



Epiqueerean
BY JENNY NGUYEN

Alberta Strikes Again

It seems about this time every year that I dedicate an entire column to the ever-morphing Alberta District. In approximately 12 months we've seen places open, shutter, reopen and then close. Every now and then, though, there are keepers. Here are three places that have done their time and are proving that they've got what it takes to stick around.

Lolo • 2940 N.E. Alberta St.

The youngest of the lot is this chic new tapas bar. Offering small plates from a handwritten chalk menu on the wall, Lolo serves traditional tidbits from regions such as Basque, Cantabria and Galicia. Banderillas, or tiny swords, of Spanish anchovy, pickled pepper and olive make for the perfect salty skewer snack to accompany any robust rioja or tempranillo. The crispy potato croquettes of Serrano and manchego can be seen at every table—and for good reason. Do not underestimate the power of a small soup or salad in combination with the small plate festival; a rich, creamy saffron soup perfectly balances a chilled, lemony *papas bravas* with tender romaine. The small yet comprehensive tapas list could stand alone, but the *raciones* or entree-size dishes are a definite plus. Leave plenty of room for the homemade *churros* and cayenne hot chocolate; dipping into decadence has never tasted so good.

Francis Restaurant • 2338 N.E. Alberta St.

This gorgeous building has tempted my culinary curiosity for some time now. It has been just over a year, and I'm kicking myself for not having gone there sooner. The extra-large windows are perfectly suited for people watching and lend warmth to the eatery. The menu is much like the atmosphere: classic-traditional and yet modern-contemporary. From perfectly poached eggs and fluffy cheese scrambles to crisp, fried potatoes, the menu is both well-rounded and excellently executed. A vegetable hash came loaded with winter squash, brussels sprouts and whole roasted garlic. A simple garnish of fruit is elevated by the slightest dash of mint-infused olive oil. Vegans rejoice, as there is an entire menu dedicated to vegan and gluten-free diners. It is these tiniest, subtlest of details that take Francis to the top of Portland's breakfast dining experiences.

Mash Tun Brewpub • 2204 N.E. Alberta St.

Practically a local landmark now for neighboring brew fans (after only less than two years), the Mash Tun has its pros and cons. Stunningly attentive service, terrific cozy bar atmosphere, late-night eats (till 1 a.m.) and quick rotating taps (and a full bar) make this a nice alternative to smokier dives on the strip. Hodgepodge juke tunes, darts and a pool table up the ante, too. But it's the food that is less than expected. Although fair for pub grub, a spot like this could use some fresher fixins than the standards. Arrive 'tween 4 and 6 p.m. and get a buck knocked off yer pint and a \$4.50 burger that would make McMenamins shiver. Changing the taps is nice, but a change in the menu every once in a while wouldn't hurt, either. **10**

JENNY NGUYEN has a self-indulgent oral fixation. Help her help you by writing to her about food, drink and the like at epiqueerean@comcast.net.

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