

New Jersey

# Homey Ethiopian, From Sister Chefs

By [DAVID CORCORAN](#)

Published: July 27, 2008

YOU go to a restaurant for a good time and a good meal — not to be reminded of bitter things like war and repression. Still, it's instructive and moving to learn the story behind Mesob, a restaurant so sweet, calm and unassuming you'd never guess its painful, storm-tossed origins.



Alan Zale for The New York Times  
**TABLE FOR TWO** At Mesob, which Ethiopian table pictured, food is served on a flatbread and eaten by hand

Berekti Mengistu, its co-owner and guiding spirit, fled to [New Jersey](#) from Ethiopia in 1982, at 16. To this day, she does not know what became of her father, a businessman who was caught up in the genocidal Red Terror of the dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam (no relation). “So many people disappeared,” she said in a resigned voice the other day.

Ms. Mengistu went to live with an older brother in Somerset County. She fell in with New Jersey's tiny Ethiopian community (centered in East Brunswick and the Oranges) and began cooking at weekend gatherings. After her older sister Akberet, another talented cook, joined her in 1999, she recalled, “People began saying, ‘Why don't you two open a restaurant?’ ” And in October 2003, that is what they did.

The restaurant's name, pronounced meh-SOHB, refers to a toadstool-shaped wicker dining table popular in Ethiopia. (The restaurant has several, though most diners sit at standard tables.) Remove the mesob's peaked cap, and there's a round surface for the platter that holds the injera, the flat, spongy sourdough bread that is the delivery vehicle for practically all Ethiopian food.

No forks or knives, please. You order stewed meats, seafood or vegetables with fetching names like doro key wat (chicken legs) and lega tibs (boned, marinated and spiced leg of lamb); they are arranged in individual servings atop one or two large injeras for the entire table, like fragrant hills on a round, flat plain.

Break off a piece of bread. Think of it as an edible scoop for wat or tibs. Or gomen, collard greens simmered in an herbed sauce. Or butcha, puréed chickpeas with a texture like highly

spiced polenta. Taste. Repeat. Berekti Mengistu or one of her staff will stop by from time to time to answer questions, to keep you well supplied with injera, or just to make sure you're enjoying yourself.

It is that kind of place. When you enter, you're enveloped by the homey yet exotic aromas of roasting coffee and spices. The long, narrow space, with seating for 85, is done in restful shades of cinnamon and cream. On the walls are elaborate decorative garments that turn out to be vests fitted for carrying babies.

Two of the appetizers are based on injera: kategna injera, in which the bread is liberally dosed with a hot-pepper powder akin to paprika, then rolled and sliced into half-inch-thick rounds, like rollmops; and timatim fitfit (say it five times fast), in which injera is combined with a spicy-cool mix of tomatoes, onions, garlic, jalapeño pepper, lemon and olive oil. Or there are pleasant salads based on lentils and portobello mushrooms.

Without the injera, the entrees would be nothing special — just well-spiced, long-simmered versions of the stews your grandmother made. Indeed, the chicken breast and the leg of lamb came out a bit overdone and dry, as perhaps your grandmother's did. But much is redeemed by that bread, with its wonderful absorbency and its soulful buttermilky undertone. No wonder the restaurant goes through several hundred pans of it a night.

Dessert is not an Ethiopian thing, but there are some imports — a dense, perfumed mini-loaf of sesame-and-pistachio halewa (halvah) and a fully acceptable chocolate torte made by a local baker. By this point, though, you may be too full for anything but Ethiopian coffee or tea, and they are the real deal: the tea richly scented with the cardamom and cloves you smelled when you arrived; the coffee black and grainy and almost chewy. There is one thing you will certainly not want, and that is to leave.

Mesob  
515 Bloomfield Avenue  
Montclair  
(973) 655-9000  
[www.mesobrestaurant.com](http://www.mesobrestaurant.com)

**VERY GOOD**

**THE SPACE** A narrow but comfortable downtown storefront decorated with intriguing, carefully chosen examples of Ethiopian folk art. Wheelchair-accessible.

