

# A Mighty Thai

## Bringing new regional flavors to Manzanita

Among chattering friends, no new restaurant has been met with the bubbling anticipation as A Mighty Thai, which opened its doors at the end of January. Any mention that I was going down to the Manzanita eatery elicited multiple guests.

I reckon the excitement can be chalked up to simple supply and demand: A Mighty Thai brings to the market the only Thai restaurant south of Warrenton. Furthermore, it assumes particular distinction in being essentially the only place in either Manzanita or Cannon Beach whose cuisine comes from outside Europe and the Americas.

Nestled in Terra Cotta's former home, right as U.S. Highway 101 curves around Manzanita, the location has strong takeout potential. But when it got busy, as I witnessed one Friday night, the overwhelmed kitchen had to stop taking to-go orders and focus on the wait-listed dining room.

A converted house that's split with Sisters and Pete's Coffee, Mighty Thai is cozy. Parties bigger than four or five might want to call ahead. Briskly decorated, there's a small bar and a tight, lively ambiance. Along with Thai beers, there are a few special cocktails, like a Mai Thai and a Tomatillo Margarita that, with celery salt and garlic, offered the twang of a salsa verde. On the un-spirited front, the orange Thai Iced Tea was bold and not overly sweet.

Before I dive into the food, I want to take a minute to talk about the menu, which Mighty Thai gets right. My last two reviews — of Mexican and Chinese restaurants — featured voluminous, multi-page tomes, each with well over 100 items. Mighty Thai simplifies, listing the dishes with a choice of meat, rather than in duplicate. It's not rocket science, people!

Mighty Thai separates by category: starters, soups, curries, noodles, street food, seafood, fried rice and "chef's choice." As I dined with so many companions, I tasted a lot. And while nothing fell completely flat, relatively few emerged head-and-shoulders above the rest. There were no showstoppers.

One thing everyone agreed on, however, was the Chicken Satay appetizer (\$8.95). The four skewers, about the size of thick business cards, had a nice char and stayed juicy. But the peanut sauce was their *raison d'être*. Chunky, sweet and oily, there was plenty of it, enough to use throughout the meal. (There could be some more chicken though...) The Salad Rolls (\$7.95 for two) were a more tenuous value, and the portion I ate contained no shrimp.

As soon as I saw the curries, I knew what I was having. It's one of the flavors I find most lacking on the coast, and I was overjoyed when the Yellow Curry (\$12.95) hit its mark. The soft, thin coconut-y broth had chunks of red potatoes, onions and artfully chopped carrots. The chicken, which, again, there could've been more of, was very lightly cooked. Adding the white rice made the plate substantial. Without it, it wasn't.

The same went for the Asian BBQ Baby Pork Ribs (\$21.95). Cooked over an open flame like the chicken satays, the ribs too had an exquisite char. "Tim's secret Asian sauce" was minimalist at best. Besides a hint of sweetness, these were quite clean ribs. The pork mostly spoke for itself and thankfully wasn't overcooked. The salad's long, thin shreds of the bright, acidic papaya dovetailed with the fatty, succulent ribs. Along for the ride was a packet of sticky rice. While wholly enjoyable, it wasn't cheap. A stout, hungry diner could easily devour this flagship dish and be left wanting.

Served in an elevated, flaming metal ves-



The Tom Yum Soup is served in an elevated, flaming metal vessel.



The Yellow Curry hit its mark flavor-wise, but could have used more chicken.



The Chicken Satay appetizer includes chicken skewers with a plentiful amount of tasty peanut sauce.

sel, the Tom Yum Soup is offered in two varieties: with choice of land dwelling meats/tofu (\$11.95), or as the "Pacific," which features a seafood melange (\$18.95). With prawns, calamari and scallops, the seafood varietal is top dog. Full of Thai ginger (AKA "galangal"), the soup is bright and fresh like springtime.

The Pho (\$11.95) had a sweet, orange, demi-like glaze. It too could've used a bit more meat alongside the rice noodles, which might've been achieved by ordering the "super" option for two dollars more. The Crab Fried Rice, however, offered an abundance of sweet, soft,

Dungeness crab meat. The Larb (\$11.95), a traditional dish of ground meat with lettuce, shallots, green and red onions, cilantro, mint leaves and toasted rice is served cold, which can be a shocker for the unexpected. The Thai Shrimp Ceviche (\$14.95) resembled salad more than ceviche. The Som Tum (\$11.95) is a bright, lean and crisp papaya salad that would be an ideal side-dish offering.

Almost all the dishes on the menu are available on a five-star heat scale. One friend opted for a four; it was certainly commiserate — for experienced spice-lovers only. However, throughout the dishes I sampled, a three-star order varied from medium to nonexistent.

Part of this is due, no doubt, to a newborn restaurant finding its way. The chefs, of Thai heritage, certainly know the foundations of these flavors. And indeed, with the peanuts and papaya, and the citrus against the savory, Mighty Thai offers tastes from outside the North Coast bubble. As such, it is desperately necessary. But these are first-time restaurateurs with numerous kinks and inefficiencies to be ironed out, both in the front and back of the house.

And to be fair, that's partly because of the stress that Mighty Thai has been put under since the moment it opened. Despite launching in the coldest, dreariest part of the tourist offseason, locals have packed the place. That's because they — like me — so welcome the prospect of new regional flavors on the North Coast.

# mouth OF THE COLUMBIA

## COAST WEEKEND'S LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEW

Story and photos by THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA • [mouth@coastweekend.com](mailto:mouth@coastweekend.com)

### A Mighty Thai

Rating: ★★☆☆

725 Manzanita Ave. Manzanita

503-368-8424

HOURS: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Tuesday to Sunday.

PRICE: \$\$ – Entrées range from \$11-22

SERVICE: Still working out the kinks

VEGETARIAN / VEGAN OPTIONS: Plenty

DRINKS: Full bar, coffee, Thai iced tea

#### KEY TO RATINGS

- ★ below average
- ★★ average
- ★★★ good
- ★★★★ excellent
- ★★★★★ outstanding, the best in the Columbia-Pacific region