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Chin's Is Making Some Noise

The Easy-on-the-wallet State Street Eatery Offers Tasty Items From Several Popular Asian Cuisines.

By Chris Martell

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The concept behind Chin's Asia Fresh restaurant seemed inevitable, maybe even overdue: Offer familiar items from several popular Asian cuisines (in this case, China's Szechwan and Canton regions, Thailand and Japan), Americanize them a bit, and put multinational spins on some of them.

Diners at the State Street restaurant make their decisions from an easy-to-decipher menu, order it at the front counter, pay a low-impact bill, then go to their table and wait for their food to be delivered. For "grasshoppers" under 10, there are Asian items such as batter-fried chicken with white rice, and fortune cookies dipped in chocolate.

Canton native Leeann Chin tried the idea in a Brookfield shopping mall, with much success. While the menu and staff do a good job of de-mystifying Asian food, it remains to be seen whether people in the campus area, who are used to grabbing authentic food on the fly from food carts run by immigrants on Library Mall, will go for this approach to ethnic food. So far, there's a lot of interest, especially at a time of year when the food carts are in their garages.

On a busy Friday evening, with a good crowd, we were able to order without waiting, and received our food in less than five minutes, even before the slightly delayed delivery of our \$11 bottle of Merlot. Maybe the staff didn't know where the corkscrew was, since it looked like we were the first

customers over the legal drinking age that night. Water is fetch-your-own style, but the interchangeable staff hustles everything else to the table.

Our table in the old two-story building overlooked State Street's twinkling white tree lights, in a loft-like room with brick walls, a maple floor and wood tables. The food was almost shockingly good, especially considering the prices.

The Chinese chicken salad, \$5.50, was a harmonious mixture of salty and sweet, crisp and tender. The bed of lettuce was fresh, and on it were moist, tiny cubes of barbecued chicken, carrots, green onions, rice noodles and potato sticks, with a sweet soy-based dressing on the side.

The nutty noodle salad, \$4.50, was spicy hot. It too had a variety of textures and vibrant flavor contrasts thanks to its carrots, napa cabbage, lo mein noodles, peanuts, scallions and flecks of red peppers.

The vegetable stir fries are partnered with either tofu, chicken, beef, or shrimp, with several choices for sauces and seasonings. The vegetable and tofu with Thai peanut sauce, \$6, was the sleeper of the evening, with tofu so well-marinated that it tasted like a delicious cut of pork, fresh vegetables cooked to the outer edge of crunchiness, and steamed brown rice. The peanut sauce was creamy, but sprinkled with moderately hot Thai chiles, scallions, and ground peanuts.

The Pad Thai, \$5, had noodles similar to linguine, with another lively back and forth between ingredients: pieces of egg and sprouts were gentle companions to the

onions, cabbage, carrots, scallions and peanuts, in a sauce that was both sweet and piquant.

I'll keep Chin's Asia Fresh in my mental Rolodex as a great place to get fresh, high-quality takeout food.

DINER'S SCORECARD

- **Restaurant:** Chin's Asia Fresh.
- **Location:** 422 State St.
- **Hours:** Sunday through Wednesday 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Thursday through Saturday 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.
- **Price range:** Entrees \$5 to \$8.
- **Specialties:** Cantonese, Szechwan, Thai, Vietnamese and Japanese appetizers, salads, and entrees.
- **Smoking:** No.
- **Accessibility:** Yes.
- **Reservations:** Not necessary.
- **Credit cards:** Accepted.
- **Telephone:** 661-0177; www.chins.com.
- **Bottom line:** Fast, high-quality, inexpensive and cooked-to-order pan-Asian menu. Order at the counter and food is delivered to your table. A good bet for vegetarians and children. The atmosphere is attractive and clean.