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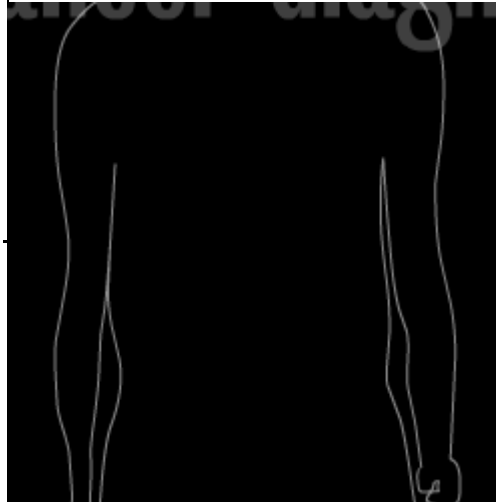
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Friday, January 14, 2005

capsule reviews of places we liked

Bold-Sky Cafe & Studios No place better embodies the funky DIY aesthetic of North Mississippi Avenue's growing restaurant scene than this eclectic cafe. The menu is a mix of comfort food, tricked-out salads and pizza-like flatbreads. One thing you notice is that diners linger here -- it's a place where people like to settle in for a while and talk. 3943 N. Mississippi Ave.; 503-287-0154. (Originally reviewed Jan. 7) -- Grant Butler

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Eleni's Philoxenia This Pearl District offshoot of Eleni Touhouliotis' popular Sellwood restaurant focuses on the unique dishes of the isle of Crete, with a tapas-style menu of small plates that lets you create your own series of interesting light bites. Main dish portions are so extreme they leave you feeling weighed down, but less-filling pasta options abound. Servers aren't particularly sharp so far, and they may make you feel like a dummy if you mispronounce any of the complicated dish names. 112 N.W. Ninth Ave.; 503-227-2158. (Dec. 24) -- Grant Butler

Criollo Bakery This lush Beaumont sweet spot, run by former Bluehour pastry chef Melissa McKinney, makes some delicious and strikingly high-style pastries and desserts. It's a lively spot for lunch, too, with a smart menu of simple, well-turned pleasures, from Croque Monsieur to quiche Lorraine. The space, which flows into the Java Man coffee shop next door, invites relaxing. 4727 N.E. Fremont St.; 503-335-9331. (Dec. 10) -- Bob Hicks

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Vitis Enoteca With an offbeat location, this Italian wine bar and bistro is easy to overlook. But it's worth seeking out for its worthy lite bites and an impressive by-the-glass wine list. The menu is mostly small plates, with the kitchen showing a particularly sure hand with the deep fryer. Baccala fritters of dried salt cod are light and crunchy. Even the fried walnut popover dessert shows a lot of sizzle. 535 N.W. 16th Ave.; 503-241-0355. (Dec. 3) -- Grant Butler

Meriwether's The one-time home to the acclaimed L'Auberge re-emerges as an inviting neighborhood restaurant with three very distinct spaces: a cozy bar that's busy on game nights; a quiet main dining room; and a year-round outdoor garden. The menu is largely meat and potatoes fare, but the executions are solid, offering some good options at the start of the day, including cured gravlax and light buttermilk biscuits. 2601 N.W. Vaughn St.; 503-228-1250. (Nov. 12) -- Grant Butler

Slow Bar Higgins meets Satyricon at this bar of intriguing contrasts. An ambitious collection of old-school punk/new wave blasts from a corner juke while the kitchen gets in a groove with subtly sophisticated Northwest/Italian bar food amped by farm-fresh produce. Take in a serious burger on a brioche bun, homemade ravioli topped with things like braised lamb shoulder and tomato sauce, some rockin' ceviche and a bittersweet panna cotta to seal the deal. 533 S.E. Grand Ave.; 503-230-7767 (Nov. 5) -- Karen Brooks

Basilico Ristorante e Enoteca The latest heir to the space of the legendary Zefiro is genuine, diverse and interesting in the way it purveys authentic Roman cuisine. The wine list is terrific -- you can order just about anything and be assured a good bottle at a fair price -- plus prices are modest and the room is handsome in a civilized way, and quiet, too. The possibility of having a conversation is a key ingredient here. Best bets are the fritti -- all manner of intriguing things battered and deep-fried -- pastas and lean lamb chops, all washed down, of course, with some of that good wine. 500 N.W. 21st Ave.; 503-223-2772. (Oct. 8) -- Karen Brooks

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