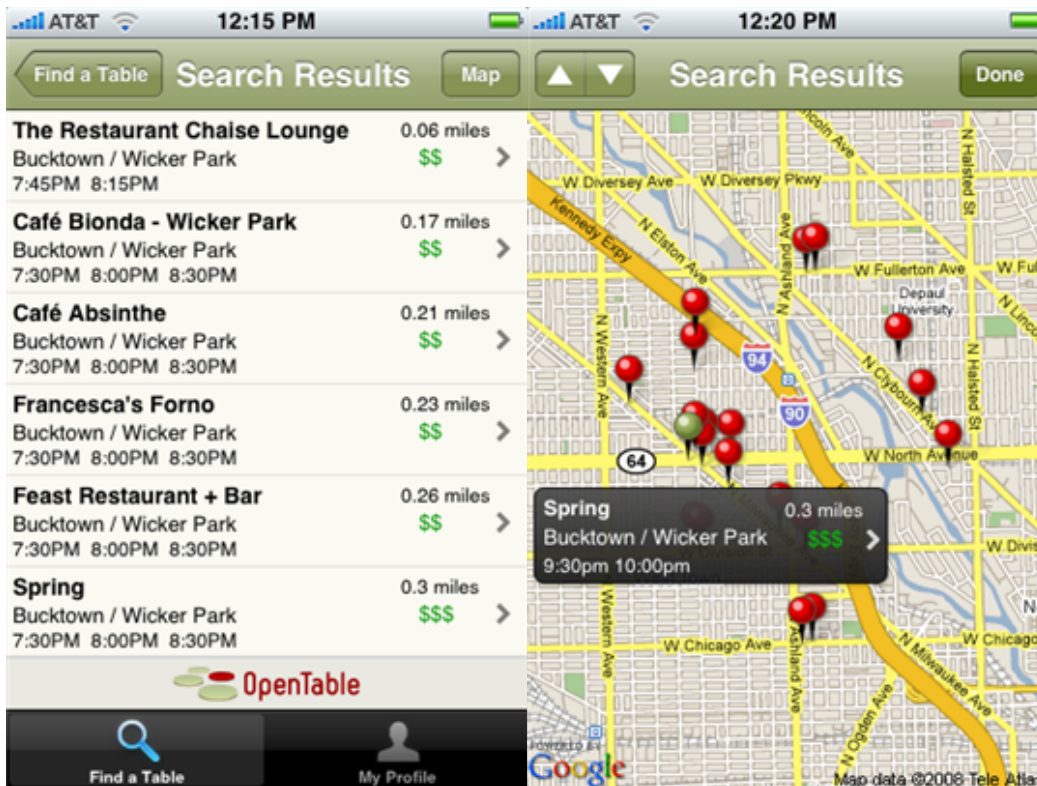


The app is simple from the get-go, which is how we like it when we're already out and about. Users can choose between searching for restaurants nearby (based on the iPhone's CoreLocation capabilities) or searching within a specific area. If you choose to search near your current location, you're prompted to enter the preferred date, time, and number of people in your party before searching.

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You'll get presented with a listing of restaurants, their distance from you, how expensive it will be, and what reservation times they have open. You can also opt to look at the search results in map form, which can be helpful for people who just want to find somewhere nearby.