**THE CROWD** Couples and families, casually dressed.

**THE STAFF** Exceptionally warm and attentive.

**THE BAR** Bring your own wine or beer.

**THE BILL** Lunch entrees, \$9 to \$12. Dinner entrees, \$13 to \$26. All major credit cards are accepted.

**WHAT WE LIKE** Kategna injera (peppered, rolled flatbread), timatim fitfit (flatbread with spicy diced tomatoes), azifa (lentil salad), butcha (puréed chickpeas), ingudai tibs (marinated mushrooms); doro key wat or doro aletcha wat (stewed chicken legs, mild or spicy), gomen (collard greens), atkilt wat (stewed green beans), shiro (puréed split peas), tikile gomen (cabbage and potatoes); Ethiopian coffee and tea.

**IF YOU GO** Closed Monday. All other days: lunch, 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.; dinner, 3 to 11 p.m. Reservations are recommended Fridays and Saturdays. On-street parking is limited; Montclair has several municipal garages and lots, including one behind the restaurant.

Reviewed July 27, 2008

The New York Times

New Jersey

Dining | The Year in Review

## For Tighter Times, the 10 Best Values for Your Tastebuds



Alan Zale for The New York Times

**DIVERSE TASTES** At Mesob in Montclair, far left, an Ethiopian spot, the spongy flatbread injera is the utensil and part of the meal.

By [DAVID CORCORAN](#)

Published: December 23, 2008

“EVERYTHING about the place cries out ‘spare no expense,’ ” I wrote in 2005, about a restaurant that will go unnamed here. “The waiters wear white gloves. ... As you walk to your table, you sink to your ankles in the plush Oriental carpet.”

Well, that was then. As 2008 slouches to a weary, depleted close, expense is the very thing that needs to be spared. Plush carpets, white gloves, the very word “upscale”: all belong to a more

innocent time, when lavish bonuses bought lavish meals and irrational exuberance seemed rational.

And so this roundup of the year's 10 best, reviewed by me and by Karla Cook, will have a different noun from the one we usually employ. Instead of "restaurants," make it "values."

They follow no obvious pattern. Most are relatively new. Several are "ethnic"; others swim in the mainstream. All share a commitment to the creative and careful handling of high-quality ingredients, even if those ingredients do not often include foie gras and truffles.

This is not a list of cheap eats. But these 10 restaurants, listed here in alphabetical order, are [New Jersey](#)'s equivalent of an energy bar: they pack a lot of worthwhile calories into a small space — in this case, your budget.

....

### **Mesob, Montclair**

In Ethiopia, diners do not use forks or knives, and so it is at the sweet, homey Mesob, run by two sisters, Berekti and Akberet Mengistu. The delivery vehicle for practically everything is the flat, spongy sourdough bread called injera. You order stews with fetching names like doro key wat (chicken legs; \$18.95), lega tibs (boned leg of lamb; \$20.95), gomen (collard greens; \$12.95) or butcha (puréed chickpeas; \$12.95). They are arranged in individual servings atop one or two large injeras for the entire table. Break off a piece of bread, scoop some filling, and eat. D.C.

Mesob, 515 Bloomfield Avenue, Montclair; (973) 655-9000; mesobrestaurant.com.

Entrees: \$11.95 to \$24.95.

## EATING OUT

OUR RATING SYSTEM ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★★★ Very good ★★ Good ★ Fair

# Ethiopian restaurant is full of surprises

## Mesob

515 Bloomfield Ave., Montclair,  
(973) 655-9000.

Hours: lunch, 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Tuesday through Sunday; dinner, 3 to  
10 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday.

\*\*\*

## By Teresa Politano

FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

Those in a midsummer dessert-and-coffee mood would not likely think first of dropping in to an Ethiopian restaurant. Yet Mesob in Montclair has a sweet and dense almond cake so punctuated with nuts that you won't be able to complete a sentence, plus a lovely cappuccino ice cream. And coffee? The coffee here is a story unto itself, part ancient ritual, part performance art, all dark and intense, served to pamper.

