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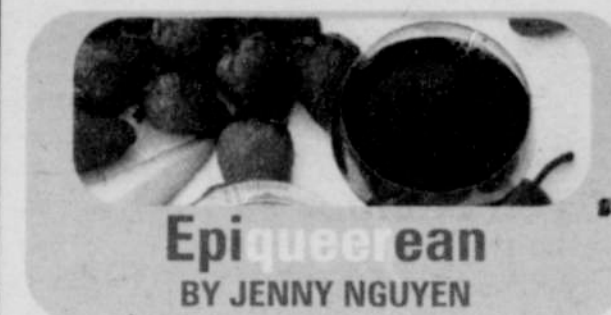
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Chip Off the Old Block

Landmark restaurants used to be able to compete on status alone, but with all the healthy competition, many of them are stepping up to prove they aren't just the old kid on the block. In fact, many of them are becoming parents of smaller, more intimate places. Cue the adjacent lounge: tiny spaces next door to grab a late-night bite, sip a fine martini or just not feel rushed, a place where lounging is perfectly welcome. Here are three just juxtapositioned joints to enjoy.

The Jade Lounge • 2342 S.E. Ankeny St.

This Asian-inspired lounge is a delightful contrast to its Italian counterpart, Il Piatto. Green lanterns and trinkets from the Orient turn the tiny space into a glowing jade oasis. Polished copper tables contrast against the velvet wallpaper and cushy chairs and couches. The menu is pan-Asian with streaks of creativity and an eye for presentation, but the food is disappointing. The drinks, on the other hand, are delicious. Martinis dubbed after safari creatures and Slangian puns are both innovative and playful on the palate. Service is extremely friendly, but it's the atmosphere that is a must-see.

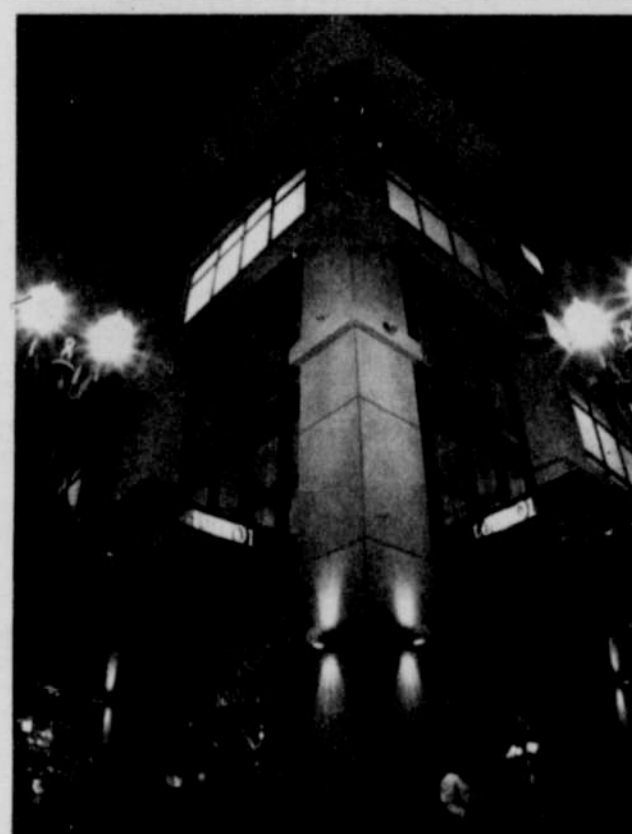
Mother's Velvet Lounge and Café • 212 S.W. Stark St.

Mogul mama Lisa Schroeder has done it again. Having nearly the entire block to herself, minus the recently closed Balaboosta, Mother's Bistro now has a naughty, nightie-wearing next-door neighbor. Dressed in black damask velvet wallpaper and gilded mirrors, this golden wild child has the goods. Lounge offerings include simpler staples off the main kitchen's menu, but late-night food comes in a nifty ceramic TV-dinner-style tray. Sounds iffy and looks even shadier when it arrives, but tasting is believing. Meatloaf with mashed potatoes and gravy are perfect in their little cubbyholes, and the \$10.95 full meal deal even comes with a small dessert—untouched by the gravy, of course. The clincher here is the hours. Except Fridays and Saturdays, the Velvet closes at 9 p.m., the same time as the restaurant, making the lounge concept a bit tougher to swallow.

La Merde • 301 S.E. Morrison St.

I guess you could say Le Bistro Montage pooped out this lil' lounge, La Merde (which is French for the shit). If you go during happy hours from 4 to 6 p.m., half po' boy sandwiches are loaded with croc, crawfish, catfish or shrimp and served with a mound of spicy and addictive macaroni salad for a measly 3 bucks. Well drinks and pints off the tap are 50 cents off. The décor is minimalist-meets-warehouse, which is perfect for the low-key lounge that it is. There are books, board games and drink specials, and they're open till 2:30 a.m. every day of the week, not to mention bingo and trivia nights. With all that good stuff minus the teeming teenyboppers (a huge "No Minors" sign inside greets anyone underage), it'll have you believing that there really is something to its name. 10

JENNY NGUYEN needs to hear from you, her readers. Write her at epiqueerean@comcast.net.



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