



Epiqueerean
BY JENNY NGUYEN

Where to Get Your "Oohs" and "Ahhs"

Anyone who has ever gotten a professional massage might understand what it means to physically restrain from moaning in pleasure. Such is the same when I eat. Usually the din is just loud enough to muffle my mewl; then again, sometimes the sounds escape. Here are three places whose names will not only evoke those aforementioned sounds (e.g., Vindalho "ooh"), but the food'll have you and your belly grumbling for more.

Purple Tooth Lounge • 938 N. Cook St.

Comfy-cozy in new pink digs (which once housed the famous Lovely Hula Hands), proprietor Kelly Stewart has turned the once-cute Victorian into a snazzy, posh two-story lush nest. Dark walls, copper countertops and zebra prints give a lil' downtown glitz to the otherwise low-key Mississippi area. The bebies score big time, with ludicrously tasty libations like the Purple Nurple (blueberry puree and marionberry-infused vodka) and the Love Bite (Godiva chocolate liqueur and cayenne pepper). The menu could use some work, with a teensy happy hour list and a below-par dinner set. Go for the swank space and devilishly delish drinks.

Vindalho • 2038 S.E. Clinton St.

Less than a mile from his first baby, Lauro Kitchen, David Machado has nailed some prime location in this corner spot with his Indian-style Vindalho. The floor-to-ceiling windows and bamboo-like tabletops are classy yet unpretentious. Thankfully, the theme runs true throughout both the menu and the service. The chicken *pakora* features perfectly golden fritters of diced chicken with spices, chickpea flour and a tart tamarind and mango chutney. The pork Vindalho is meltingly braised and packin' the heat, served with a pyramid of cumin-infused basmati. Tender nuggets of meat are cooked on a yard-long metal skewer in an 800-plus-degree *tandoori* oven, locking in juices to make the lamb and mahi mahi unbeatable, not to mention *naan* like none other. Terrific island-inspired cocktails and side orders of everything from chutneys to onion rings make dining at V-ho a must.

Encanto • 5225 N. Lombard St.

Move over, Tex-Mex, this new NoPo spot is turning heads with the cuisine of New Mexico. Eat the *sopapillas*, corn masa cakes fried golden brown (like a sweet corn doughnut, yum) served with honey butter. Or eat it chock full of braised pork (*carne adovada*) in red chile sauce; just know the New Mexico red chile sauce is 100 percent ka-ZING! The green chile stew with pork and warm tortillas is milder, while the buffalo short ribs in cherry-pasilla sauce are sweeter. The sautéed black mussels with Spanish chorizo in a sour orange-serrano broth are utterly perfect. Whatever you have, it'll be good. Hell, they could sauté rock shrimp in chipotle-butter sauce and serve it over a deep-fried avocado if they wanted to and get away with it...oh wait, they do and they do. **jo**

JENNY NGUYEN believes in leftovers, chilled soups, sharing entrees and reader comments. Write to her at epiqueerean@comcast.net.

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