



No-nonsense noodles

Yum Yum's busy kitchen whips up multiple dishes at a time (opposite page), including Pork Tan Tan Noodles (above) with miso ground pork and a chili ragu

Noodle Bars Pop Up Everywhere

Ever since the word "bar" became attached to the word "noodle," it has become known as hipster cuisine.

The trend owes much to the Momofuku chain started by superstar American-born chef David Chang (who happens to be of Korean descent). His template for a noodle bar that freely mixes foods of Asian cultures has given rise to a whole new, fun approach.

In Asia, noodle bars tend to specialize in one kind

of noodle (because they make their own, a labor-intensive process). "Lots of restaurants in Japan and Korea specialize in limited menus," observes Asian food guru and blogger Joe McPherson of *zenkimchi.com*. But here we are seeing an explosion of noodle bars that do it all. You'll basically see four types: ramen, which is a Chinese-style egg noodle; rice, made from rice flour; soba, which contains buckwheat; and udon, a thick wheat noodle.

Asian noodle bars also tend to be "cheap lunch

counters and late-night stops to fill the stomach after a night of drinking," says McPherson. Here in America, using noodles from Japan, a new wave of noodle shops fills people up at any time of day.

Judging from the crowds at **Yum Yum** in Woodstock and Kingston, the formula is working.

Owned by husband-wife team of Nina Moeys-Paturel and Pierre-Luc Moeys along with chef Erica A. Mahlkuch, these unpretentious spots bill themselves as purveyors of Asian street food — nothing too fancy, just good.

While the Woodstock location takes advantage of Catskill views, the Kingston restaurant has an urban vibe, with brick walls and a full bar complete with imaginative cocktails. "Noodles are the new burger," says Moeys. "They are going to be huge because they are fast, inexpensive, and great. We've created a lot of noodle addicts. It's mostly very healthy food." To create their own bowls, customers mix and match their noodles (ramen, udon, soba or rice), broth (vegetarian, curry/coconut, pork/chicken, or dashi/miso), and protein (chicken, tilapia, beef, pork, tofu, or seitan).

There are tons of potential combinations, but chef Mahlkuch says the most ordered is the traditional noodle bowl: ramen with pork and pork broth. Seitan with rice noodles and coconut curry broth runs a close second. Seasonal ingredients are always revolving into the dishes, whether spring fiddleheads as a vegetable or a mushroom broth.

With the exception of the noodles (imported from Japan), everything is made in-house, including Korean pepper paste, umeboshi sauce, seitan, kimchi, and broths.

"We are not trying to be a traditional Japanese restaurant because we can't be. We are not Asian. And we'll freely sample from different cuisines, like Mongolian," says Moeys.

Which is why you'll also find surprises like zucchini tempura buns with lemon aioli, or choco-



late and ginger cream cupcakes on the menu.

A food truck also makes appearances at festivals. Be on the lookout!

Gomen Kudasai in New Paltz takes a completely different approach. Here, it's all about tradition. Owner Yuoko, a native of Japan and a Manhattan transplant, happily gives lessons in noodle slurping.

"The best way to enjoy the taste is by slurping," she says. "It's when liquid is mixed with oxygen — that's when you can taste the real flavor. If it's a hot noodle you can enjoy the hotness, or if it's cool you can enjoy the coolness. Noodles are a long food, so by slurping, you can get the texture, temperature, and taste. That's the only way to eat them. There's no chewing noodles, it's not right."

Here, patrons don't design their own dishes but instead order from choices on the menu. But there are so many possibilities, hot and cold, one could hardly complain. If you're eating gluten-free, try the shiritaki yam noodles in a soup or mung bean noodles in a stir-fry. The restaurant's hot soba noodle soup choices include seaweed (the secret of youth, says Yuoko), tofu, vegetable, sliced beef and onion, or pork and kimchi. Her homemade warishita, loosely translated as "mother sauce," is a key ingredient in her broth, as well as her zaru and bukkake sauces to accompany cold udon and soba noodles. A special treat: bukkake soba with roshi and shake — soba served in an ice cold bowl with grated daikon radish, broiled Norwegian salmon, and spinach. While you're there, try the house-made gyoza and rice balls, too.

If you're feeling hungry, adventurous, and spontaneous, pay a visit to Rockland County's **UNoodles Snack Bar**. The clock above the bar,

which is set to times in different places around the world, is your first clue that this Haverstraw hot spot is hard to pin down. Owned by El Salvadoran chef Jose David Martinez and his French partner Paulo Feteira, this is about as international as it gets. A more laid-back atmosphere than Union, the duo's other restaurant around the corner, UNoodles might not be ultra fancy but it's still sophisticated and chic, a casual fine-dining spot where a noodle bowl and yucca hushpuppies can coexist on the same menu.

"It's a casual, last-minute place to go," says Feteira. "A place you don't have to think too much about."

In the middle of the restaurant, diners gather around a big communal table — made from salvaged bowling alley planks — that sits 18, while smaller tables line the room. The atmosphere is convivial, with people popping in to meet friends, often for a quick drink at the U-shaped bar and an appetizer — maybe chicken and lemongrass dumplings with ponzu sauce. In warm weather, the garage-style front doors open to the street, creating a bistro-

like, street-side dining feel.

Noodles here mean more than Asian: They share space on the menu with pasta. The crowd-pleasing Piggy Bowl pairs ramen noodles with pulled pork, napa cabbage, and a hard-boiled egg, in the classic style. Udon Sakana is a lovely presentation of bok choy and mushrooms in a spicy fish broth.

Stir-fried egg noodle with Asian vegetables also tempts. Plenty of other Eastern-influenced dishes dot the menu, including teriyaki pork, "kind of like a barbecue pizza, Asian-style," says Feteira.

Yum Yum
Woodstock. 845-679-7992
Kingston. 845-338-1400;
www.yumyumnoodlebar.com

Gomen-Kudasai
New Paltz.
845-255-8811;
www.gomenkudasai.com

UNoodles Snack Bar
Haverstraw.
845-947-7625;
www.unoodles.net

Noodling Around



Ramen

Made from wheat and eggs, these thin, firm noodles — often yellow in color — originated in China but are also popular in Japan. They are most often served in broth.



Udon

These white, wheat-based noodles are the thickest kind available in Japan. The chewy noodle is served both hot — often in a broth flavored with mirin and soy sauce — and cold, with a special dipping sauce.



Soba

Available dried or fresh, these brown noodles with a nutty flavor are made with buckwheat and wheat flour. They are served in hot broths as well as cold, with a dipping sauce.



Vermicelli

A thin, rice-based noodle, vermicelli is popular in several Asian cuisines — from China (where in one city it is a breakfast staple) to Indonesia to Malaysia.