

Daily Pilot

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Wholesome Ho Sum Bistro fixes the Chinese food cravings

By Kathy Mader

DINING REVIEW

I may be preaching to the choir here. In fact, if you have eaten at Ho Sum Bistro on the Balboa Peninsula before, I know I am. But try not to hold it against me that I think everyone should know about it, not just the regulars. Ho Sum Bistro, a name that is a play on the word "wholesome," specializes in what it calls light and healthy "Californioriental" cuisine. Good word for good food.

You walk into the brightly lighted, white-tiled eatery, with both tables and seating at the counter, and it smells like it's supposed to. Not like there has been a recently doused grease fire or that heavy oil odor that comes with some Chinese restaurants. Ho Sum smells of excellent spices and tasty dishes. Bottom line, it has that "Boy, am I glad we are eating here" smell.

Those of you who go to Ho Sum, go a lot. I have a friend Meghan who moved away from here years ago, yet every time she comes she plans, and I mean on paper, how she can maximize her Ho Sum visits. She averages three of their famous Ho Sum chicken salads a trip. Ho Sum is that kind of place. Addictive.

If I haven't convinced you, let's say we all know you are supposed to have certain cravings when you are pregnant. Well, since I have been pregnant, my husband, Brian, has craved this place once a week. Go figure. It's that kind of place.

Ho Sum Bistro is inexpensive and very good. Yes, it's healthy. Now that I'm past that verbal roadblock, I enjoy it every time we go.

There are a couple of items we always order, and then we attempt to try one or two new things.

The aforementioned Ho Sum chicken salad is probably its No. 1 item, as everyone seems to have one on the table and the phone rings fast and furious with takeout orders for the same. It is a salad of roasted and finely shredded chicken tossed with lettuce and a might tasty red ginger dressing. Their other salad, the sesame seed chicken salad, is equally as popular, and those in the know go for the "combo" salad, which is half of each (\$5.25/\$8.28).

The other item on our "always order" list is the combination fried rice (\$6.45), with chicken, beef and pork — the best fried rice I have ever had. I know "them's fightin' words," but I am willing to back it up. It is light, not oily in the least and a flavor bonanza. Yes, bonanza.

You may recall that Ho Sum's Pho Phun noodle soup (\$4.95/\$6.25) made my list of top 10 soups in town, with its chewy Chinese rice noodles, fresh vegetables, shredded chicken breast and sweet shrimp in a rich broth. 'Tis the season for this soup, my friends.

Ho Sum's dim sum is yum yum, and they have a long and interesting list, from (my very favorite) chicken dumplings in a spicy cilantro sauce to lobster wontons and spring rolls. The very best way to try all of these is at the restaurant's Sunday brunch.



SEAN HILLER / DAILY PILOT

Ed O'Neill is the owner of Ho Sum Bistro in Newport Beach. The restaurant serves California cuisine.

FYI

- **WHERE:** 3112 Newport Blvd., Newport Beach
- **WHEN:** 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday
- **HOW MUCH:** Inexpensive
- **PHONE:** (949) 675-0896

Don't go expecting eggs Benedict or waffles, this brunch is all-you-can-eat of almost all they serve. And no, there is no buffet, no line, no sneeze screen. All food during this time is

made for you as you order. It includes salads, soup, all of the dim sum choices, and the delectable fried rice, with champagne to boot, all for \$15, including tax. This is the deal.

Ho Sum also makes all the traditional favorites, such as Szechuan chicken (\$5.95), kung pao noodles, a variety of lo meins (noodle dishes) and a very excellent mu shu (\$5.95) — chicken, veggies or shrimp sauteed, rolled into thin crepes and served with a plum sauce that makes life worth living.

But it is the dim sum that gets me there, and it is those salads that seem to get everyone else there. You must try the candied pecans for dessert, I would

order these by the pound if I could.

Ho Sum has some nice lunch specials, where you can get a half-order of either salad and a half-order of fried rice for \$6.25. This is another great deal, and I just know Brian sneaks down there quite a bit of the time. Did I mention they have takeout? Get it any way you can, Ho Sum Bistro is just plain good.

• **KATHY MADER's** dining reviews appear every other Thursday.