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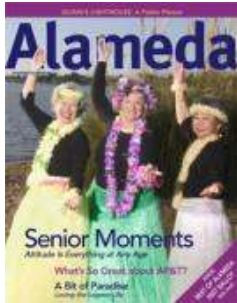
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Tidbits

Different Strokes

Dining on Encinal Avenue just got more cosmopolitan, thanks to two restaurants that opened within weeks of each other recently. They are new; they are neighbors. But when it comes to cuisine and style, it comes as a surprise to find that they are worlds apart.

"Mainly, we're Vietnamese," says Dan Nguyen, co-owner, with two cousins, of the trendy, family-run Dragon Rouge (2304 Encinal Ave., 510-521-1800, www.dragonrougerestaurant.com). "When we say the restaurant is Vietnamese fusion, we're referring to the sake and wine bar, the beer from Belgium and the ciders we serve," he explains. In choosing the decor, which features abundant bamboo and bold, warm colors, the intention was to create a hip, modern, sophisticated ambience that would appeal to "a younger crowd—mainly 25- to 45-year-olds." Nguyen says his mom and aunt will oversee the kitchen, at least in the short-term, and serve up skewer specials, shrimp rolls and family-style meals. If Oakland's popular Le Cheval (1007 Clay St., 510-763-8495) is any indication, Dragon Rouge will be a hit. "That restaurant belongs to a cousin, and its success inspired us to share our food and culture in Alameda," says Nguyen.

Next door at Paul Wong's Hawaiian BBQ (2306 A Encinal Ave., 510-864-1188), the interior includes surfboards, skateboards, framed photos of Hawaii mounted on sunny yellow walls and two plasma TVs. In the afternoon, expect to find a bunch of teens straight from school hanging out. Wong was once the owner-manager of the nearby Kentucky Fried Chicken, and his Alameda Island roots run as deep as the ocean off Honolulu. Favorite dishes are the mixed plate with teriyaki steak, short ribs and chicken (\$7.50) and the crispy breaded chicken that comes with dipping sauce (\$6.25). All the food is served in takeout boxes, whether you eat in or take it with you, and all entrees come in regular or mini-meal size.

—By Wanda Hennig

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