If Mesob is on your radar screen

at all, it's likely there as a destination restaurant, one of those places to go when you are feeling adventurous. Indeed, the decor reinforces that conception. Much is here to engage the curiosity-seeker; the artwork is stunning, offering practically a museum's tour of tapestries, leatherwork, artifacts. It's soothing here, in an ancient way, a hushed-toned way, a museum way . . .

But there on the menu are cabbage and potatoes, for goodness' sake. And there at a table by the door is a happily munching 5-year-old, whose mother, all crisp and Lily Pulitzer summery, is taking pictures, as if it's his birthday celebration.

The wait staff at this sophisticated BYO is clearly trained to help you connect the dots between New Jersey and Ethiopia. "Is it your first time here? May I

## The wait staff at this sophisticated BYO is clearly trained to help you connect the dots between New Jersey and Ethiopia.

make a suggestion?"

If it is (and if you are a meat-eater), you'll be guided to the restaurant's meat sampler (\$21.95) - a perfect choice, too, for critics. Bluntly put, you get five meats and three vegetables.

The meats, prepared family-style, are stewed versions of favorites that transcend cultures. We ate simmered lamb, a spicy beef stew, a cubed beef stew and a mild beef stew. We ate chicken breast sauteed with red onions and garlic. We ate cabbage and potatoes, green beans and carrots and marinated portobello mushrooms (which are well worth their extra cost). '

Everything we tried was quite

pleasant, but we were impressed more when we ventured off the sampler. The shrimp (\$22.95), sauteed with red onions and fresh tomato, was so light as to almost seem airborne.

Once you've made sense of the menu, then, the real culture shock is not so much the food, but the way it is served. The entire meal comes on a giant round piece of spongy Ethiopian bread (think savory crepe). And no silverware. The idea is to gather the food with tire bread, family-style. Which, of course, is nice, and friendly and communal and all, but, as Americans, we worry about such things as double dipping

and too many carbs.

But if you ask nicely (and they'll probably hate me for telling you this), you will be given one of the forks they have reserved in the back. (And even though this was admittedly an ugly American thing to do, they were cordial about it.)

Order the urn of Ethiopian coffee (\$14), and the beans brought to the table for your approval, as if they were a revered vintage.

The coffee that returns (in an urn that appears lovingly ancient, and is quite heavy) is dark, rich and vibrant, but also crisp, without a trace of oils or even the faint hint of aftertaste. It is poured, appropriately, in tiny and oh-so-delicate china cups. And those desserts - the sweet almond cake (\$7.95) comes with an intense raspberry sauce, and the cappuccino crunch (\$5.95) is rich and creamy.

## For two sisters in Ethiopian family of 10, feeding a crowd comes naturally

Wednesday, December 17, 2003

By ERIC LEVIN

Until they opened Mesob in November, Berekti and Akberet Mengistu had never even worked in a restaurant. But having grown up in a family of 10 children, the Ethiopian sisters have plenty of experience cooking for a crowd, which is what they hope to attract when Mesob holds its grand opening tomorrow through Sunday. Ethiopian cooking is all about family-style eating. Most of the dishes are rich, thick stews, long-simmered and served on spongy sourdough crepes that double as plates and, when torn into pieces, even as spoons. Scoop it up with fingers and a piece of the crepe, called injera, and you have an Ethiopian meal.

At their home in East Brunswick, the sisters are familiar with people dropping in for dinner. Two of their seven brothers live nearby, and a third brother lives in Manhattan. They have more than 100 cousins on their father's side alone.

"People are always visiting, coming for weddings, staying with us," says Berekti. Dinner for eight is a minimum. Dinner for 30 or 40 is no big deal.

At Mesob, which is located at 515 Bloomfield Ave., Berekti is the manager and Akberet the chef. They began to think about



a partnership four years ago, after Akberet, who had been running their late father's hotel and trucking business in Addis Ababa, came to live with Berekti, who ran software development projects for AT&T and Lucent. The girls had been trained in Ethiopian cooking by their mother, whose 1997 funeral was the last occasion when all 10 children gathered at one time and place.

