

A Welcome Touch Of Asian Elegance

By CLOE CABRERA
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TAMPA — Think of Asian dining American-style and you probably envision a paper container of pork fried rice, or a buffet loaded with everything from egg foo yong to vanilla pudding.

Liang's Bistro in New Tampa is definitely different.

Owners Linda and Perry Li, natives of China, opened the eatery, their first, in August.

"I wanted to give our customers a choice," said Linda Li. "There are a lot of take-out [Asian] restaurants around. I wanted to offer a fine-dining atmosphere where people can sit down and have a beer or wine with their meal and enjoy it."

Liang's boasts a sleek decor, with polished wood, large booths, soft lights and splashes of gold, green, red and burgundy.

The menu is extensive, with Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese and Japanese selections.

We kicked things off with the coconut prawns. The five jumbo shrimp came coated with breading and coconut flakes and were fried crisp.

DINING REVIEW

Liang's Bistro

CRITIC'S RATING: Food: B+; Service: B+

BOTTOM LINE: Elegant Asian cuisine in New Tampa

WHERE: 17515 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa

HOURS: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday; 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday

CREDIT CARDS: All major

RESERVATIONS: No

CHILDREN'S MENU: Yes

ALCOHOL: Sake, wine and beer

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: Yes

PRICE: Entrees range from \$6.25 to \$16.95

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Another delicious nibbler was the barbecued spare ribs, tender tidbits bathed in a sweet and tangy sauce.

We also enjoyed the Chicken in Skewer, featuring marinated, bite-sized chunks of grilled white meat.

The least exciting of the appetizers was the Salt & Pepper



Tribune photo by CLIFF MCBRIDE

The menu at Liang's Bistro in New Tampa features (clockwise from bottom left) Orange Peel Chicken, Liang's Snow White Prawns, Crispy Cheese Puff and Golden Nest Seafood.

Calamari. We couldn't taste the calamari; the few times we did we found it rubbery.

Thumbing through the entree selections we felt somewhat daunted by the number and variety. Sections of the menu are devoted to chicken, beef, pork, vegetables, shrimp, fried-rice, noodles, lo mein, favorites and more.

At our server's suggestion, we ordered the Sizzling Teriyaki Steak. This was pure beefy butter. The steak finishes cooking at the table in a thick, tangy sauce with sliced mushrooms and onions.

Liang's Chicken, thin breaded strips of tender white meat stir-fried with carrots and celery shreds, came coated in a sauce that had a perfect balance of sweet and spicy.

The Golden Nest Seafood more than lived up to its name, containing lobster meat, shrimp, crab meat, scallops and a vegetable medley of broccoli, snow peas, water chestnuts and baby corn. The vegetables were perfectly cooked — not too soft — and all the ingredients were cloaked in a delicate cream sauce and nestled in a light, crisp noodle basket. It was a masterpiece of flavor and presentation.

Among the lively fried rice offerings, we enjoyed the pineapple with chinese sausage, shrimp and mushrooms all zapped with ginger, and a special combination that we requested of chicken, roast pork and beef.

If you have room for dessert,

we recommend the creme brulée cheesecake. The luscious mix of vanilla-bean flavored brulée layered with cheesecake was heavenly.

But the bananas in the Banana Spring Roll, wrapped in wonton skin and deep fried, should have been more ripe.

Service at Liang's was top-notch. Our server, a young man with a shy smile, was unfailingly sweet throughout the meal, bending over backward to ensure our experience was a good one. When he noticed we had barely touched our banana spring roll, he had the manager take it off the bill without a moment's delay.

Tribune reviewers eat anonymously. Cloe Cabrera can be reached at (813) 259-7656.