

East Borough: When pasta gets the full-on pho treatment



(Cathy Chaplin / For The Times)

By **Cathy Chaplin**

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Name: East Borough — “East” as a nod to the Asian cuisine and “Borough” to pay homage to the restaurant’s East Coast influences.

The chefs: The restaurant’s menu is a collaborative effort between chefs Chloe Tran and Jason Neroni. The former honed her Vietnamese cooking chops aboard her family’s NorCal food truck before opening the original East Borough in Costa Mesa in 2010, while Neroni has earned attention for his pastas at Superba Snack Bar.

Concept: A new take on Tran and partner John Cao’s O.C. restaurant of the same name, with an infusion of new ideas from Neroni and restaurateur Paul Hibler (Pitfire Pizza, Superba Snack Bar). Lunch swings toward traditional Vietnamese with *banh mi*, spring rolls and vermicelli noodles, while dinner presents boldly flavored and creative plates, like whole trout with grilled pineapple and anchovies and tamarind-slicked lamb ribs.

What dish represents the restaurant, and why? Phocatini — toothsome strands of handmade bucatini receive the full-on pho treatment complete with oxtails, hoisin, onion, cilantro and Thai basil. A squeeze of fresh lime juice adds the perfect tangy touch.

Runner up: The head-on blue shrimp with pomelo and crab paste butter is a testament to East Borough's commitment to delivering flavors full on. It's funky, spicy and fabulous. The ginger rice served on the side plays the perfect foil.

Who's at the next table? Worker bees from nearby offices by day and Culver City dwellers (with a smattering of Kirk Douglas Theater-goers trickling in before and after the show) by night.

Appropriate for: Vietnamese food aficionados who are delighted by thoughtful design and punchy flavors.

Uh-oh: The space can be loud and dark during dinner, so choose your dining companions accordingly.

Service: Apron-donning gents with dependable recommendations about what's good to eat and drink.

What are you drinking? On the clock — blood orange cinnamon soda. Off the clock — tequila-spiked tamarind cocktail with lime and sriracha salt.

Info: 9810 W. Washington Blvd., Culver City, (310) 596-8266, east-borough.com.

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