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Epiqueerean
BY JENNY NGUYEN

Hot Spots

The heat is on here in the Rose City, and I'm not just talkin' 'bout the mercury rising. New restaurants are ripe with hype, competing for our picky, everyone's-a-food-critic dollar. So here I am to give you my two (and three-quarter) cents on some of P-town's hottest spots.

Rocket • 1111 E. Burnside St.

This is perhaps one of the most overhyped restaurants to infect Portland in years; Leather Storrs (of Noble Rot fame) has a huge reputation to fulfill. The new "green" building on the corner of Sandy Boulevard and Burnside Street is absolutely stunning once you get to the fourth floor, where the gleaming-chic dining room perches. Take in the mad views, bathe in artsy decor, and be at ease in the expertise of the wait staff, 'cuz when it comes to the food, all bets are off. The shrimp cocktail with avocado and chips is delicious, but the potato pierogies are dry and lackluster. A \$10 salad of butter lettuce and fennel narrowly misses the mark for being overdressed and wilted. The braised beef rib is tender but lacks sauciness. On the other hand, the crisp salmon and lemon chicken *sous vide* are fairly good. The menu isn't overly creative, but consistency makes Rocket a constant experiment.

The Chesterfield • 1101 E. Burnside St.

Strapped for cash but craving to be in "the scene"? Look no further, as literally just upstairs is the spendy/trendy Rocket and down the street is the Doug Fir. Here, it's DJ'ing bass beats, graffiti art and ambient lighting in all the right places. The stellar cocktails will have you reeling, 'specially if you take it to the "patio" to be paired with some steaming, hot CO₂. Grab a group and claim the must-see Egg's Nest upstairs (seriously too cool). Don't even think about skipping a meal here expecting drab bar food, as the menu is superbly executed by Tabla chef Paul Duncan. From a divine cheese plate of *ossau iraty*, port-poached prunes and Marconas to an open-faced pork belly sandwich with a fried duck egg, the food here is spectacular. For what seems like forever Fir Territory, East Burnside now has a couple of alternatives for the people by the people.

Toro Bravo • 120 N.E. Russell St.

This beautiful space adjacent to Wonder Ballroom is earthy, airy and inviting. Specializing in Spanish *tapas*, the menu is laden with soon-to-be quintessential small plates. From a deliciously fluffy *tortilla española* to an incredible green gazpacho with scallop ceviche, every single plate is to die for. The pork rilette with braised cherries is tender, salty and addictive. The flawlessly grilled bone-in pork chop dances with rosemary-infused cherries. With an extensive and complicated menu, TB somehow still manages to make killer *paella* and stellar Marcona gelato and to pull a nice shot of espresso. Although the echoic dining room can get vociferous, you'll forget all about the noise when all you can hear is your own moaning. Bravo indeed. 10

JENNY NGUYEN wants to know what's in your mouth. Spit it out by writing to her at epiqueerean@comcast.net.

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