Since East Brunswick already had an Ethiopian restaurant, the Mengistus looked elsewhere. Inevitably, the project became a family affair. Their cousin Amanuel Michael, a real estate agent in West Orange and Montclair, found the space, which had previously been a seafood grill, an Egyptian restaurant and, back when, a health food store. Michael's wife, Azeb, an architect, handled the permitting. The firstborn, Daniel, who lives in Plainfield, backed the venture financially. Berekti's friend, the New York bridal gown designer Manalé, who is Ethiopian, chose the palette of

earthtones for the awning, menu and interior.

Mesob, which is pronounced with a short e and a long o, is named for the round wicker tables, with their decorative dome-like covers, at which Ethiopian families traditionally dined. Patrons can sit at mesobs near the front windows, or at regular tables. Wherever they sit, they will hear recorded Ethiopian pop music, improvisational and rhythmically intricate, playing softly in the background.

On the walls hang works from Berekti's collection of Ethiopian and Eritrean art, including what appears to be a set of four large fabric sculptures. These turn out to be traditional tribal papooses made from leather and trimmed with seashells from the Red Sea.

"I wanted the restaurant to look like an art gallery," says Berekti of Mesob's long, high-ceilinged walls, one of which is brick. "I've never seen this art shown the way it should be."

The most collaborative effort of all produced the most striking result — the seven cylindrical lamps that cast a toasted-wheat glow over the bar that runs down the center of the room.

Each lamp is a tan cylinder four feet tall made of paper-thin leather stretched on a metal frame. The parchment-like leather is covered with rows and columns of burnt umber-colored characters — the 33 letters of the Amharic alphabet, each of which has seven vowel-sound variations, and a table of Amharic numerals.

"My brother in the Netherlands, Amanuel, designed the lamps, and my brother Henok, who lives in East Brunswick, assembled

them," says Berekti. One of the lamps, instead of the alphabet, is painted with scenes of life among Ethiopia's Afar tribe.

"This is all a family's love," says Berekti, standing at the bar, gesturing around the restaurant.

Spiced tea and strong coffee are prized in Ethiopia, and the bar will feature both. Mesob grinds spices for the tea daily. The flavors include cinnamon, ginger, cardamom and cloves in a black-tea base. The bar will feature a half-dozen different teas, along with American desserts made by Montclair baker Raymond Reid, whose company is called Tart & Soul.

Dessert is admittedly not an Ethiopian dinner's most inventive hour. Fresh fruit is typical. In drinks, honey is the traditional sweetener. Ethiopians make an aperitif-like honey wine called tej. Children drink berze — water weened with honey. "Sugar is not popular, though we grow it," Berekti says. "It is associated with modern times," she explains, notably the occupation of Eritrea by Italian forces before World War II.

Ethiopian cooking is powered by a spice paste called berbere, which is made from a paprika-like pepper combined with cayenne, salt, onions, ginger and other spices, and toasted over low heat.

Main courses are slow-cooked, with constant stirring. "It's like risotto that way," says Berekti. Meat stews are prepared with clarified butter. "In Ethiopia the cows eat grass, that's it. There are no hormones and we use a lot of butter," she says. "Here, we use much less."



Ethiopia's population is about equally divided between Moslems and Coptic Christians. Vegetarianism is important in both religions, and meatless dishes contain no butter, eggs or other animal products. About a third of dishes on Mesob's menu follow this vegan tradition.

The Mengistu family attend a Coptic church in New York City. Their surname may sound familiar: Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam led the junta that violently deposed Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. Berekti wants to make one thing perfectly clear: "There was a horrible president, a brutal dictator, by that name, but we are not related to him."

## RESTAURANT REVIEW

## Mesob

Reviewed by [Genevieve Contey](#)

Posted March 11, 2008

Communal meals are the heartbeat of Ethiopian culture, and injera—grilled sourdough pancakes made from a tiny grain called teff—is its lifeblood. Injera serves as plate and, torn into pieces, as fork and spoon for the slow-cooked stews central to Ethiopian cuisine.

