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Alex Chin proves his mastery of pan-Asian food at Suzie Wong

By Polly Campbell
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I remember when the concept of pan-Asian hit Cincinnati. Pacific Moon in Montgomery first offered dishes from various Asian cuisines -Thai, Chinese and Japanese - all on the same menu.

Now there's even more to explore as Vietnamese has become more familiar, there's a lot of interest in Korean food, and people are ready to try Malaysian and Cambodian.

Suzie Wong, newly open in East Walnut Hills, offers these newer adventures. With a smartly selected group of dishes from all corners of East and Southeast Asia, you can find something new. Not surprisingly, you'll also find Alex Chin, who was behind that first Pacific Moon menu. He is running Suzie Wong for a Chicago Chinese restaurant group.

Suzie took over the former location of Seny at DeSales Corner. Painted red, fronted by a wall of windows, it's a modern, stylish dining room. A glittery painting of a Chinese robe decorates one wall, the tableware is modern, the feeling chic.

Appetizers come in three categories: warm, cold and group. My husband and I decided we qualified as a group, and ordered two appetizers really meant to be shared by a table of people. We polished them off easily, though.

The dish I'll remember, and no doubt recommend many times, was the Cambodian carpaccio (\$11.95). Slices of raw beef filet are topped with a mouth-exploding combination of flavors: tart with lime, fresh with basil, spicy, and salty, you will fight over it. Calamari (\$5.95) in a thick, crisp coating with pomegranate sauce was equally hard to stop eating.

Most of the entrées are served to be eaten by one person. That worked out well for me when I ordered the green Bangkok curry served in a coconut shell (\$13.95). It swam in a moderately spicy sauce, silky in both texture and taste. They use fresh coconut milk for the dish, not canned, according to Chin, and that's why it feels so light.

But when I ordered the Thai pomegranate chicken (\$12.95), I encouraged sharing. It was really the only dish I didn't like, overloaded with a heavy sweet sauce splashed around not as decorative as the cook intended.

The Korean noodle bowl, jan chi guksu (\$8.95) was spicy with kimchee and filled with "glass noodles", those transparent rice noodles that are the most slippery substance ever invented, and topped with a fried egg. Nothing better on a cold night - it even beats the delicious pho, (\$8.95) with a rich, beefy broth, served with a veritable salad of basil, bean sprouts, lime and peppers.

There's no dessert, but the sensational kalbi (\$15.95), Korean beef ribs coated with a rich, sweet sauce served on a sizzling plate, could have substituted.

Service was good, and Chin is a hard worker. Nevertheless, if we had played a drinking game, taking a sip every time any of our servers said "you guys," we would have left plastered.

But we would have had to bring our bottle. They don't have a liquor license yet. But they do deliver in the neighborhood, and I know if I lived nearby, I'd put Suzie on my speed-dial.

Additional Facts

Suzie Wong's
★★★★

Where: 1544 Madison Road, East Walnut Hills

When: 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Monday-Thursday; noon-10 p.m. Saturday; 4-9:30 p.m. Sunday

The scene: Busy; a few large tables

Reservations: Taken

Prices: Entrées \$8.95-\$15.95

Vegetarian choices: Excellent. Noodle dishes, eggplant and tofu clay pot, crispy vegetarian ribs, etc.

Miscellaneous: No liquor license yet. Entry down a few steps. Neighborhood delivery.

Info: 513-751-3333; www.suziewongs.com

★poor;

★★fair;

★★★good;

★★★★excellent;

★★★★★extraordinary