



Epiqueerean
BY JENNY NGUYEN

Hawthorne Reborn

Known for decades as Portland's alt-hip-communal district, Hawthorne is finding itself in the process of a major facelift. With roadwork, flashy glass condos, boutiques and cutesy cafes arising constantly these days, a growing Portland is finding refuge in one of its most treasured old-school drags. Here are three restaurants that will have you loving Hawthorne all over again.

K2 Kebab • 3962 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd. Suite C

Parked alongside a doggy wash shop is this unsuspecting Pakistani/Indian restaurant. The menu contains all the traditional mainstays and then some. The clientele here generally consists of Middle Eastern folk, which to me is a very good sign. The garlic naan is light, airy and vengefully spicy with garlic dust, a delicious accompaniment to the sweet flavors of the aloo gobi. The basmati—a long grain rice fluffed with the essence of saffron, nutmeg and juniper berry—is exceptional. The lamb gyro, a flawlessly cooked spiced ground lamb with tomato and raita wrapped in a mammoth blanket of homemade pita, is the most value for your dollar and perfect for lunching. Better for takeout than dining in, you still get the feeling K2 knows what it's doing. Though pricier than others of its kind, it's worth the pretty penny.

My Thai • 3500 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd.

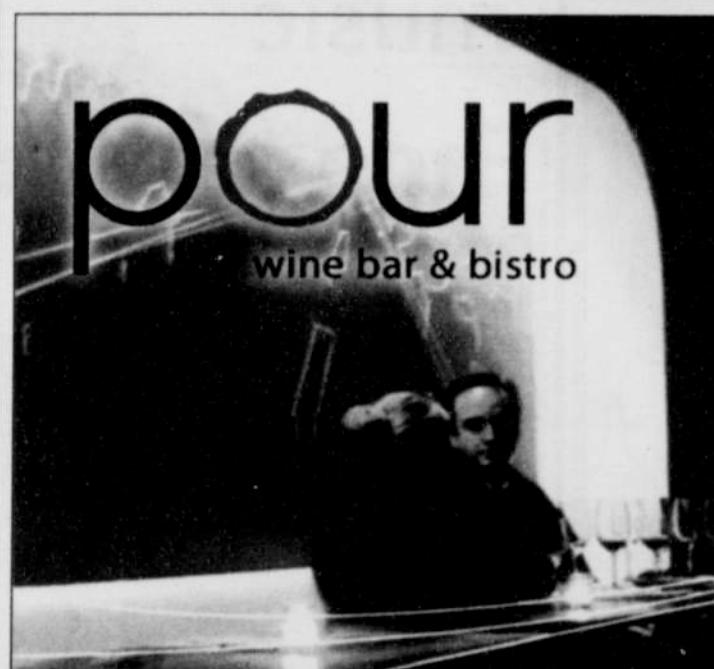
Looking swank in its new digs at the now defunct Coffee People, My Thai houses coconut cream and curry instead of caffeine and caramel. Though the décor is hit and miss, the service is impeccable. Som tum, or green papaya salad, is exquisite with just the right sprinkling of fish sauce, chilies and lime. Pad phed—a chili-garlic-based stir-fry with bamboo, bell peppers, eggplant and Thai basil—is succulently spicy and damn near perfect. Even the requisite Thai iced tea comes out in "ooh and ah" fashion in a tall pilsner glass. So many Americans are convinced that good Thai food must be heaping, hot as hell and bearishly cheap; My Thai has set standards differently. Intense flavors, beautiful plate presentations and modest portion sizes make dining here both pleasant and satiating.

Taste of Europe • 1739 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd.

The eldest of these three, TOE is a tried-and-true market of Eastern European foodstuffs. A bounty of cryptic sauces, spice blends, candies and brews resides here. Not only can you pick up Czech beer, Hungarian marshmallow and chocolate pudding, and Russian blood sausage, you can also order a plethora of otherworldly entrees. Fresh lapina, or Bosnian bread, is baked in-house daily and served with cevap, a ground beef and lamb mixture, or sis, a spicy beef kebab. Chicken sandwiches and hamburgers get the European treatment from different ethnic spreads, from Turkish ajvar to Serbian kajmak. Get lunch and get an education; Taste of Europe is a local landmark and a gold mine for the epicurious. **10**

JENNY NGUYEN is a Portland native who cooks, eats and writes. Give her advice on all these and more by contacting her at epiqueerean@comcast.net.

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