

Hong Kong Restaurant due for a spring cleaning

Review and photos by
THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA
MOUTH@COASTWEEKEND.COM
FACEBOOK.COM/MOUTHOFTHECOLUMBIA

On Astoria's northeast edge, the decades old Hong Kong Restaurant has settled into a bland bargain where portion is prized über alles.

Essentially, they deliver two insipid meals for the price of one decent one. Which is to say: your to-go box will be teeming.

Whether or not you'll want those leftovers — or even the first go-round — is another question. In searching for developed flavors and freshness at Hong Kong Restaurant I came up empty-handed.

What I found instead were towering, tasteless heaps, like a sesame chicken that was woefully short on actual chicken. (Most of the fried fare was two-thirds or three-quarters oily, artery-clogging dough encasing a smidgen of meat.)

I crossed paths with vegetables — cabbage, bamboo chutes, water chestnuts and the like — that were all but crispy water.

I squinted and sniffed at seafoods, wondering whether they'd spent more time in the ocean or the freezer.

To be sure: This exhausted strain of Americanized Chinese food is hardly exclusive to Hong Kong Restaurant. It is, I reckon, more a reflection of American comforts and palates than anything worldly.

As Jiayang Fan wrote in a recent issue of *The New Yorker*: "By now, most Americans recognize that Westernized basics like chop suey and General Tso's are compromised simulacra of authentic Chinese food."

Hong Kong Restaurant has plied



Special No. 1: General Tso's chicken, sesame chicken, chicken with pea pods and vegetables, pork fried rice

this model for decades. It is due, at the very least, for some extensive spring cleaning.

The first to be tossed is the squid.

Part of the Three Delicacies (at \$11.95, the most expensive single item on the menu) the geometrically machined squid tubes were rubbery as a tire and tasted like an aquarium smells.

Throw out the General Tso's sauce, too. Smacking of corn syrup and little else, it was too sugary to eat with dinner. It made more sense as a dessert jelly to dip fortune cookies in (but even then only in moderation).

And while there could be hope of overhauling the dull, lightly garlic-y

oil that coated everything I had that wasn't fried (such as the Three Delicacies and Chicken w/ Pea Pods & Vegetables), it might be better to just chuck it and start over. The sauce was muting, hardly elevating. It made everything taste gray.

While we're cleaning, the menu also needs a good scrubbing. Loads of choices stem from too few ingredients. For the most part it comes down to fried, oil-slicked or both. For the dozens upon dozens of choices, there are few disparate flavors.

Servers offered little more direction. "Everything is good," goes the refrain. When pressed, recommendations were so tepid I had to wonder:

Maybe there really aren't any stand-outs, specialties or hidden gems.

Two different servers did call the Beef w/ Broccoli (\$8.50) "popular." The beef was thin and chewy. The broccoli's essence was cooked out. Everything was smothered by that indeterminate oil, melding and minimizing everything into a same-y, desaturated mush — another shade of gray.

I suppose the Wonton Soup (\$6.50/small) is the dish I'd order again if I had to. It had the same overcast flavor, but at least it was wrought with the least offensive ratios of oil and dough to meat.

Everything at Hong Kong Restaurant comes out fast, suggest-

HONG KONG RESTAURANT

Rating: ★

2813 Marine Drive
Astoria, Ore.
97103

503-325-5344

Hours: 11 a.m.-11 p.m. everyday

Price: \$ – teeming portions for around \$10

Service: Patient, quick

Vegetarian / Vegan Options:
Dull vegetables

Drinks: Full bar

KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

- ★ Below average
- ★★ Average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Best in region



Wonton Soup

ing rather than cooked to order, that a good deal of it is sitting, waiting to be warmed, finished or dunked in the fryer.

All of this is a huge bummer. More authentic and vibrant Chinese food in the region would be so welcome. So, too, would be more Americanized Chinese that at least offers a modicum of concern for health and/or flavor, where the kitchen is engaged.

And while the argument "it's really cheap" may be tempting, let's remember: Offering food at bargain-basement prices isn't necessarily an act of compassion. Nor is it one that necessarily has our best interests at heart. **CW**