



LEFT: Tibetan vegetable dumplings, a.k.a. momos. CENTER: Owners Connie and Devi States. RIGHT: Everest's "complete meal"—everything but the prayer flags.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY KATHERINE BISH

FRUGAL FOODIE

EVEREST CAFÉ AND BAR

If they ever decide to spin off an *Extreme Makeover: Restaurant Edition* series from that Ty Pennington show, St. Louis' own Everest Café and Bar could serve as a pretty great template for how to do it.

Once upon a time in 2004, Everest owner Devi States and his wife opened the original Nepalese establishment along a stretch of Washington Avenue west of downtown proper that, at its best, looked as if it had been through a war. There were bars on the windows and poor signage. On the inside, States and Co. did their best to gussy up the drab space with Tibetan prayer flags and some greenery ... but it still looked, let's face it, rather like a hovel.

What a difference a change of address makes! After years of struggling to stay afloat in those dingy digs, about a year ago States transplanted Everest Café to The Grove, an area fast becoming restaurant central. Were it not for a few signature touches—the colorful prayer flags and States' omnipresence—it'd be damn near impossible to believe this was the same business.

Now diners are greeted by a bright interior, hefty silverware, linen napkins folded accordion-style into their water glasses—even, on occasion, a man with a keyboard

plinking out old Gershwin tunes. It's practically a supper club now, complete with a black-attired wait staff that is supremely helpful and friendly.

States is a native of Nepal, but with the location change, he added Indian and Korean fare to the menu. Lunch is still served strictly as a buffet, with a rather large à la carte menu for dinner. The "bar" part of the new name is evidenced by a very short bar in the front room, a small list of liquors, a number of hip wines (The Conquista Malbec from Argentina, for one) and around a dozen beers, many of them dry, crisp Asian lagers (Sapporo, Tsingtao and one called Taj Mahal that you've gotta try) that pair very nicely with East Asian delicacies.

Thankfully and wonderfully, though there

4145 Manchester, 314-531-4800,
 everestcafeandbar.com. Lunch buffet: Mon-Sat
 11:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m. Dinner: Mon-Thu 5–9 p.m.,
 Fri-Sat 5–11 p.m. Opening Sundays in October.

have been all these changes, the Nepalese cuisine served at Everest is still lovingly prepared and absolutely delicious. It's easy to give first-timers a quick summary of what Nepalese cooking is—thanks to Nepal's geography, think strong Indian, Tibetan and Chinese influences. Thus there is a dumpling, called a *momo*, that's stuffed with either meat or veggies, then steamed. Everest Café's momos are done just right, moist but not greasy. Another tip for the newcomer: Don't worry about reading the entire menu (which can be quite daunting)—just order for the table a "complete meal." It's a sampler platter of basmati rice, chickpeas, veggies in raw, cooked and pickled form (plus one pickled fruit: mango), and the protein of your choice (go for the lamb). For dessert, stick to rice or mango pudding.

Once you're feeling more adventurous, the servers are able to guide you through more of the menu, including the new Indian and Korean dishes (my favorite of which is the tandoori chicken). Think of a meal at Everest as an adventure—kinda like the one that Everest itself has been on this past year, transforming itself from an off-the-eaten-path hole-in-the-wall into an ethnic-eats find that's finally found itself. —Rose Martelli