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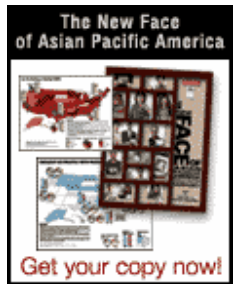
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Fowl Play

Duck and noodle dishes are hits at Osha



Jul 16, 2004

Osha Thai Noodle Café on Geary has served up its fair share of chicken soup for the soul to folks who have had that after-

hours grumble in their stomachs for something salty, flavorful and slippery. The popular Tenderloin late-night joint attracts both young and old looking to slurp and sweat over a steaming bowl of noodles in a barebones and greasy environment.

Now, Osha fans have another reason to celebrate as the restaurant has expanded to a second location in the Mission. Instead of elbowing people at the often-packed Geary spot, you'll be rubbing elbows with the city's hip and pretty crowd at Osha Thai on Valencia. On any given night, you can bet your bottom dollar that Mission hipsters and young urban bohos are gnoshing on pad thai and spicy eggplant.

Sleek, clean, tropical and modern are just some of the adjectives to describe Osha Thai's décor. The unassuming exterior leads to a dining room with subtle bamboo murals on taupe walls and a Buddhist alter near the entrance of the restaurant. Metal-framed and oblong-shaped plastic chairs are reminiscent of The Jetsons, and the Pergo-like floors finish off the restaurant's clean and airy atmosphere.

Definitely a place to take a date.

While a meal at Osha Thai won't break the bank as it might at, say, Slanted Door, the food does carry some hints of what you might encounter at Charles Phan's upscale restaurant.

Wearing jeans and my New Balances, I didn't know if my casual attire would jibe with the atmosphere, but was relieved when I saw I was in the company of several scruffy looking tourists. Our server was energetic, attentive and personable, and greeted my lunch mates and me with a smile.

The Salmon Sashimi Salad (\$7.95) really showcased the importance of presentation and artistic flair at Osha Thai. The dish consisted of fresh mango wedges, sliced lemon grass, kaffir lime leaves, red onions, scallions and raw chunks of salmon all dressed in a spicy, lime-spike sesame oil vinaigrette. Atop these simple and fragrant ingredients were strands of orange carrots and red beets.

Between bites of the supple and oily salmon, the moist mango and the crunchy lemon grass made this dish a sensory experience for my mouth. The lime juice permeated the salmon just enough to give it a kick, which brought out the saltiness of the mango. The salmon was fresh, however I felt the salad lacked an overall refreshing quality to it. The mangoes weren't sweet and the dressing seemed to be on the briny side.

We enjoyed the smooth and gentle flavors of the Green Curry Chicken (\$7.95), which had chicken, Thai green eggplant, bell peppers, basil and bamboo shoots swimming in a green chili paste and coconut milk infusion.

The curry had a nice sweetness to it and the sauce wasn't too greasy or congealed. You can request the degree of spiciness of this dish; we asked for a mild heat, which turned out to be very conservative. You can also ask for a dish of fiery, red-hot chili paste if you want to really impress your date.

Hands down, Osha Thai's Barbecue Duck Noodle Soup with Spinach Noodles (\$7.95) is probably one of the best noodle soups I've had here in the city. Served in a beautiful porcelain-boat tureen, the soup featured pieces of perfectly cooked duck entangled among a soft mound of spinach noodles, which soaked up the amazing and soothing herb-infused potage. After sipping

the broth, I placed my soup spoon down and allowed my taste buds to soak up every flavor present in the rich and smoky broth. I gently swirled the tablespoonful of liquid in my mouth like I was tasting a bottle of vintage wine.

Crisp mung bean sprouts added a nice crunch to the soft-textured dish, and the soft and creamy fettuccine-like noodles absorbed the roasted flavors of the juicy and sweet duck.

At times, Osha Thai gives the impression that it may be focusing too much on appearances to compensate for areas in which it's lacking. But from the dishes I had last week, they don't have to worry about that. My philosophy is: If it tastes good and is fresh, you can serve it to me in a *clean* bucket. You can't really dress up rubbery noodles, day-old fish or wilted vegetables but you can downplay pretty garnishes and twirly vegetables to concentrate and put the spotlight on the main ingredients.

Osha Thai

819 Valencia St. *(between 19th and 20th streets)*

San Francisco, CA 94110

415-826-7738

Hours:

Sun. – Sat. 11 a.m. – midnight

Prices:

Appetizers: \$3.95 - \$6.95; soups and salads:
\$5.95 - \$10.95; entrees: \$6.95 - \$10.95

Credit cards accepted.

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