

**Bistro Mon Cheri's innovative menu is a fine-dining delight – 05.18.17**

Posted by [Lisa Dupuy](#) | May 18, 2017 | 0 |



Spicy Seafood Soup

When I read that Chef Kimmy Tang had opened a new restaurant in Pasadena, I got excited. I loved what she did at 9021Pho in the Glendale Galleria. Fragrant herbs and veggies dominated her creative fusion dishes. It was common for her to come out of the kitchen and greet diners. I remember her being enthusiastic, almost frantic, at the Glendale restaurant. She extracted herself from the 9021Pho chain a few years ago, spent time as a personal chef and cared for her mother. Nowadays, she's calmer, more focused but just as enthusiastic and still in love with cooking.

Chef Tang's new space is considerably less ambitious than her previous ones. It's smaller, more manageable and an easier place in which to connect with diners. What she's created has the feel of a European bistro, with Matisse-like paintings and a cafe service bar in back, but with the deep red walls and rustic wooden tables of an Asian restaurant. Combo jazz and French accordion music on the sound system sets a lovely mood and the modest wait staff members are all charming. Once you're seated and looking out at leafy trees, you tend to forget you're on the second floor of a rather hideous '80s stucco and aqua tube building. The food at Mon Cheri is informed by Chef Tang's Asian heritage and her travels to Europe, particularly Copenhagen. She is inspired by the infusions employed at world-famous restaurant, Noma. Bistro Mon Cheri's menu has a similar playfulness and imagination. Consider, for instance, Chokoliscious (meatballs filled with chocolate lava sauce) or Coffee Tori Wings (chicken wings with coffee peanut sauce). The meatballs are wonderful. What look like four donut holes arrive at your table, artfully garnished with strawberry and cucumber. We're instructed to taste everything in one bite. The deep-fried panko encrusted orb of fresh ground beef crunches, then juices, then oozes with warm chocolate filling, the

strawberry and cucumber adding refreshing texture. I expected more divergent flavors, such as bittersweet chocolate, but, as I came to find out throughout the meal, Chef Tang's way is far more delicate. You have to attune your taste buds to appreciate the lightness of her touch.

The chicken wings are to die for. Not quite sure how she does her breading and frying, but it's so light and crispy. The depth and stickiness of the coffee-peanut sauce is very satisfying. I admit we used our fingers to lick the plate clean.

Only three weeks open and Bistro Mon Cheri is already doing decent business. People seem to know exactly what they want when they come in — pate de foie de canard (duck liver pate) or filet mignon in black pepper sauce piled high with fried taro, or just a bowl of beautiful chicken noodle soup.

We opted for a unique salad and some mains. The Shibuya Sarada salad is delightful. Chiffonade-cut kale, julienned carrots, sunflower seeds and chopped tomatoes all work surprisingly well together with the slightly sweet yuzu-sesame dressing and delicious toasted walnuts. Again, we ate every bite.

Coming back a second time, I eagerly ordered another salad, the Sakura Shrimp, but this I did not like at all. In a way, I appreciate that. Not every flavor profile should be for everyone. It's better not to compromise than to try to please every palate. Chef Tang, who regularly comes through the dining area, could sense I was not into it and offered to bring something else.

All the staff has clearly been instructed to do whatever will please the customer. For example, my dining partner could not decide on which one of the many hot teas they offer. The waiter brought a full-size sample of the one she was leaning toward and never charged us. That kind of customer service goes a long way.

Speaking of hot teas, I loved the woody genmaicha. My friend loved the Paris with black and oolong tea, black currant, vanilla, caramel and bergamot flavors. We both loved the little snail tea bag holder on the side of the mug.

The Savory Tofu entree (\$13.95) with its whispers of kaffir lime leaf, ginger and garlic got more delicious with every bite. It comes on a bed of long-sautéed onion bits which seemed very French to me. The Vietnamese Curry (\$16.95) is a gorgeous yellow color with a complex flavor and has tender yam slices, crunchy snow peas and big, beautiful prawns. Had to go back for their bargain lunch special (11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday). For \$10.95 – \$11.95 you have your choice of the Colorado Blvd, the Catalina St. or the Mentor St. (now you know where the restaurant is located). They include combinations of their famous fresh spring roll, delicate miso soup or house salad and either curry, one of two large salads or noodle soup with an impeccable chicken broth. There are a number of vegetarian and some vegan items on the menu as well, with very creative uses of tofu. Street parking can be kind of a nightmare at Mon Cheri. If you overshoot the bistro, you get stuck in a web of one way streets and No Parking signs. There is a lot behind the restaurant, just off of Mentor, but it's easy to miss and costs \$2. It would be best to simply walk here. If I lived nearby, Bistro Mon Cheri would become my regular spot. The prices are right, the atmosphere is comfortable, and the food is healthy and innovative.

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### **Bistro Mon Cheri**

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