



Chef Tang's 9021Pho offers a fusion of French and Vietnamese cuisine

Fresh, tasty and healthy . . . with a twist

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MELTING POT—Chef Kimmy Tang has brought her French-Vietnamese fusion cuisine to The Lakes shopping center in Thousand Oaks. Her restaurant, 9021Pho, originated in Beverly Hills.

If you've never tasted food from a French-Vietnamese restaurant, you're in for a real treat at 9021Pho in Thousand Oaks.

The concept is the brainchild of Chef Kimmy Tang, a delightful woman from Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City. Her vision of great-tasting food that's also healthy has resulted in five SoCal restaurants, the first in Beverly Hills—ZIP code 90210—giving rise to the clever name.

In response to my curiosity about the French-Vietnamese connection, Tang explained that the French occupation of Vietnam for decades resulted in a wide range of influences on her country's cuisine, introducing staples such as baguettes and peppercorn sauce.

Thus, the restaurant's Vietnamese pho (soup) has become a pleasant melding of cultures in a bowl—the French “hot pot,” her country's rice noodles and some California-inspired flair—creating a lovely dish that is served with bean sprouts, basil, jalapeno and lime, and a choice of perfectly spiced chicken curry, sliced beef, shrimp, meatballs, veggie selections including bok choy and mushrooms, and more.

The noodles are gluten-free, and there's even a low-carb pho, so everyone can enjoy this delectable fare.

The signature soup arrives in a 36-ounce bowl the size of a small sink, so be prepared to come with an appetite and a hankering for satisfying comfort food. And you'll leave with plenty of leftovers.

The indoor dining experience at 9021Pho is relaxing, and there's an outdoor patio overlooking the pretty gardens and water features at The Lakes on Thousand Oaks Boulevard.

A huge plant wall that includes a mix of edible herbs is a focal point of the restaurant's interior. General manager Alan Molina said the herbs are harvested for some of the dishes.

“We do wall-to-table,” he laughed, playing on the concept of farm-to-table ingredients.

The 9021Pho staff are big fans of the food. Molina, who's been with the company for over three years, described the fare as “simple ingredients done well,” and server Tess Rybowiak, also part of the Pho family for three years, said “It's fresh, really good, healthy, fun food.”

The appetizers set the tone for what's to come. For example, the fresh, handmade, chicken potstickers with minced bok choy are scrumptious served with a light ginger, soy vinaigrette, and the tasty fresh shrimp rolls definitely live up to their name. (See recipe on page 37.)

The menu also features a choice of salads, including Vietnamese chicken and Chef Kimmy's, with mixed greens, mint, seasonal fresh fruit and honey-roasted walnuts topped with a tangy tamarind dressing. Wok-tossed entrees, according to the menu, feature “Chef Kimmy's interpretations of traditional Vietnamese dishes,” with choices of protein, jasmine or brown rice, and sauce.

Tang says her specialty is making sauces, so prepare to be dazzled by the curry sauce or the lemongrass, black bean or basil choices.

There's a variety of noodle and rice dishes—such as exoticsounding Mei-Nam and Chao Fun as well as rainbow fried rice and veggie rice selections.

A menu must-have is the grilled beef, pork or chicken banh mi sandwich, one of the lunch specials available from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The charbroiled pork sandwich was so incredibly fresh and memorable, with its bits of cucumber, lettuce, pickled carrots, radish, onions, jalapeno and cilantro on a soft bun with a light mayonnaise spread.

But it's more than just great food and a wonderful atmosphere at 9021Pho because Tang is a woman on a mission. She welcomes guests as if they were family members.

“Everyone who comes to my door is my VIP,” she said.

Businesses, private parties and clubs can take advantage of the restaurant's catering services.

Ask about the sake or wine and food pairing opportunities.

Tang has been busy in the restaurant business for 29 years.

Though she has no kids of her own, she said, helping children keeps her motivated.

“I am rich in my life. I work a lot, and my dream is to give back, to help kids. . . .

“In my country, it takes \$300 a year to feed a child, so I send back money to help them,” she said.

Tang is also passionate about serving the local community and is involved in fundraising events in Ventura County.

She is also “the featured chef” of United Healthcare and AARP in the Chinese community.

“I'd like to make more people aware about the importance of helping others,” Tang said.

9021Pho is at 2200 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd. Hours are Sunday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Fridays and Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.

For more information, call (805) 494-6633 or visit www.9021Pho.com.