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eating out



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BY MICHAEL E BARRETT

Portland's food triangle

You've heard of the pink triangle, the Sunni triangle and the Bermuda Triangle. In an effort to review restaurants from different parts of the city, I discovered a very worthwhile food triangle starting at the top of Hawthorne to the bottom of Thurman to the middle of MLK. Draw it on a map and see for yourself. Then go eat.



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Carlyle • 1632 N.W. Thurman St.

On the edge of Northwest, beyond the vast parking lots that separate it from the restaurant rows of 21st and 23rd avenues, Carlyle invites you into a trendy, hip oasis in the midst of an industrial area under the shadows of the Fremont Bridge. The unusually high quotient of hot waiters risks drawing your attention from the food—until you taste it. My top recommendation is the Duck Duet. A seared breast and roasted confit leg lounges atop a rich and unique combination of squash puree, bosc pear and zinfandel sauce. In a town obsessed with garlic mashed potatoes, squished squash is an ingenious alternative: This dish's amalgam of flavors is exceptional. The cocktails are fab, and they have cookies and ice cream for dessert...mmmmm.


Sapphire Hotel • 5008 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd.

Lease your suitcase at home—the Sapphire Hotel isn't really a hotel, it's just part of the name. Why? Who cares? The food is what counts. The menu looks more sophisticated than what the kitchen actually produces, and I mean that as a compliment. With a distinct homemade taste, cooks rustle up food like Mom might have made...if she'd made things like Moroccan chicken chickpea stew. This hearty tangine-based creation is reminiscent of some of the great vegetarian dishes found in other Hawthorne eateries, where the right blend of herbs and spices attracts the palate's attention. Think of the chicken as a bonus. If atmosphere matters to you, the Sapphire welcomes you to its warm, dimly lit comfort zone, perfect for a date.

Russell Street BBQ • 325 N.E. Russell St.

On the corner of Northeast Russell and MLK, this lesbian-owned restaurant has the best authentic American barbecue in town. I didn't even know I liked barbecue until I was dragged to this place. For starters, I had baked beans (so that's what they're supposed to taste like!) and macaroni and cheese. Feeling a bit adventurous, I mixed the two together. Wow! It looked so gross but tasted so good. For the main course, I made a pig of myself with shredded pork, beef brisket and turkey, all with different sauces that varied from tomato-ey to spicy to honey mustard, each an authentic, homemade Russell Street invention. Dessert couldn't have been more sinfully yummy: deep-fried chocolate pie, best described as *pain au chocolat* on steroids.

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