



Dining: Vietnamese expertise

Review: Brodard Chateau has superb specialty dishes, a comprehensive menu, and large portions to boot.

By **ELIZABETH EVANS**

SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

Fine Vietnamese dining is something one should look forward to. I once wept when the lack of taxis in San Francisco nearly caused me to miss a hard-won reservation at the famed Slanted Door Vietnamese restaurant.

Booking a table at Brodard Chateau in Garden Grove isn't nearly so difficult, especially on a Monday night during some sport's playoff series. The restaurant is well named, as it's housed in a rather baroque building that looms large among the drive-through restaurants and other businesses that line this section of Trask Avenue.

The space inside is coolly modern. We enter the a spacious bar and are led into a long dining room flanked by a bay window on one side and large globe light fixtures on the other.

We start with something from the bar. I like the Jackfruit Martini (\$7.50), a tangy tequila-based libation made with a splash of juice from the tropical fruit that is related to breadfruit and fig. Lychee Martini (\$7.50) is also refreshing; the sweet, translucent syrup

is mixed with white cranberry juice and vodka. It's served up in a stemmed martini glass and garnished with a whole lychee.

I'm less impressed with Drunken Jasmine Tea (\$7.50). Though it's meant to be a takeoff on that classic from the 1980s, Long Island Iced Tea, I'd hoped for more flavor from the flowery tea for which it's named. Instead it's blandly sweet and intoxicating with a mix of gin, vodka and tequila.

There's also an impressive list of nonalcoholic beverages including Coconut Juice in its own shell (\$3.25) and shakes made with ingredients including malodorous Durian and Avocado (\$3.50).

Vietnamese 33 Beer (\$4.25) is another good choice with the meals here, which really should start with the Brodard rolls. The restaurant's well-established and more modest sister restaurant, also in Garden Grove, is famed for its rolls. Here the choices included the delicately crunchy Roasted Pork Spring Rolls (\$4.25) filled with tender slices of sweet barbecued pork, a thin layer of crisp, fried won-ton wrap, along with tender lettuce, mint, carrot, and cucumber, bound together in a thin, soft rice paper served with a chili-specked sauce.

Ahi Spring Rolls (\$7.95) are a hybrid of the fresh Vietnamese rolls and sushi; rare seared ahi tuna is tightly wrapped in the sheer rice paper with a mix of lettuce, fresh mango, mint and cucumber. It's teamed with two sauces, one a spicy mustard-based soy sauce and the other a creamy red-bell-pepper-seasoned mayonnaise.

My least favorite starter is the Trio of Satay (\$11.50). The selection of shrimp, beef and chicken skewers are nicely prepared, but I find them somewhat lacking in flavor. It takes the creamy peanut sauce and terrific cucumber salad – chunks of cucumber floating in a sweet vinegar sauce with red onion and disks of jalapeño – to properly perk them up. Moon Cakes (\$7.95) are large, grilled shrimp served in crunchy rice cups with loads of fresh lettuce, purple basil, mint and cilantro. It's do-it-yourself finger food: You pop the sweet and crunchy morsel into a large leaf of lettuce with herbs, top it with chili sauce, and eat.

But don't confuse these with Lettuce Wraps (\$7.95), which here are less sauced than those offered in some contemporary Chinese restaurants. This version is finely chopped chicken sautéed with pine nuts and green onions, and served with shredded mango, roasted shallots and crushed peanuts as well as large leaves of romaine lettuce. The menu is comprehensive, if somewhat confusing. One of the best salads is not to be found in the salad section, but rather under the oddly captioned At the Chateau. That said, the Prawn and Mango Salad (\$17.95) is outstanding. Large, grilled tiger prawns and a couple of spears of slender asparagus are served on a mountain of a slaw-like mango salad, more flavorful than sweet. This combination is also garnished with rice cakes, which are shaped like cut sushi but unfilled and with a chewy texture. Entrees aren't technically served family style, but it's impossible not to want to try what everyone else is having. And portions are large enough to encourage sharing. Sea Bass Curry (\$19.95) is a filet of the endangered white fish under a blanket of spicy yellow curry and over a bed of shiitake mushrooms and eggplant. It's served with plenty of crusty French bread so that none of the rich sauce goes to waste.

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Noodle dishes include "Ha Noi" Style Smoked Pork Noodles (\$7.95). This is a rather complicated dish. A small simmering pot of smoked pork chops and pork patties in a lime-based sauce is served with rice vermicelli noodles and assorted pickled vegetables and a pile of fresh herbs. It comes with an empty bowl, which we're told to use to mix the ingredients to our taste.

Seafood Clay Pot (\$8.95) is another dish that comes undercover. Once the top is lifted and the steam clears, the tender calamari, shrimp, and crab with fried rice and vegetables are revealed. It is a moist and garlicky rice dish.

A more simple dish is the Grilled Pork Chop Over Broken Rice (\$7.95). A single pork chop is sectioned and placed over a mound of steamed rice. There's also a sizable portion of crunchy pickled vegetables served on the side along with a bowl of the ever-present sweet, sour and pungent fish sauce.

I think my favorite offering is the Shaken Beef (\$11.95). This is a stir-fry-style dish with tender filet mignon cut into bite-size pieces with fat, juicy, brown mushrooms in a thick garlic- and soy-based sauce. It's served with a bowl of Jasmine rice on the side. The wine list is a short one, with some well-thought-out selections for the food. We select Trimbach Riesling (\$35). It's a light off-dry Alsatian wine that traditionalists like with Asian food.

We end with a selection of sweets from the dessert menu. The French influence is apparent in the desserts I like best. The fine Apple Tart (\$4.50) comes warm from the kitchen on a puff-pastry-crust tart that is lined with a sweet egg custard and topped with soft apple slices. It's best with a side of Cinnamon Ice cream (\$1.95).

I also like the Nutella Chocolate Banana Crepe (\$5.95). This is a large, thin rice pancake with a liberal dose of the classic Italian chocolate and hazelnut spread. Slices of banana and a thick dusting of coconut complete the dish. Worth noting is the Coconut Jello (\$3.25). The dessert resembles a giant Petri dish with thick strands of freshly grated coconut floating in the pale-grey gelatin. I have to think it's an acquired taste. One could end with a cup of the sweet but strong Vietnamese coffee enriched with condensed milk (\$2.50). After all, when one eats in a chateau shouldn't one linger?
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