

Vietnamese fare at 9021PHO in Westlake Village



Chef Kimmy Tang of 9021PHO restaurants in Westlake Village and Beverly Hills specializes in dishes from her native Vietnam, but adds Chinese, Indian and French influences as well.



The Fresh Roll appetizer is filled with jicama, cucumber, carrots, lettuce and a choice of steamed chicken, pork, shrimp, tofu or soy ham. The dish also comes with a peanut sauce for dipping.



The grilled meat with rice and pork at 9021PHO offers a choice of pork, beef or chicken served over jasmine rice, served with a Vietnamese vinaigrette.

Chef Kimmy Tang is putting her distinctive culinary touch to work at two 9021PHO restaurants, the most recent on Russell Ranch Road in Westlake Village. The first, in Beverly Hills, doubtless inspired the name, which is a play on the 90210 ZIP code. The restaurant's name rhymes with the ZIP code, if you pronounce "pho," a traditional Vietnamese soup, as "phoe," American-style, instead of the originating country's correct "phuh," which is spelled out on the back of the bright and inviting takeout menu.

But whether you say phoe or they say phuh, the food Tang dishes up is distinctly fresh, light and radiating a rainbow of flavors.

The Westlake Village 9021PHO occupies the space originally held by Wolfgang Puck's Cafe in a small center with several other eateries. Accenting the Asian influences in the décor are patches of bamboo on the walls and a section of vivid banana-leaf wallpaper. Outside, bright red-orange umbrellas shade the patio tables.

The well-traveled Tang lays claim to culinary influences beginning with her native Vietnam and expanding into Chinese and Indian preparations, layered with a knowledge of French techniques and, for good measure, a sense of Southern California's interest in healthy options.

Skimming over the menu, my friends and I soon realized that as inviting as the appetizers sounded, we'd better just sample one and move on to the main dishes. We chose the traditional Fresh Roll (\$5.95), which comes wrapped in rice paper and sliced in four pieces, just perfect for our table. With the slivered jicama, cucumber and carrots come lettuce leaves and a choice of steamed chicken, charcoal pork, shrimp, tofu or soy ham, from which we selected the pork, which added a layer of lively flavor. A tangy peanut sauce is provided for dipping.

While we were enjoying the crunchy rolls, the other dishes started to arrive: pho bo (\$8.95), a big bowl of typical Vietnamese soup to share; chicken tamarind (\$12.95); cilantro prawns (\$16.95); and Vietnamese grilled meat/rice (\$9.95). One by one, we savored their pleasures.

The pho bo bowl was brimming with beef broth, sliced beef, halved beef balls, onions and noodles. On the side, a plate included bean sprouts, basil and chili to add to taste. The entire mix was aromatic but quite mild. For those longing for more fire, bottled and cooked sauces were available to sprinkle at will.

By Rita Moran