Epiqueerean
BY JENNY NGUYEN

Spice Up Your Life

This year I'm turning up the heat. I'm tired of people scoffing, "What kind of Asian are you" when I hesitate at a 1.5-star rating at Cha'ba Thai or outright laughing when I opt for mild at the taco stand. This is the year I will not cringe at chili flakes and fresh jalapeño bits or push aside the dollop of sriracha in my peanut sauce. For all the lovers out there, here's to cranking up the heat, 'cuz we all know you *are* what you eat.

East India Co. • 821 S.W. 11th Ave.

Walk through the doors of this new, ultra-swanky restaurant and let your taste buds guide you through the Silk Road journey. First be met by a fanciful wait staff, bar and enveloping beige silk and finely stitched cream leather booths. Sit down and be treated like royalty, beginning with paper-thin cracker bread accompanied by tantalizingly tart tamarind chutney or the mouth-blazing jalapeño-cilantro chutney. Continue with *papdi chaat*, little cakes stuffed with curried potatoes and chickpeas; they will have your adrenaline reeling. Spiced *pakore* are small, crisp fritters bursting with cumin, ajowain and jeera. Travel further and find the finest of spiced slow-cooked lamb dishes, gosht vindaloo, with its succulent, slow, smoky heat that keeps on giving. Conclude your culinary travels with one of the many authentic Indian desserts: from *gajjar ka halwa*, carrot cake with nuts and raisins, to the ultimately divine *gulab jumun*, milk "doughnuts" poached in cardamom, rose water and saffron syrup.

Dalo's Kitchen • 4134 N. Vancouver Ave.

Housed in a seemingly uncanny multipurpose warehouse across from Vendetta, this tiny restaurant packs enough heat to make Dr. Dre blush. Choose between small and giant portions of berbere-spiced lentils with lamb, curried peas and cabbage and split peas in light yellow sauce. Inside you'll find one of the best Ethiopian vegetarian platters in town. The heat is subtle and gentle at first, then you realize you've taken off your scarf, your hat, your jacket and your sweater. Use the perfectly spongy injera to sop up the sauces, and prepare to perspire. One thing that you won't be sweating is the bill, by far the hottest holla for your dollar.

Thai Pk Restaurant • 6141 S.W. Macadam Ave.

Fear not: Neither the strip mall locale nor the rattan and tropical/palm theme inside is any reflection on the quality of food. This place is renowned for its dedication to fiery Thai cuisine; anything above a three-star rating is definitely not for the faint of heart. Being as I am in the midst of a grand transformation, of course I had no choice but to order at least one three-alarm fire. Millions of taste buds died in the process, but the house special, Flaming Beef, is totally worth it. Also notable, and notably *less* spicy, is the *miang kum*, a sort of roll-your-own with ginger, shallots, spinach and dried shrimp. If the water isn't putting out the blaze, Pk has a sizable beer menu to help squelch your hot, hot heat. jo

JENNY NGUYEN *hopes your Valentine's Day was scorching hot. Help fuel her fire by sending restaurant and bar suggestions to epiqueerean@comcast.net.*

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