

## RESTAURANT REVIEW

# Terrific dining fun and value



KEVIN LYNCH, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Tony Ho and Morgan Watts display their popular Ho Win Chicken dish.

For my money, Ho Ho may be the best family eatery in this city

BY ANNE DESBRISAY

I don't know if the balloons have been a part of the Ho Ho experience for all 21 years that Ho Ho's has been dishing out the chow mein, but they sure were a hit at my table. The balloons came along with the bill and the fortune cookies. Swords made from twisted balloons for the lads, and then an invitation from our host to go joust (that is, whack each other) in an adjoining, empty, apparently sword-proof dining room down the hall.

Meanwhile, the bill got paid, the leftovers got packaged up and the last gulp of the Tsing Tao beers were taken by the adults in peace. Perfection.

If I tell you I believe Ho Ho Chinese Food may be the best family restaurant in Ottawa, I'll be spoiling everything. Ho Ho's is a private pleasure for my gang — albeit a recently discovered one — and for our dining-out-with-the-kids dollar, it's a treasure.

My plan here is to broadcast my enthusiasm for this place, but only if you promise not to go.

Which is *not* to say that Ho Ho is a very well-kept secret. Folks have been coming here — to Richmond Road, east of Woodroffe Avenue — for more than 20 years, sometimes from far afield. Before that, they came to the Ho Ho's in Lincoln Fields when it was a small take-away spot.

Our family first came for ice

cream. It was the *après-soccer* treat: a chocolate-dip ice cream cone from the Chinese restaurant's parking lot ice-cream stand. We'd sit at the picnic tables and lick the drips and swat the wasps and watch the traffic. Ho Ho's was about ice cream, we thought, not egg rolls.

But when we finally did venture inside, we were hooked.

Ho Ho's is not a posh spot. And the menu, apart from being colourful and thoughtfully laid out, does not distinguish itself from any other "dine-in, take-out, we deliver" Chinese restaurant. But the food is fresh, the vegetables offer more than the usual bean sprouts and bok choy, the chicken has real chicken flavour, the beef is tender, the shrimp crunchy, the sauces have life and none of it has MSG.

And the other real joy of this place is the family that runs it ... gracious, amusing and good fun.

My favourite dish (and one I have all to myself, as the lads can think of nothing more revolting) is the enormous sizzling platter of shrimp-stuffed Chinese eggplant smothered in black bean sauce.

The eggplants arrive all alone on the cast-iron platter, then the black bean sauce is poured over their deep purple skins tableside with great sizzle and smoke (that part, they like). The sauce is pungent, spicy, a fine match for the soft-spoken eggplant, and the

## Ho Ho Chinese Food

875 Richmond Rd.,  
722-9200

**Food:** Good Cantonese.

**Access:** Two steps into restaurant.

**Price:** Starters, \$1 to \$3.25; main dishes, \$7 to \$15.

**Hours:** Lunch Tuesday to Friday, dinner Tuesday to Sunday. Closed Monday.

shrimp within are sweet, crunchy, perfect.

They do a very fine ginger beef here too — the meat lean and remarkably tender, the ginger flavour strong, the onions caramelized, the sauce with just the right amount of bite for the boys (which is to say, not too much). The lads also liked the sweet and sour spare ribs with peppers and pineapple — the ribs mostly bone, but occasionally coated with very tender meat, lightly battered and coated with that glorious, memory-making cornstarch-thickened, sweet reddened sauce.

The *Mo-shui* anything (beef, pork, chicken) is popular here: tender meat, softly cooked egg, vegetables, Chinese mushrooms, all available to wrap up in a "tissue pancake" and dunk in *hoisin* sauce. They also like the *won ton* soup, the chicken *chow mein* and any of the spring rolls (shrimp, vegetable, chicken).

Ho Ho has a west-end following. And it deserves it. But don't y'all decide to follow your way over there the same night I need it. Hey, I saw it first.

For a family of six, we paid about \$100, with three beers, four root beers and free balloons.