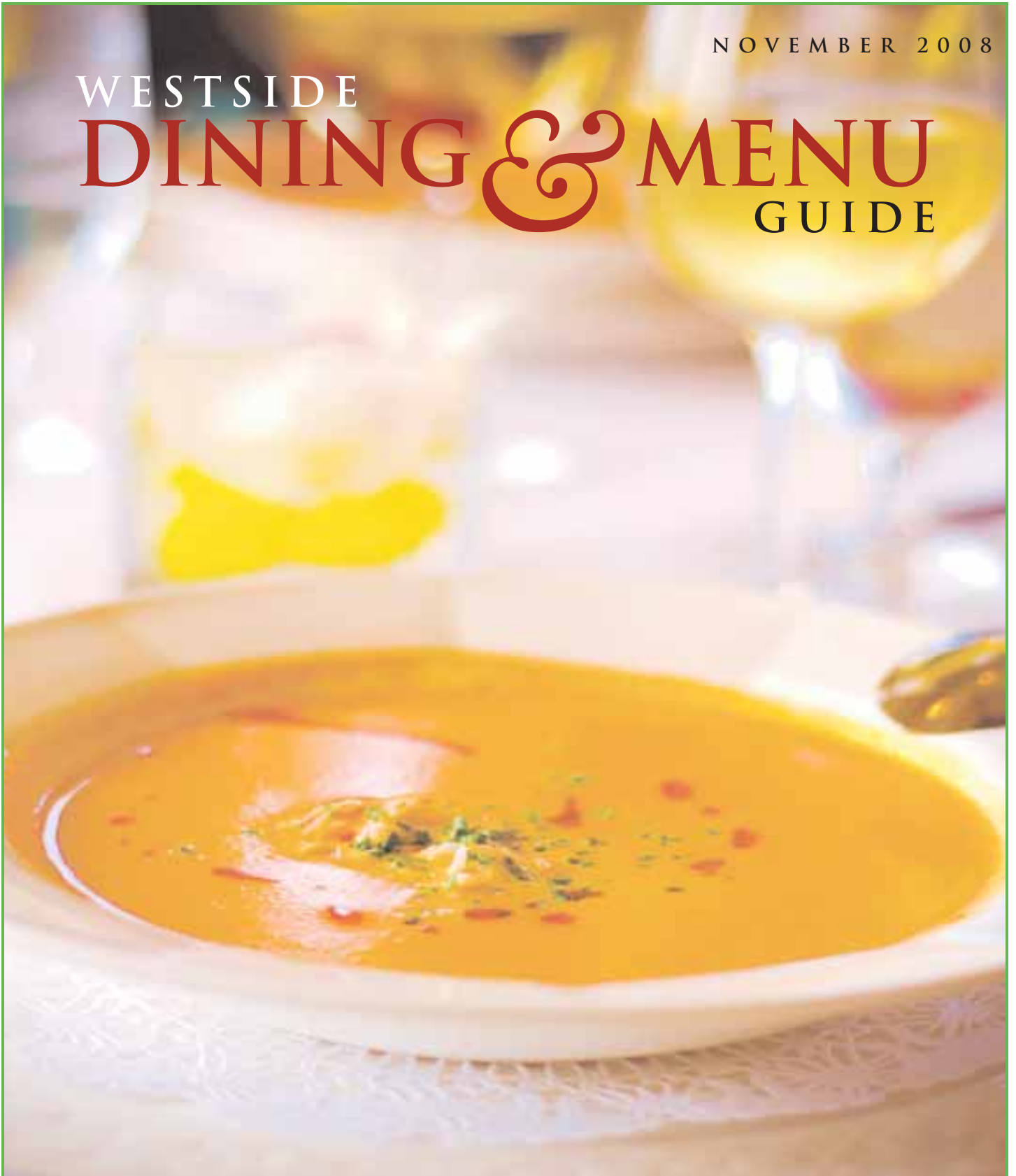


NOVEMBER 2008

WESTSIDE
DINING & MENU
GUIDE



BEACH GOURMET

Wokcano: Eastern Promise Fulfilled



Image Courtesy of Wokcano

Tim Broughton
Mirror Contributing Writer

Imagine a place where comfort, sophistication, and chic are the norm, skeletal trees surprisingly hint at intrigue and vivacity, and tantalizing aromas dance through the air like Anna Pavlova in *Swan Lake*. A place where the furniture is dark and the mood celebratory. What kind of venue is this, you wonder? Wonder no more: Wokcano, a palace of Asian culinary delight, is now open in Santa Monica, bringing its flavors, its ambience, and its late-night dining to all and sundry, and at a price that belies its classic pose.

A recent visit with fellow scribe Beverly Cohn exposed me to Wokcano's creative approach to dining, and, after bypassing the trio of indoor dining spaces (sushi bar, indoor dining room, and cocktail bar), we were escorted to our table on the patio, to enjoy our sustenance al fresco. This veranda is grand, and also includes a raised section at one end for groups who may choose to enjoy a more privately elevated Wokcano experience.

Our host, the curiously named Justice, presented us with menus and, as we sat at the low and expansive table, saw to it that we were efficiently but unobtrusively catered to.

The Wokcano menu takes the diner on a journey that covers a large swathe of Asia, including appetizers like Egg Rolls (\$4.95), Chicken Satay (\$6.95), BBQ Ribs (\$8.95), and Crispy Pepper Calamari (\$8.95). Main dishes include Spicy Garlic Chicken (with broccoli and onion in a spicy garlic sauce, \$11.95), Black Pepper Beef Mignon (chunk of tender beef quick-stirred in rich roasted black pepper sauce, \$13.95), and Tofu Family Style (firm tofu with mixed vegetables in spicy sauce, \$8.95).

Bev and I took the opportunity of such a regionally voluminous menu to mix and match, and so shared a variety of dishes, starting with a Yellowtail (\$5.00 per piece) from the sushi menu, and also the Crispy Pepper Calamari.

The presentation of these dishes was superb, and the Yellowtail, served with jalapeno, green onion, and a light ponzo sauce, was delicious. The calamari was very fresh and tasty, and evidence of the quality of these palate-pleasing offerings became clear within just a few short minutes, as both plates were swept completely clean.

For the main courses we shared the Honey Walnut Shrimp (crispy prawns topped with glazed honey walnuts, \$14.95) and also a Chicken Lo Mein (\$8.95). This Lo Mein turned out to be traditional and splendid, with a light soy flavor complimenting tender strips of chicken and delicate noodles. The Honey Walnut Shrimp was very, very good indeed, in fact the star attraction on our visit, with juicy, tender, and well-proportioned shrimp dressed with a succulent glaze and served with sesame and broccoli; it left nothing to the imagination and was, again, delightfully presented.

Our night at Wokcano was very enjoyable indeed, although it is something of a contradiction, but in the best possible way, because the setting is exquisite and beautiful, the staff welcoming, efficient, and knowledgeable, and the food absolutely delightful. So where is the dichotomy you ask? The prices are more suited to a plainer, less ornate environment, and the food represents value for money that is off the scale. I understand that Wokcano's take-out and delivery business is doing a roaring trade, but for me the real treat was to go there and enjoy all that this fine restaurant has to offer.

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