Mesob (meh-SOBE) is named for the woven, mushroom-shaped tables Ethiopian families gather around. Diners at Mesob can sit at actual mesobs in the storefront windows. The restaurant, owned by sisters Berekti and Akberet Mengistu, is staffed almost entirely by family. Sister Hiwot regularly delivers the highly prized pepper-spice mixes, critical to Ethiopian cuisine, straight from Addis Ababa.

The scent of freshly ground cloves and cinnamon fill the nose as you enter. Then the eye falls on the Ethiopian tapestries and handmade leather papooses. Lamps with shades of parchment-like leather inscribed with the Ge' ez alphabet illuminate the bar with amber haloes.

Mesob's menu could overwhelm first-timers if not for its instructive glossary and heat ratings. Entrée portions are large, and side dishes are an essential part of the fun, so don't over-order. That said, it's hard to pass up preludes like kategna injera, toasted strips of injera basted with berbere spice mix and clarified butter. Ayib bemitmita, a cool, creamy farmer's cheese dusted with mitmita (a hotter variation of berbere), is refreshing despite the higher heat. The standout preamble is ingudai tibs, marinated Portobello sautéed with caramelized red onion, garlic, and tomato.

Akberet, the chef, produces beef entrées with big bangs of flavor. Tibs wat (cubed beef simmered with awaze spice paste) was consistently moist and smoky. Minchet abish aletcha wat (chopped beef sautéed in spiced butter) was akin to a sloppy joe, but sweeter and more vibrant.

In Ethiopia, seafood is generally limited to freshwater varieties, but Mesob's adaptation of chunky swordfish tibs was well-prepared and reminiscent of a comforting cacciatore. Succulent shrimp tibs might be Mesob's finest dish.

Chicken and lamb were flavorful but inconsistent. Doro tibs (chicken) was moist the first time, dry on a repeat visit. Lega tibs (boneless lamb) was tasty but sinewy. Yebeg aletcha wat (tender lamb chunks) was the better of the two lamb dishes, but the unexpected bones made scooping with injera awkward.

Vegetables are a strong point. Nearly half the menu is vegan (no meat, dairy, or eggs) and closely follows the Lenten recipes of Ethiopia's Coptic Christian Church. The shiro (puréed split peas) had the

warm, pumpkiny essence of autumn. Atkilt wat (green beans simmered with carrots) and tikile gomen (a chunky cabbage and potato stew) were deliciously comforting. Lentils, an Ethiopian staple, bask in a sharp red-pepper sauce (miser wat) and are also served as a chilled salad (azifa) delicately dressed with olive oil, parsley, and a hint of jalapeño.

Excellent Western-style desserts from Tart & Soul in Montclair include moist almond cake with strawberry sauce, rich espresso chocolate torte, and pistachio halvah with fig sauce.

The ancient proverb, Buna dabo naw, or “Coffee is our bread,” demonstrates Ethiopia’s affection for its prized Arabica beans. They produce a robust brew that is nuttier and less biting than espresso. Poured from a gourd-like pot and served in festive porcelain cups, Mesob’s coffee is a must.

**New Jersey**  
MONTHLY

Copyright © 2009 New Jersey Monthly Magazine  
[Legal Disclaimer/Privacy Statement](#)



## Edible Exit eats its way through Montclair

Published: Thursday, April 22, 2010, 4:28 AM

[Frank Remshifski](#)



Doro Aletcha Wat at Mesob in Montclair. Photo by Frank Remshifski

Mesob Restaurant  
515 Bloomfield Ave.  
(973) 655-9000

A modern yet welcoming design aesthetic and Ethiopian cultural art set the stage for exotic regional cuisine. Most entrées are just about \$10, including classic wat (stews) that are served with two vegetarian side dishes and atop an enormous injera (flatbread the size of a large Jersey pizza). I enjoyed the doro aletcha wat (chicken and eggs in a mildly spiced sauce) with atkilt wat (green beans and carrots) and butcha (pureed chickpea mélange). Don't ask for utensils when you don't find them on your table. You eat with your hands using the spongy flatbread. \$9.95

© 2009 New Jersey On-Line LLC. All Rights Reserved

# What diners are saying about Mesob...

from [OpenTable.com](http://OpenTable.com)



Jul 3, 2010

The food was delicious--we had the vegetarian sampler for two. The prices are very reasonable and it's a BYO. All the dishes we selected were delicious. The decor was very nice and the staff was helpful and attentive; the hostess even ...

