



Dining in Paradise



Editors' Note: On this page in our March, 2006, issue we published a review of Michelia Euro Asian Bistro restaurant in Los Angeles. We are sorry to report that this excellent restaurant has closed its doors. They will be missed.

R: When we discover a restaurant with great vegan offerings, we come away feeling elated. When that great food is coupled with an effervescent and gracious chef-owner that greets diners at each table, we are doubly blessed.

Z: Our good fortune was a truly exceptional dining experience the evening we met our friends Marilyn and Wendell for dinner at Michelia on West Third Street at the edge of Beverly Hills.



R: That evening the restaurant was packed with a throng of noisy students who filled nearly every table. We were seated outside on a cozy little patio flanking the entrance to the restaurant and pleasantly warmed by an outdoor heater. Clear plastic sheeting provided the perfect enclosure to keep out the winter chill. A gently bubbling fountain provided pleasant background sounds.

Z: We learned of the restaurant from one of our avid VIP fans and knew the chef has a special vegetarian menu. Lindsey, our cheery, well informed, vegetarian server eagerly offered suggestions. "The soup is really good and the **Mekong Tofu** is great," she told us. The menu offers several vegan temptations that we all decided would be more fun to share.

R: We chose the **Vegetable Saigon Rolls** as the appetizer. The **Spicy n' Sour Soup** was so highly touted by Lindsey we couldn't resist. After much pondering on the entrees, we settled on the **Garlic Eggplant**, the **Savory Shrimp**, the **Baby Bok Choy and Mushrooms**, and the recommended **Mekong Tofu**.

Z: The tables were dressed with crisp white tablecloths, cloth napkins, water goblets, a candle, and a small dish of uniquely pickled sliced vegetable. The first bite was pungently sweet, the flavors so unfamiliar we all took guesses about the seasonings. None of us guessed the flavor combination that included powdered plum, sugar, and rice vinegar. We didn't even realize we were crunching on pickled green papaya! The flavors were so pleasantly compelling we worked our way down to the last piece and divided it into fourths.

R: The chilled **Vegetable Saigon Rolls** were angle sliced into four pieces and arranged Asian style, the top pieces slightly overlapping on the diagonal. These were served with sweet **Plum Sauce** for dipping. An excellent starter, the tightly wrapped rice paper rolls were filled with shredded carrots, black mushrooms, jicama, cucumber, and a generous serving of breath-freshening mint leaves.

Z: The soft moist rice paper wrapper is a delightful contrast to the crunchy, minted filling, yet the roll was light enough to leave us anticipating the rest of the meal.

R: The **Spicy n' Sour Soup** is a knockout! It has all the qualities that make an exceptional soup--zesty chili spice, a tasty tamarind broth infused with lemongrass, large, plump veggie shrimp floating at the top, and a varied selection of vegetables including straw mushrooms, baby corn, red bell pepper, carrots, peas, and even pineapple chunks.

Z: All agreed the soup was one of the tastiest and tangiest we had encountered in our dining adventures. We were glad we had ordered the generous size cup instead of the bowl, leaving us room to look forward to our entrees.

R: Presentation is a specialty of Chef Kimmy Tang. Each dish was attractively plated, some even elaborately garnished. Our **Mekong Tofu** was stunning! Served on a square platter, the stir-fried 5-spice tofu and vegetables were spooned into a deep-fried tortilla shell that rested on a pillow of shredded green cabbage.

Z: The sensational garnish really made this dish stand out. Resting on one corner of the platter was a large, diaphanous, delicately formed flower made from daikon radish. All the outer edges looked as if they were cut with narrow-gauge pinking shears. Topping the flower was a small butterfly ingeniously carved from a slice of carrot.

R: Though the flavor of stir-fry fell a little short, we would recommend it so others could savor its beauty, too. The abundant serving of **Savory Shrimp**, however, was very tasty. Also served on a square platter the veggie shrimp were heaped with scallions and well seasoned with garlic, black pepper, and chili sauce.

Z: High on our list of favorites is the **Baby Bok Choy and Mushrooms** presented lavishly with sauced, thinly sliced soft tofu tucked underneath an umbrella of Chinese black mushroom caps. Surrounding the glistening mushrooms were the baby bok choy with their knobby bottoms facing outward.



R: Simple, yet well-designed plate décor truly does enhance the dining experience. That night we became ardent admirers of Chef Kimmy who takes pride in her food preparation and artful presentation. Beauty aside, those toothy mushrooms were glazed with a luscious tangy, lightly sweetened sauce that was pure joy to devour.

Z: The most outstanding dish of the meal was the **Garlic Eggplant**. Pan-fried with garlic, shallots, shredded carrots, scallions, and chopped peanuts and bathed in a Vietnamese vinaigrette, this delicacy was lightly spiced and heightened with a hint of sweetness. It was pure innovative alchemy! If Reuben hadn't been quite full, he would have ordered a second plate of the eggplant, his very favorite vegetable.

R: Rounding out the meal was the bowl of simply prepared brown rice that provided the perfect balance to our well-seasoned dinner. As we were finishing our meal, we were greeted at our table by Chef Kimmy, a petite, bubbling bundle of enthusiasm from Saigon. Kimmy told us about her culinary experiences supervising the kitchen of a Japanese restaurant and preparing food at a Chinese supermarket prior to opening Michelia.

Z: Cooking is a passion Kimmy has cultivated since the age of 9 when her mother taught her how to prepare traditional Vietnamese dishes. We asked about the dazzling

flower garnish on the Mekong Tofu. While Kimmy took it apart and showed us how to assemble it, she told us the restaurant has been open for two and a half years.

R: The vegan menu offers two other appetizers, **Crispy Mock Chicken** and **Vegan Spring Rolls** as well as a total of eight entrées including a tasty **Sweet Chili Tuna Steak**. If you make reservations well in advance, put in a special request for a dish not listed on the menu--the melt-in-your-mouth **Black Pepper Tofu** as one of your side dishes. Because the restaurant has a diverse menu for omnivores as well, Michelia is an excellent choice for dining with friends who are not vegetarian.

Z: Since our only taste of the restaurant's ambience was the patio, we wandered inside to explore. Simple yet elegant Asian touches included a whole wall of water cascading down a beautiful stone backdrop, walls painted in warm nugget tones, soft lighting from resin formed fixtures, and a wainscoting of vertically ridged teak wood along one wall. Even the women's restroom was tastefully decorated with gold and copper sponged walls and a clear, textured resin sink resting on a mirrored pedestal.

R: Though prices are moderately expensive for a vegan meal, they were not unreasonable for the value. At Michelia we dined elegantly and will definitely return for the exceptional food and outstanding service.

Reviewed March 2004

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