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**eating out**  
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**epiqueerean**

BY MICHAEL E BARRETT

**Feeling saucy?**

The right sauce can make an otherwise mediocre dish taste fabulous. Chefs are increasingly daring in this regard, which makes eating out even more fun and adventurous! Aura's vanilla, Meriwether's lemon crème fraîche and Café Dacx's tomato saffron herb sauté still linger happily in the memory of my palate. Why not add them to yours?

**Aura Restaurant and Lounge • 1022 W. Burnside St.**

Looking more like a nightclub or a really cool aquarium than a restaurant, this split-level, ultra-trendy bistro seems refreshingly out of place in Portland. The food is the real reason to come to Aura. Its cheese fondue sauce could rival that of the great Horst Mager, but toss the toasted French bread aside; you're better off dipping the herb-infused house bread, also fantastic on its own. For your main course, you can't go wrong with the Vietnamese braised veal shanks, nothing short of a work of art. Petite veal shanks braised in sirachi, mirin, cilantro and vanilla scented broth, atop a sweet potato-vanilla bean puree, taste even better than they sound. The shanks are tender, generous and exploding with flavor.

**Meriwether's Restaurant • 2601 N.W. Vaughn St.**

Portland can stop lamenting the loss of L'Auberge. Meriwether's now occupies this newly renovated space in the shadows of Montgomery Park. If you like outdoor dining, the large secluded garden features a covered fire pit to keep you and your friends warm on these chilly autumn evenings. For dinner, start off with roasted mushroom ravioli. Plump and firm, yet silky on the palate, the raviolis find their perfect complement among pancetta, lemon crème fraîche and delicate caramelized onions. Beef lovers won't want to miss the grilled tenderloin, dripping with rich truffle jus, but even the burgers are great! Choose from ground chuck, turkey, fresh salmon or portabello mushroom.

**Café Dacx • 1937 N.W. 23rd Place**

If your restaurant preference du jour calls for quaint, head to Café Dacx. The simply decorated blue and white interior is reminiscent of a Greek Orthodox chapel, but the menu is eccentric and cosmopolitan. Seafood plates are Dacx's specialty. The catch of the day, usually a white fish, raises the eyebrows with its tomato saffron herb sauté. Sea scallops topped with a roasted red pepper lemon caper sauce go brilliantly with a Lebanese-inspired toasted pine nut pilaf. Hints of cinnamon, cardamom and allspice punctuate this dish with an exclamation point of approval. Regardless of your entree choice, be sure to start off with the crab torza. This pizza-like delicacy consists of a crispy tortilla crust covered with pesto cream, cheese, fresh basil, tomato and Dungeness crab.

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