Jun 27, 2010

Great restaurant! Authentically Ethiopian which is terrific. Friendly atmosphere, great food and good location. Staff is friendly and the place is beautifully decorated and clean.

June 24, 2010

"I am never disappointed when I go to Mesob. Excellent service, pleasant environment and superb food. And, it's a BYOB."

Jul 12, 2010

"Excellent as always! We have been dining here for past 4 years and the food has always been consistently excellent. :-)"

Jul 5, 2010

"The food was delicious--we had the vegetarian sampler for two. The prices are very reasonable and it's a BYO. All the dishes we selected were delicious. The decor was very nice and the staff was helpful and attentive; the hostess even noticed me struggling with the menu in the dim light and adjusted the lighting for my middle-aged eyes. We will definitely return."

June 29, 2010

"Great restaurant! Authentically Ethiopian which is terrific. Friendly atmosphere, great food and good location. Staff is friendly and the place is beautifully decorated and clean."

June 15, 2010

"Had a great time! Food is beyond tasty!" Special Features: fit for foodies, romantic

June 8, 2010

"Great food and a lot of fun. Our waitress was wonderful she spent a lot of time with us helping us figure out what we should order, as some in our party had not eaten Ethiopian before. The owner came over to our table after dinner to talk with us as well, which was also really great. I would highly recommend this restaurant and we will definitely be going back"

June 1, 2010

"This is the second time we have visited this restaurant and have had very agreeable experiences both times. The cuisine is Ethiopian and therefore something different, which is an advantage. Everything was well-prepared, very tasty, with good variety and unusual presentation. The service was outstanding, very solicitous and helpful. We would certainly return."

June 1, 2010

"This restaurant never disappoints me. The warmth of the staff and surroundings add to the experience of cuisine that is always so savory and fresh. The Ethiopian blending of spices is so skillful that each dish becomes a distinct work of art."

May 26, 2010

"One of our favorite places! Food and service are wonderful."

May 18, 2010

"This is our second visit to Mesob and is among the gems of Montclair. The food and service are excellent and the "hands on" eating makes it a true dining experience. We love the control you have over what appears on your plate which is good news for vegetarians that may be in your group. Be prepared if you don't like the idea of eating with your hands because forks are nowhere to be found here."

May 12, 2010

"I had never eaten Ethiopian food before so I had the sampler plate - it was all great. The menu was clearly labelled what level of spiciness to expect which is good. Very tasty food. Service was very good too and the setting was beautiful. If you are in the area, you should definitely check it out."

May 11, 2010

"Found this restaurant a few years ago when my professor took our class to sample some of the food he grew up on in Ethiopia...have been coming back ever since. The food is great, the staff is friendly and helpful and the overall ambiance makes for a fun night out for dinner."

May 4, 2010

"Our first time trying Ethiopian.. we LOVED it. Staff was super fantastic at describing menu items, helping us choose, explaining how to eat it! We'll definitely go again."

May 4, 2010

"My sister chose Mesob for my Birthday dinner...even though my Birthday was April 6th :) We were a bit late on celebrating, hehe I have been to an Ethiopian Restaurant many many years ago in New York City, and it did not make a very good impression on me. I was a bit hesitant to give Mesob a try, but my sister's co-worker spoke VERY VERY highly of this place.

It's bring your own, which is great I think! My sister brought a bottle of wine.

The food is OUTSTANDING!!!! The waitress was SUPER nice and shared her favorites with us, to help us decide. We were told by my sister's co-worker to try the "TASTE OF MESOB", which is a sampler. It was amazing! You choose from a mild/medium/spicy flavor, which I think is great. I would come here again!!"

