

## TASTE: 10 Best Things I Ate This Year

Looking back in fullness

By Max Jacobson

What really surprised me, looking over all the goodies I ingested during the past year, was the big improvement in east-side and Henderson restaurants. Generally, I try to make this list as eclectic and geographically diverse as possible, so I could have included even more dishes from the east Valley than I did here.

### 1. Lievre à la Royale, at Guy Savoy

This dish is the best thing I have ever tasted in Vegas. The stellar French restaurant in Caesars, which has what might be the most expensive tasting menu in the United States, served me an off-menu wild hare stuffed with duck confit and foie gras, in a civet, or blood sauce. You'll just have to wait until game season in mid-fall to experience this dish, and only then if you are very, very lucky. (Inside Caesars Palace, 731-7110.)

### 2. Momo at Himalayan Cuisine

Momo are golf-ball-size steamed dumplings that come 10 to an order, with a side of delicious tomato chutney—they are probably Nepal's most popular dish with Western visitors. In Nepal, they are often stuffed with lamb or water buffalo. In this restaurant, the chefs use ground turkey, a lighter, less fatty meat that, when spiced, is just as good as the original. There are also momo for vegetarians, stuffed with a mixture of minced, spiced veggies. (730 E. Flamingo Road, 894-9334.)

### 3. Pizza Settebello at Settebello

Brad Otton, a former USC quarterback who spent two years in Naples, Italy, serves the best pizza in Vegas, real Neapolitan pizza made with dough worked with the hands, never rolled with a rolling pin, and raw ingredients all baked in a wood-burning stone oven. He has also imported a live Neapolitan pizzaiolo, Carmine D'Amato, who makes one of the house specialties, pizza Settebello, with prosciutto, sausage and, somewhat against his will, pine nuts, the one concession he makes to his owner's whims. (1776 W. Horizon Ridge Parkway, 222-3556.)

### 4. Village Greek salad at The Fat Greek

A true Greek salad has no lettuce, only fat Kalamata olives, thinly sliced cucumbers, ripe red tomato, pungent onions and lots of creamy feta cheese, all tossed with astringent vinaigrette dressing. This version is one of the city's best, and, priced at less than \$6, it is a bargain to boot.

It's easily big enough to share, and it fairly shines with freshness. (4001 S. Decatur Blvd., 222-0666.)

#### 5. Brown stew fish at Tasty Island

Owen Sutherland serves terrific Jamaican fare at his storefront café, meat-filled patties, penetratingly spiced jerk chicken wings and a wonderful goat soup. Brown stew fish is his chef d'oeuvre, though. Picture a red snapper, pan-fried whole and served on the bone on top of a mound of rice and beans. Smothered in onions and brown sauce, it is, at \$14, the most expensive thing on Tasty Island's menu, and well worth it. (6820 W. Flamingo Road, 222-0002.)

#### 6. Cold cuts at Valley Cheese and Wine

Bob Howald has one of the most innovative gourmet-food stores in Nevada, filled with artisan cheese, boutique wine and unusual imported foods. He also stocks the best cold cuts around, salamis from Paul Bertolli's Northern California Fra'mani, imported Tuscan ham, aged 600 days, and porchetta, pork with a flavor that has to be tried to be believed. (1770 Horizon Ridge Parkway, 341-8191.)

#### 7. Chiu Chow Fun Gor, at Ping Pang Pong

Now that Royal Star in the Venetian has closed, their dim sum chefs have moved over to this less upscale but equally authentic Chinese restaurant in the Gold Coast. Dim sum are small savory and sweet dishes consumed with steamy pots of Chinese tea, and the variety can be endless. Here, there are dozens but none tastier than this rice flour dumpling filled with chopped meat, peanuts, herbs and vegetables. (Inside the Gold Coast, 367-7111.)

#### 8. Hummus at Chandelier

Hummus, a garbanzo-bean and sesame paste eaten as an appetizer in Middle Eastern restaurants all over town, has become so popular it is in every supermarket in town. I like the one served at Chandelier, a vaguely smoky puree served with a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil, all of which is pure magic on triangles of warm pita bread. (2980 St. Rose Parkway, Henderson, 456-8643)

#### 9. Ninh Hoa sausage rolls at Pho Saigon 8

By all accounts, this is the city's best Vietnamese restaurant, not only for its beefy pho soup, but also for the many finger foods and rice plates local Asians flock here to eat. Ninh Hoa sausage rolls come with a delicious dipping sauce made from ground shrimp, long cylinders of rice paper stuffed with raw vegetables, strips of cooked sausage and a crispy fried-flour strip for added texture. Dip the rolls in the sauce, or eat them with that chili sauce on the tables. Either way, this dish is a real winner. (5650 W. Spring Mountain Road, 248-6663.)

#### 10. Deep dish key lime pie at Bonefish Grill

For dessert comes a surprise from a fish-house chain that belongs to the Outback Steakhouse family. I wasn't blown away by the generic seafood offerings, but this dessert was one of the best versions of this pie I have ever tasted. The thick Graham-cracker crust is moist, delicious enough to eat by itself, and the pale yellow custard, topped with a thick layer of fresh whipped cream, puts most pretenders of this classic pie to shame. (10839 S. Eastern Ave., Henderson, 228-3484)