

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

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Joshua Trujillo / P-I

Gorgeous flowering teas blossom while steeping. From left are Jasmine Pearl, Blooming Heart and Fairy Peach Pearl Black.

Boom Noodle's small plates make a big impression

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By LESLIE KELLY
SPECIAL TO THE P-I

I cannot get enough of Boom Noodle. I'm crazy about the place, from its lean, clean aesthetic to a bustling kitchen that produces some of the prettiest petite plates in Seattle.

Typically, I'll have three meals before writing a review, but I've already visited Boom more than a half-dozen times since it opened in early January. Even a couple of times on my own, not the P-I's, dime. (A menu of under-\$15 options helps tremendously on that front.)

The Capitol Hill restaurant was conceived by the culinary dream team behind Blue C Sushi: Steve Rosen, James Allard and George Christothoulou. For this Northwest noodle shop they recruited chef Jonathan Hunt and sent him to slurp soup in Japan. One of the biggest hurdles Hunt faced was creating a deeply flavored broth without using MSG. (The traditional flavor enhancer is one hot potato, causing reactions in a small percentage of the population, though the FDA recognizes it as a safe ingredient.)

To fill the MSG void, Hunt dips into miso, curry, even red beets to give Boom's broth some extra oomph. He finishes a memorable mushroom soba by adding a parmesan crisp and tries to lighten the typical tonkatsu by blending chicken stock into the pork bone base.

RESTAURANT REVIEW

BOOM NOODLE

PHONE: 206-701-9130
ADDRESS: 1121 Pike St.
WEB SITE: boomnoodle.com
PRICES: \$3.95-\$7.95 starters; \$9.50-\$12.95 soup; \$8.95-\$10.95 wok noodles and fried rice
HOURS: Noon-10 p.m. Sunday-Thursday; noon-2 a.m. Friday-Saturday
BAR: Limited bar featuring specialty cocktails; short wine list with global selections; an assortment of sake, fresh juice drinks; Sapporo on tap
RESERVATIONS: Accepted for parties of eight or more
PAYMENT: Visa, MasterCard; no personal checks
SOUND: High ceilings and hard

As much as I admired the soups, it was the winning collection of small plates that so impressed me during my first few visits:

1 The Boom edamame puree is a sublime hummuslike dip in which soybeans and olive oil are whirled velvety smooth and served alongside sweet potato chips, marinated Japanese eggplant and slices of pickled cucumber.

1 A curry potato korokke was the most beautiful golden croquette I've ever dunked in ginger creme fraiche. This spud preparation could give frites some crunchy competition for the title of best deep-fried tuber.

1 Forget what you know about rice cakes. The caramelized miso-drizzled mixture of 10 grain rice cakes at Boom wears a brilliant veggie slaw and a creamy tofu drizzle. The plate looks like sushi gone wild.

1 Chilled cubes of sesame-dressed tofu are showered in shiitake mushrooms, bamboo shoots, green onions and dried wakame seaweed. Could this tasty dish win over bean curd haters? Quite possibly.

1 The panko-crusted pork tenderloin medallions billed as katsu curry are thicker than the typical fried cutlet, making this meaty appetizer eat more like an entree, especially because it's served with a lightly dressed, lovely mizuna salad, steamed rice and the intense Japanese curry dipping sauce.

1 Equally satisfying, a chazuke (grilled salmon and rice doused in a green-tea-and-dashi broth) and the noodle-and-cabbage pancake known as okonomiyaki make good candidates to share, family style. Or, if you're feeling generous, pass a plate to your neighbor in the cafeteria-chic seating.

While I appreciate the community-table concept, there was never a critical mass when I was in Boom, which left a buffer zone between parties. For pairs who insist on privacy, there are a few two-tops in the lounge area.

Let's back up a minute and hit the bar: The short wine list is all over the map, from an Argentinean malbec to food-friendly Rieslings from Germany and Washington state. There are no vintage dates listed, which is curious, because the rest of the menu is so detailed. Sake options include a sparkling version and an organic and the servers did a fine job offering recommendations to match dishes.

I most enjoyed the booze-free beverages, especially the fresh-pressed juice drinks and the gorgeous flowering teas, which blossom while steeping. The cucumber-mint fizz, spiked with ginger and a sweet

surfaces make conversation challenging when the dining room is busy.

ACCESS: No barriers; elevator to restroom on lower level

PARKING: Street parking is difficult at best; pay lots in the area

KID-FRIENDLY: Yes; high chairs available and a special children's menu features pint-size bento boxes

BEST BETS: Edamame puree (\$4.95), Curry Potato Korokke (\$4.50), Miso-broiled Rice Cakes (\$3.95), Okonomiyaki (\$6.50), Salmon Chazuke (\$7.50), Mushroom Soba (\$9.50), Cha Shur Pork-fried Rice (\$10.95), cream puff (\$3.50), Boom Waffle (\$4)

RATINGS:

Food: ** 1/2

Service: ** 1/2

Ambience: **

Ratings guide ([full explanation](#))

**** extraordinary

*** excellent

** good

* fair



 Joshua Trujillo / P-I

A bright entryway greets Boom Noodle's customers.

milk drink called calpico, was as refreshing as a cold plunge after a hot sauna. Or after a steamy bowl of soup.

After tasting through the seven noodle soups at Boom, my flat-out fave is the mushroom soba, made with green tea-infused pasta imported from Japan. The soup's dashi broth gains depth from assorted mushrooms.

The shio ramen -- built on a pork and chicken broth -- and the Tokyo ramen with braised pork were surprisingly bland.

Then I learned that the kitchen was in the process of switching out its noodles. Hunt sources most of Boom's noodles from a custom producer in Northern California, and after the restaurant's launch in early January he determined that the noodles were absorbing the broth too quickly, weakening the flavor of the soup.



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Joshua Trujillo / P-I

Boom's chilled sesame tofu might win over bean curd haters.

The new ramen noodles are wavy and thinner, more like traditional ramen. I've tried the new noodles and the difference is subtle. I still found the miso ramen lacking richness, but it's good to know the kitchen is working diligently to fine-tune its ingredients and its approach in putting them together.

The evolution can be seen all the way down to the desserts, where leaden beignets are now more aptly called doughnuts. Also on the sweet side, the cream puffs are the same as the beloved pastries from Blue C Sushi, chocolate or vanilla pastry cream stuffed into a flaky puff. I liked the Boom waffle, maple syrup switched out for chunky azuki bean jam and vanilla ice cream. This dish tasted better than it looked.

It's possible to go from starter to soup and then dessert in under an hour at Boom. Service is lightning quick. If you want to slow it down, order a couple of small plates and hold off on the entrees until you're good and ready.



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Then again, the pacing makes Boom a fine option for a quick slurp. I'll be back again soon.

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