Apr 27, 2010

"A rare dining experience with a unique cuisine, informed and attentive service, and charming ambience with tables well placed for discrete personal space."

Apr 20, 2010

"The food was delicious and presented in a wide variety for both meat and non-meat eaters. The space was accommodating and our waiter showed us how to eat the food as it was our first Ethiopian dining experience. Portions were generous and there was enough food to take home and enjoy!"

Apr 18, 2010

"An eating adventure. Great novelty for something different but so delicious it will be great to return to. BYO-FYI"

Apr 12, 2010

Our dining experience was excellent!! Ethiopian food was something new and exotic to the 3 of us and it exceeded our expectations. The staff was friendly and well informed, they were able to make suggestions on what the most delicious plates were. The overall experience was great and i would recomend it to anyone looking to try something new & exciting..."



From UrbanSpoon.com

By Leah - Jun 13, 2010

Amazing! I used to go to school at Montclair, and anytime my family would visit we would eat here. The food was always great, and everyone was always friendly. Make sure you go in ready to eat .

By Diallo Hall - Jun 11, 2010

The food is both authentic and prepared with attention to quality and the sensibilities of it's patrons. For example, the chefs go to great lengths to strike the fine balance between flavor and authenticity. In Ethiopia, people believe that excessive amounts of oil make a dish "special.". (So if you have ever had oily Ethiopian food, you now know why - it was "special"). However Mesob has adapted the ancient cooking traditions of Ethiopia to give a unique dining experience in a warm environment.

by Debi - January 24, 2010

I love Mesob - the staff and owners always take special time to welcome you. The food is the best Ethiopian I have eaten (and I've eaten it in NJ and NY) - perfect blending of those great spices. And, always thinking of their diners, they've added desserts to the menu - all freshly made. That's another thing I love about this restaurant - ALL the food is freshly made, no canned food, no frozen foods, no preservatives.

by Zizi

July 10, 2009 - Likes it

Amazing food!!! The best ethiopian restaurant!!! Can't be better than that!! The restaurant is super cozy and clean! Love it!!

by Robert Buchanan

June 21, 2009 - Really likes it

Complex Spices, tender meats, flavorful vegetables and injera bread makes dining the experience it should be.

The friendly staff and warm decor makes Mesob the perfect place to relax with family, friends and you favorite BYOB wine, while eating just about the greatest "finger foods" in the Montclair.



From Yelp.com



**June 18 2010**

**Andrew D**

I've been eyeballing this restaurant for a few months, since it opened, and finally got a chance to tuck inside for dinner with my wife a few weeks ago. I loved it. I'm already kind of a fan of injera food, because I like to eat with my hands and make a mess, and this was quite a treat.

The atmosphere of the place is really calm, warm, and inviting. The tables are small and nicely spaced, and even when the dining room is crowded you feel like you're in your own little booth. The staff is friendly and welcoming, and are happy to explain anything on the menu.

The food itself is delicious, prepared with the love and care of native Ethiopian cooks. The owner of the restaurant told us about her cookbook and described how the particular chilis that they use are prepared specially in Ethiopia by drying and soaking and roasting for weeks on end.

The bread they serve is beautifully soft and has its own kind of fermented zing. It is always uniformly bubbly and doesn't have any of those hard, dried, crusty bits around the edges. It reminds me of the suppleness of a calf's skin, or some large, fluffy creature's stomach lining. Yeah, I know that doesn't sound so great, but trust me on that one--stomach lining is pretty soft.

An important note: Mesob is BYOB, so if you want a glass of wine with your meal, bring it yourself. There is no corkage fee.

And for a good selection of wine and beer and spirits, try Amanti Vino, on Church St, about a block and a half away.

**Apr 7, 2010**

**Donna W**

Living in NYC, I have enjoyed Ethiopian food since 1986 when I was in college and we went to Zulu on upper Amsterdam near Columbia University. Zulu is sadly gone, but now I live in NJ and am thrilled to have found Mesob. The food is delicious, the prices are good (not as dirt cheap as Zulu was, but I'm not a student anymore either). I usually stick to the vegetarian options . .Shiro, spicy lentils, etc, but have also tried some of the meat options, and they are excellent as well. The vegetarian sampler option is a good way to go, but I have also ordered the various vegetarian entrees and each of those comes with 2 sides. So if there is a vegetarian option you just want to try, you can do it with a side. I found that worked out really well for me. Also when I ordered the individual entrees I was sure to get enough of the yummy shiro!!

