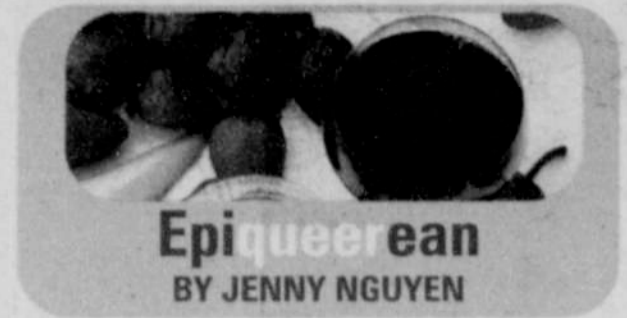


eating out eating out eating out eating out eating out eating out eating out eating out



Epiqueerean
BY JENNY NGUYEN

Presents of Mine

There is something about the holiday season that makes us think about those we love, how we want to share our good fortune and, more importantly, what we want to give to those who've given to us. This time 'round I'm giving you, my lovely eaters/readers, a random spackling of some small but delightful restaurants that will turn even the naughtiest gluttons nice.

Cava • 5339 S.E. Foster Road

Practically across town from me, Foster Road has, until late, been just a name paired with gridlock on traffic reports. That was before I discovered Cava (and Devil's Point on the same block). The simple menu is chock full of distinctive Northwest flavors done up via classical French cookery. The result is a pure, flavorful and authentic taste that is rare in these here parts. The cheese plate is a divine smattering of four or five unique cheeses, from a bitter crème to a pungent, chalky blue paired with honey and marconas. The watercress salad comes dressed with perfectly roasted beet, marcona almonds and orange. The cassoulet is decadent with an entire bone-in confit duck leg, sausage and white beans. While heartier sandwiches grace a space on the menu, go for the exquisitely executed entrees. Get a to-go box and then splurge on dessert, paired with a few nicely chosen ports or dessert wines. Cava is a gift to the Southeast side.

Miss Delta • 3950 N. Mississippi Ave.

This small new kid on the block packs all the punch of an authentic Southern kick to the groin. The gin gimlets put a lil' hair on my chest, while the sumptuous fried chicken and cheesy mac had me undoing my belt two notches. The crispy okra, hushpuppies and stout-spiked spare ribs are all true-to-form staples done right. The fried black-eyed pea fritters are dense, moist and addictive, whilst the collard greens hold enough heat to melt yer damn chaps. Balance it all with some dark, creamy shrimp gumbo, an apple hot toddy and rambunctious diner folk and you'll start to wonder which Mississippi you're really in.

Caffé Allora • 509 N.W. Ninth Ave.

A resident in the Pearl for more than four years, this beautifully tiny, intimate restaurant has been overshadowed by some of Portland's most prestigious Italian joints. Thank goddess for that, making reservations unnecessary and keeping the prices insanely moderate. The abundant antipasti platter pays homage to pickled and marinated vegetables as much as it does to buttery coppa and spicy capricola. The homemade ravioli specials are to die for, as is the quattro formaggio gnocchi. Simple fare is the key to Allora's menu—no lobster cream sauce or truffle-infused caviar brioche, just perfectly cooked pasta, creamy cheese and fine cured meats. 10

JENNY NGUYEN believes everything needs the balance of sweet, salty and hot. Write to her about restaurants, food or egg drop soup at epiqueerean@comcast.net.

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