

AS SEEN IN

the

Parklander

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COCO Asian Bistro & Bar

By Charles Marcanetti

Sometimes, in a world full of glamour for the sake of glamour and glitter to shine away the emptiness of reality, I come across a truly remarkable eatery. Coco Asian Bistro & Bar is just such a place. While it is gorgeous in an understated way, with no detail overlooked and quality even where most people would never expect, it is also the clear leader in Asian Fusion fare. The food is so far above the competition, it is safe to say there is no competition.

In no given order: the **Coconut Soup** is the absolute best I have ever had...anywhere. The **Rack of Lamb** and the **Filet Mignon** were so tender as to seem unreal. The **Chilean Sea Bass** was so sweet you'd think it was candy and the **Duck Breast** was succulent to the point of decadence.

Let's start at the very beginning. Our waiter, destined to be a famous clothing designer, was Yord, a young, wonderfully polite and efficient individual who comes from the same small town in Thailand as owner, Michael Ponluang. With them, came some of the most scrumptious recipes in all of Asian cooking. Let me give you a little background on Ponluang, owner and executive chef. He has traveled the world, learning and teaching elegant Thai food preparation. In 1980, Chef Ponluang moved to Fort Lauderdale and, to the delight of their patrons, he served as a chef at the Lighthouse Point Yacht Club. In 1991, he opened the successful Coral Springs restaurant Thai Pepper, which he owned for 15 years. Michael has also served as a Thai food instructor at Chef Jean-Pierre's Cooking School and he has studied at a sushi academy in Venice, California. He opened this masterpiece in April 2006.

He decided to give his patrons choices in spice intensity. Most of the foods are served with two or three sauces ranging from the mild to extreme Asian heat. Let me explain: Latin heat is hot and stays hot (think chili), but Asian heat is hot and dissipates quickly (think wasabi). So, please experiment.

I always start my Asian dining with some warm Sake... here they serve only the finest, extra premium Sake, which means no matter how much one drinks, it holds its flavor and body. I know that's true because I always try to see how long it will take before the flavor changes. I never win and I love that I lose.

When I'm in Paris, I usually make one complete meal of Vietnamese Fresh Rolls.

It seems the Vietnamese - French really know how to blend the ingredients perfectly and until now, I haven't met anyone who can do it as well, or even better. Chef Michael's recipe surpasses even the finest Paris has to offer. His consists of Cooked Shrimp, Imitation Crab meat, Cucumbers, Bean Sprouts, Lettuce, Rice Noodles and Basil wrapped in Thin Rice Paper and served with a Sweet Chili Sauce. I easily could have made a meal of this but I wanted to sample so many other delicacies, I forced myself to be moderate.

I also had the **Papaya Salad** prepared with Shrimp, Soft Shell Crab, Dried Shrimp, Shredded Green Papaya (very rare and incredibly fantastic), Carrots, String Beans, Lime Juice and Tomato. This treat is like no other we have recently encountered and, if you choose this dish, you'll be raving about it as well.

I devoured the **Conch and Octopus Sunomono**, which consists of Sliced Conch, Octopus and Cucumbers in Sweet Vinegar. You will also.

I mentioned three remarkable main dishes already, and I add to that the **Pad Thai** for two reasons: I was morally obligated to sample a truly traditional dish from Chef Michael's homeland, and I love rice noodles. It was wonderful and truly authentic.

I cannot and will not stop bragging about this place. It is sure to impress you and your guests. Chef Michael and his great staff are sure to instill in you a desire to return, and I predict, you will.