Park in the lot right behind Mesob since street parking can be hard to find.

**Feb 17, 2010**

**Itamar K**

We had been meaning to try Mesob out for a while - but never got around to it. So finally, on my wife's birthday - we went out - and have loved it ever since! We had never had Ethiopian food before - and were surprised to find how much we loved it!

The service was amazing, and the food had such a great distinct taste. We literally can't wait to go again!

Oh, and the owner contacted me on Facebook after I'd mentioned Mesob - and invited me back themselves - with a free coffee! If you give this restaurant credit - they will reciprocate!

**Feb 15, 2010**

**Elizabeth S**

I've been on an Ethiopian food mission for the past year and Mesob continues to come out on top. In comparison to recommended restaurants in Ferndale, MI, DC, New Brunswick, I still think Mesob comes out on top for the following reasons:

1) Atmosphere: Walking into this restaurant, you are hit with the wonderful smell of the spices. It is dimly lit, romantic, and well decorated.

2) Food: The food here has by far been the best seasoned Ethiopian I've tasted.

The wait staff is hit or miss, but the owners are great and friendly. I consider this a place you spend the night in, enjoying some wine and taking your time eating. If you are in a rush, I don't recommend eating here.

Mesob is still the best Ethiopian I've had and what's even better is that I can walk here!!

**Jan 18, 2010**

**Johnny A**

When I think about a good night out at a restaurant, I think about this place.

The staff is super friendly and the food is so delicious! We got a vegetarian sampler split between the three of us and it was plenty of food. The bread is SO GOOD and delicious.

This place should stick around for a LONG time!

BYOB, too!!!!

the pictures you'll see on the internet are not helpful at all. just go to this place and try it if you've never had ethiopian food. it's a lot like eating Indian food.

who needs silverware when you've got hands and fingers?

**Nov 11, 2009**

**Jay S**

I mentioned Mesob in my review of Zoma in NYC, so I figured I owe it to them to come and write a review for this place too...

I cannot believe it's true, but it is. Mesob is the best Ethiopian restaurant in the entire Greater New York City area. I know that's quite a claim, but I've tried them all now, and hands down Mesob wins.

The food here is fantastic. Great ingredients, plenty of fresh, fluffy injera, and wonderful spices in the stews.

The service is friendly, to the point where you actually feel like the place is run by a group of friends.

The atmosphere and decor is pretty typically ethnic Ethiopian, which I have to admit is a little nicer than the nouveau-wallpaper magazine Zoma.

Plus, it's in Montclair, which means:

- It's easy for NJ'ers to get to
- easy / free parking
- BYOB with friendly provision of corkscrew & glasses

If you live in the city, then you'll probably scoff at the idea of going to Montclair for a great meal.

But... if you live in NJ, Mesob is proof that you don't have to go into the city to have a fantastic meal.



**From Montclair Eats.com**

**Excellent Ethiopian Cuisine**

Family owned, nice ambience with traditional ethiopian style furniture, and authentic food - Our favorite is spongy freshly baked bread "INJERA".

Posted by A & Y on 01/20/2010

**Our New Favorite!**

My husband and I had never had Ethiopian food before, so we decided to try something new. The food at Mesob was absolutley phenomenal! My husband had some kind of lamb/beef sampler with 3 kinds of vegetables - lentils, chickpeas and string beans - which he loved. I had shrimp tibs (tomato and shrimp stew..but very light) with collard greens (never had these before..so good) and lentils. The injera bread that you eat with is also very good. The flavors were just wonderful! The sevice was also excellent. The owner made sure to come around and introduce herself. This is definitely one of our new favorite restaurants!

Posted by Sullivan on 10/04/2009