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Ho Sum's secret is out

Newport bistro's 'Califoriental' cuisine is well worth discovering.

By **CHANTAL LAMERS**
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Some secrets are worth spilling. My secret is a little spot called Ho Sum Bistro on my former stomping grounds in Newport Beach.

Somehow I've come to presume that if people hadn't heard via word of mouth about "Califoriental" cuisine served here - a combination of MSG-free Asian and California healthy - that the slim, two-story blue building (whose front glass panels curve to form part of its high ceiling) would pique the interest of eaters all by itself.

While Ho Sum is housed in some wonderfully strange architecture, what's inside is even better. The adequately sized menu has the ideal variety of soup, salad, dim sum, noodles and specialty choices.

One of Ho Sum's most irresistible features is its Sunday brunch, or as I refer to it, the best fare and buzz in town for \$15. And while I try never to overstay a welcome, I had to drag four friends from the all-you-can-eat champagne brunch last weekend.

The brunch menu starts off with soup and salad. Among soups are the chicken broth with shredded carrots, green onions, sliced mushrooms and hunks of tofu, or a similar broth with plump pot stickers, or my favorite, thick hot-and-sour soup.

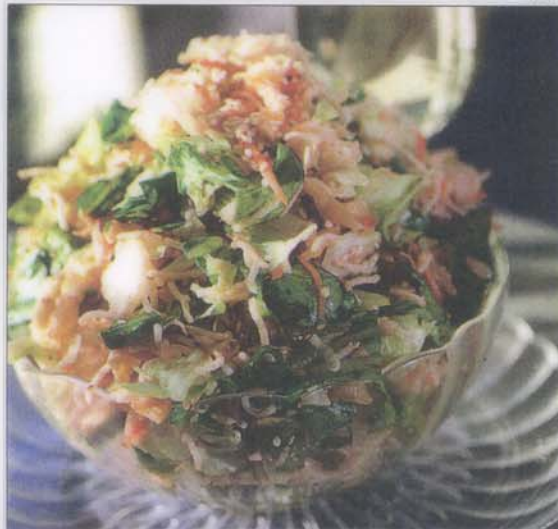
While the Ho Sum chicken salad (with ginger dressing) and the sesame chicken salad (romaine lettuce, sesame seeds and a sesame oil-vinegar dressing) are delicious on their own, I recommend the combo salad.

The food is just as bountiful as the champagne at brunch. Before you can gulp down half the soup, a large bowl of fried rice and steaming plates of dim sum arrive.

The seemingly never-ending feast includes crisp chicken



ANA VENEGAS, THE REGISTER



dumplings, poached wrapped wontons, thick spring rolls, pot stickers, dumplings (served with a spicy cilantro sauce) and quenelles (stuffed with a blend of chicken and vegetables).

But if you aren't fortunate enough to make it to Ho Sum for brunch, there are plenty of other items to satisfy a substantial appetite. For starters, the crispy crab bellies are won-

tons filled with crab meat and cream cheese and come with a tangy ginger marmalade sauce. (The ginger marmalade is also served with the coconut shrimp.)

While the appetizers are certainly good, I like to save room for my favorite dish, the minced lettuce chicken wraps. The dish comes with pieces of iceberg lettuce and plates of minced chicken that is cooked

in a sweet, light-brown sauce.

If I'm feeling like eating something fried, I go for the honey-glazed chicken (you can opt for shrimp). It's marinated in a sweet and spicy sauce and served over white rice mixed with sliced almonds.

When I'm craving vegetables, I order the vegetable mu shu (which also comes in chicken and shrimp options). The veggies are sautéed in a

Ho Sum Bistro



Source: ESRI, TeleAtlas The Register

3112 Newport Blvd.,
Newport Beach
(949) 675-0896

- **Hours:** 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Mondays-Thursdays; 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays; 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Sundays
- **Reservations:** No
- **Cuisine type:** Califoriental
- **Parking:** Meter
- **What to wear:** Casual
- **What to order:** Combo salad, hot and sour soup, vegetarian mu shu, minced chicken lettuce wraps, pot stickers, crispy crab bellies
- **Pricing:** \$3.95-\$8.95
- **Credit cards:** Major credit cards
- **Smoking:** No
- **Alcohol:** Sake
- **How's the service?** Friendly

sweet sauce and rolled in a crepe.

On a hot summer day, I'll order the tai tai menia. The cool, large portion of cold, crunchy noodles, sprouts and chicken is mixed with spicy peanut sauce.

When strawberries are in season, there's no better way to end a meal at Ho Sum than with a big, chocolate-covered strawberry. During the off-season you can try a chocolate-covered almond or fortune cookie or a plate of candied pecans.

Busy tables and a constant stream of take-out tell me this eatery isn't necessarily my little secret. But because the bistro is so quaint and intimate, I hardly feel like hundreds of others have discovered this place and, like me, have the number programmed into their cell phones and don't need to look at a menu.

But that's OK; now Ho Sum Bistro can feel like the best-kept secret of hundreds more.

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