

Warung Café

words by Evan Fowler

In today's increasingly composite society, pop culture patrons have high expectations for unique experiences: Particularly when it comes to eating out. Where there was once Japanese, Indian or Thai, there is now Indo-pan-Asian-fusion. Many restaurants create an amalgam of nonsensical menu items designed to confuse the restaurant goer into purchasing a "one-of-a-kind" entree that looks a lot like pad thai. Warung Cafe, however, has taken on the daunting task of solving the Asian fusion equation, and the outcome is a truly unique dining experience that would rival any traditional restaurant.


Warung Cafe, nestled beneath the towering historical buildings of L.A.'s infamous Old Bank District, is both relaxed and elegant, welcoming a bevy of business lunches during the day and offering the perfect neighborhood haunt for the L.A. hipster scene at night. The exposed brick and high ceilings give it a New York charm, complemented by the subtle influence of upscale Asian decor. Entrees feature a heavy influence of Thai and Indian flavors, and take shape in the form of beautifully garnished Asian tapas: small plates at very affordable prices. There are no appetizers, only individual plates divided into "Hot" or "Cold."

We began with the Cold, a papaya and tofu salad, dressed with a lime chili vinaigrette. It was light and fresh, the perfect healthy start to an over-indulgent lunch. It was followed by a spicy Indian chicken salad, a brilliant mixture of baby mix greens with

shredded chicken and basmati rice, tossed with bell pepper, cucumbers and a spicy sesame dressing. This is a must! Truly a masterpiece in the art of Asian fusion, it featured an explosion of bold flavors, crunchy texture, and the perfect amount of spice. Some may say it's overdressed but the dressing is the best part. Once I'd finished licking my plate clean, we moved on to the seafood Asian ceviche, an impressive pastry shell filled with tuna, shrimp, and scallop, tossed with seasoned seaweed and cucumber salad. The most aesthetically pleasing dish of the day but least flavorful; I enjoyed looking at it more than eating it. But for the true seafood lover, it relies more on the natural flavor of the fish than seasoning, and was definitely one of the more filling entrees.

Then came the Hot, beginning with crispy chicken potstickers served with mustard soy vinaigrette. Not to be confused with steamed, healthy potstickers, these are fried and delicious. Following was another personal favorite, wok stir-fried wild mushrooms, lightly sautéed with garlic and butter soy sauce. Borderline "comfort food," the dish offered bold flavors that will soothe the soul with soft, toasted char sui buns – don't be afraid to dip! Next were the baby lamb chops. Another brilliant combination of exotic flavors, pairing a bold, smoky lamb marinated in a sweet mint pesto with a light, almost sour yogurt cumin sauce. What followed was almost spiritual and truly the jewel in the crown of our Asian fusion experience. A grilled filet mignon served with taro root Wasabi mash and green apple teriyaki sauce. Unlike anything I've ever tasted, the Wasabi mash was light and only reminis-

cent of the Wasabi that often drowns most dishes. And despite my best efforts, the sweet and sour teriyaki is simply indescribable. You'll have to try it for yourself. The restaurant also boasts an impressive dessert menu of interesting choices, including a coconut crème brûlée.

Warung Café is the perfect restaurant for lunch with friends or a romantic dinner for two. Stop in for a quick bite or indulge in as many small plate combinations as you like, and choose from an elaborate list of exotic drinks at their Sake and Soju Infusion Bar. Fear the fusion no more! 

Warung Café:
118 W. Fourth Street
Los Angeles, CA 90013
213-626-0662
www.warungcafela.com

