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Sunday, August 5, 2012

Ratha
Chau poly
and Ben
Daitz with
their hefty
sandwiches
at Num Pang



heroes among us

Num Pang puts a
Cambodian spin
on sandwiches

ULIA XANTHOS/DAILY NEWS

Photo:
historic career



Bottles of Sriracha sauce are ready for noshing customers at Num Pang.

Cambodian connection

BY DAISY MELAMED
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Num Pang, Union Square's sole Cambodian eatery, has revolutionized the sandwich.

At their hole-in-a-wall storefront on E. 12th St., owners and college buddies Ratha Chaupoly and Ben Daitz offer up a varied selection of hand-held Cambodian heroes, each built from a mix of high-end ingredients.

Though the menu at this three-year-old spot – named in Bon Appetit's "25 Things to Eat, Drink, and Cook in 2012" – changes constantly, the principle behind the food remains the same.

"The sandwiches at Kampuchea [Chaupoly's old restaurant] were about 11 inches. Now, it's portable," explains Chaupoly, a Cambodian native. "That was our concept, to change how people enjoyed eating lunch or dinner."

Num Pang's décor brings together a schoolhouse esthetic with accents reminiscent of New York's street-art heyday.

With just eight stools and minimal standing room at the bar, the shop is small in size and that's just how the pair wanted it. "The advantage of a small space is that we can have our hands on everything that goes on," says Daitz.

The shop opened during the peak of the economic crisis, and Chaupoly and Daitz say their unique business model – offering high-quality food in an affordable (prices range from \$7.25 to \$9.25) and easy manner – proved instantly successful.

Just don't confuse Num Pang's

Two buddies bring the taste of Southeast Asia to Union Square

sandwiches with their oft-associated cousin, banh mi. "Unlike Vietnamese banh mi, our sandwiches have a long, thought-out process behind them. We love banh mi, but here, there's a lot more coming to the table."

Adds Chaupoly: "Those traditional sandwiches are very simple. What we do here takes much more time."

Combinations at Num Pang, which has a second location near Grand Central station, include peppercorn catfish with house-made sweet soy sauce and five-spice-glazed pork belly with pickled Asian pear.

The creative duo's relationship is as interesting as the food they serve. Together, Chaupoly and Daitz bring extensive culinary skills and a natural affinity for local flavors to the Num Pang brand.

They're also known for teaming up

with guest chefs to create limited-edition sandwiches that benefit local charities.

Just this year, they worked with Mario Batali and ABC Kitchen's Jean-Georges Vongerichten and Dan Kluger.

"The partnership has been able to yield some interesting results because Ratha is coming to the table with more of a natural palate from that part of the world, and I'm coming to the table with more traditional technique," says Daitz.

Adding fuel to the already-roaring fire, they say, is the increased public appreciation of the region's culinary traditions. Cambodian flavors, techniques and dishes are becoming increasingly mainstream.

"The growth of ethnic awareness with food is huge. It used to be that there was a very small group that tasted our food and knew our food, but now, it's really grown," says Chaupoly. "This type of sandwich just came out to the mainstream public in the past few years."

So what's the plan going forward? Expansion.

"We wanted to start small, but that doesn't mean we don't have plans to grow," says Chaupoly. "We've got a couple targets now we're moving toward."

Num Pang, 21 E. 12th St. (212) 255-3271.

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Veal Meatballs Num Pang

Serves 6

2 pounds ground veal
 ¼ cup hoisin sauce
 ¼ cup cooked rice
 10 ounces canned tomatoes
 1 whole yellow onion, quartered
 2 tablespoon salt
 3 tablespoon sugar
 1 tablespoon ground black pepper
 1 cup Thai basil
 Olive oil

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine ground veal, cooked rice, hoisin sauce, half cup basil, salt, sugar, black pepper and mix well. Let sit for 20 minutes before rolling into meatballs about 1½ inches wide.

2. In a large pot, pour can of whole tomatoes and simmer.

In a large skillet pan, heat up olive oil on medium heat. Place meatballs and cook to brown about 8 to 12 minutes in low heat.

3. Add browned meatballs to simmering tomatoes, including oil. Add onions and let stew for 30 to 45 minutes on low to medium heat or until lightly thicken.

4. Add ½ cup of basil and serve.

Peppercorn Catfish Num Pang

Serves 6

1 cup low sodium soy sauce
 ½ cup honey
 2 tablespoon finely chopped garlic
 ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
 3 tablespoons finely chopped ginger
 1 cup chopped scallions
 5 tablespoons ground black pepper
 2 tablespoons sugar
 Pinch of salt
 6 to 7 catfish fillets (4 to 6 ounces each)
 Cooking oil

1. To make the glaze, combine soy sauce, honey, salt, sugar, scallions, ground black pepper, ginger, garlic, apple cider vinegar. Set aside.

2. Heat oil. In a medium skillet pan, place two pieces of catfish at a time only and lightly brown.

3. Slowly add glaze and let glaze thicken on the fillet. Serve hot and enjoy.

SANDWICH ASSEMBLY:
 Assembling ingredients

3 12-inch baguettes
 Pickled carrots
 Sliced cucumber
 Cilantro
 Chili mayo (recipe is same the chili mayo for corn)
 Cut baguette to 6 inches and toast.
 Spread mayo on both sides of baguette.

1. Lay sliced cucumber on the top end of baguette along with pickle carrots and cilantro.

2. Place protein (meatballs or catfish) on the bottom of baguette. Combine top to bottom and enjoy!

Grilled Corn With Chili Mayo and Coconut Flakes Makes 4

1 cup of mayo (Hellman's)
 1½ tablespoon sambal chili sauce
 ½ teaspoon sugar
 Pinch of sea salt and ground pepper
 4 corn on the cob, cleaned with no husk
 2 whole limes cut in fours
 ½ cup unsweetened coconut flakes
 Chili powder to taste
 Melted butter

1. In a medium bowl, mix mayo, sambal chili, sugar, salt and pepper until combined. Set aside in fridge until use.

2. Preheat grill to 350°F. While grill is heating, soak the corn in cold water for at least 10 minutes.

3. Shake off all water and place corn on the grill for about 10 to 12 minutes. Make sure to turn corn to cook on all sides.

4. Lightly brush corn on all sides with butter. To serve, lay corn on one side, spread chili mayo over the top, sprinkle with coconut flakes and a few dashes of chili powder. Serve with a wedge of lime and enjoy!

Note: You can boil or roast your corn if you do not have a grill. It's just as good.



Watermelon Juice Serves 8 to 12, makes 16 ounces each serving

1 whole seedless watermelon

Carve out meat of watermelon, put in a blender. Blend until puréed. Serve chilled.