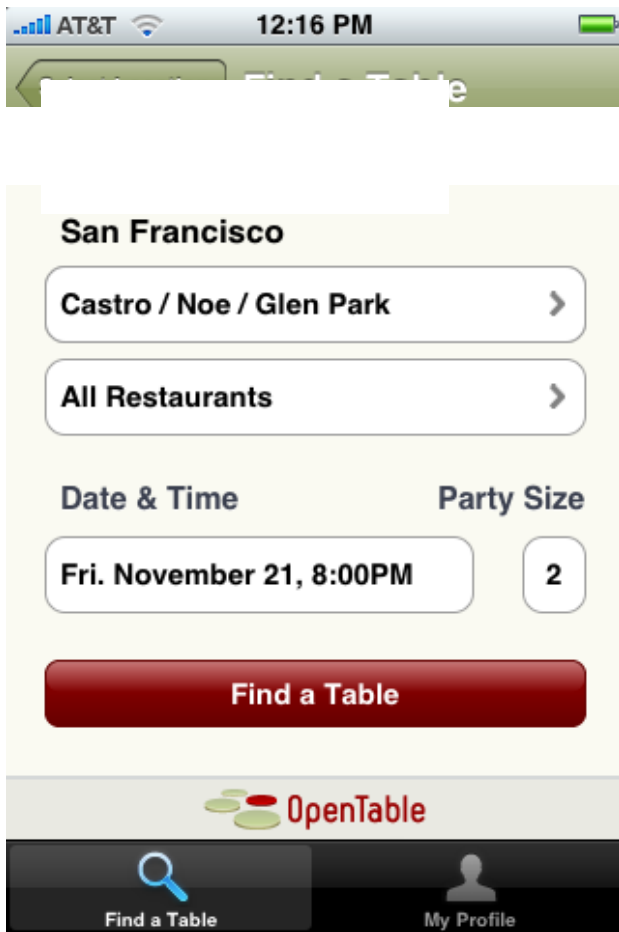


Tapping on one will bring you to the restaurant's listing in full view. This is where you can select the time for your reservation. When you tap on the button for the time, you'll be prompted to either log in if you already have an OpenTable account (I already do), or you can skip the log-in process and just enter your name and phone number. From there, your reservation is made!

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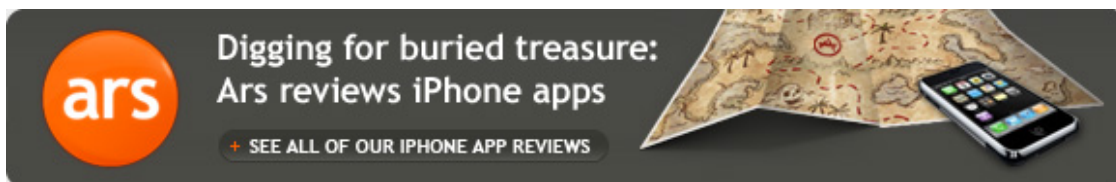
But let's back up a couple of steps. Say you don't want to go to just any restaurant, or you're searching within a specific city or neighborhood. You can do that easily from the main screen, allowing you to search within a plethora of metro areas from Boston to Atlanta to San Francisco, and (almost) everything in between. Hell, there are even listings for London, Ireland, and China, so it's not limited to the US. And if you're skeptical about your city having OpenTable-capable restaurants, rest assured that I was able to find restaurants in Little Rock, Arkansas; Chattanooga, Tennessee; and Jackson Hole, Wyoming. OpenTable knows that hunger knows no bounds.

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Finally, if you just have that *specific* restaurant in mind, you can search for that too. This is my only nitpick about the app, because although it's not difficult to figure out once you're in the right place, it's not exactly intuitive to find if searching for one restaurant is your end goal right from the start. In order to do this, you must go from the main screen to Select Location, then to your specific city, region within that city, and then to the "All Restaurants" pull-down. When you finally get there, it'll give you a listing of every restaurant within that area that has OpenTable capabilities, letting you navigate to your favorite in the list. Like I said, it's a little convoluted, and might work better as a standalone option on the main screen.



Overall, this app made me very, very happy. I often find myself out with friends or stuck somewhere right after work, looking for a place to go but not in the mood to play the "Google for restaurants and call around for a half hour" game. OpenTable's iPhone app makes it simple to find restaurants with guaranteed openings without you having to call 15 places in order to secure them. And best of all, the app is free, so there's nothing stopping you from trying it. I highly recommend doing so and making some reservations of your own this weekend.



READER COMMENTS

JACQUI CHENG

Jacqui is an Editor at Large at Ars Technica, where she has spent the last eight years writing about Apple culture, gadgets, social networking, privacy, and more.

