

Satisfying Your Sweet Cravings



Red Ribbon in Puente Hills Mall

For 24 years, Red Ribbon has been satisfying the sweet tooth cravings of Filipinos and Americans alike. As one of the first Filipino-owned brands in the United States, Red Ribbon Bakeshop has planted definite roots in the country and their reach is about to get wider.

Since opening their first store in West Covina back in 1984, Red Ribbon has since expanded to 24 sites all over the nation. Their newest location in Puente Hills Mall features an open layout that welcomes customers inside and allows them a closer look and feel of the popular Red Ribbon cakes, breads and pastries. Customers conveniently pick up their choices to bring to the beautifully-designed cash wrap counter.

"Since we opened our first store, our products have attracted a good number of non-Filipinos looking for high-quality cakes and pastries either for special occasions or to simply enjoy at home," says Pinky DeCastro, Brand Manager for Red Ribbon Bakeshop USA.

The Tres Leches Cake, Banana with Walnut, Strawberry with Almonds and Rocky Road offerings were designed specifically with the non-Filipino market in mind, tapping flavors already familiar to them in order to draw them into the franchise. Nevertheless, staples like Mango Cake, Ube Cake, Taisan Mamon and Black Forest transcend all boundaries, making them the favorite of customers, regardless of race, gender or age.

Tommy King, VP and Country Manager of Red Ribbon noted: "our presence here signals our corporate drive to make our products more known to and accepted by different cultures." Further, "our unwavering commitment to premium product quality delivered with warm and friendly service will help us build close ties with the multi-cultural community of residents and workers in the City of Industry and neighboring Hacienda Heights, Rowland Heights, Walnut and Diamond Bar."

Their continued success is evidenced by continued revenue growth despite the hard times. However, Ms. DeCastro assured that "we remain vigilant in controlling our costs while further intensifying our efforts to serve our customers with the same high-quality products that they look for from us."

The country can also look forward to more Red Ribbon in their future. "We will be opening our first full-line store inside a mall at the Arizona Mills (Tempe, AZ) late this month and we remain committed to open at least (12) more new stores this year," reveals Ms. DeCastro.*

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- Pinky DeCastro, Brand Manager for Red Ribbon Bakeshop USA



Max's of Manila at Puente Hills Mall, the luxurious interiors (left)

the business was great, but the vision of 'better' was never far off in the horizon.

Says Liza Abraham, Micro-Business Unit Manager for Max's of Manila: "the restaurant in West Covina that lots of room for improvement. We felt that the time was ripe for change, took the chance, and now here we are."

What do we have here? Here is a gorgeous, spacious location right by Puente Hills mall entrance. Contemporary interior design dominates the updated look of this restaurant, in keeping with a trend in all Max's restaurants, especially in the Philippines. The interiors use predominantly earth colors and understated but elegant décor. The ethnic touch is subtle but effective, with paintings by Filipino masters adorning the walls and Filipino ornaments placed purposefully around the room. Of the food? Well, not only are you sure to get a good meal, but gourmet plating and presentation grace the tables as well.

Roomy tables replaced the previously cramped dining conditions. For those who love sunshine or moonlight, this Max's has an outdoor patio that takes its diners away from the mall in the city to hushed tropical Secret Garden-esque spot. Palm trees and banana trees tower over the guests and a large waterfall structure provides a calming soundtrack to one's meal. Sequestered from outdoors by an unobtrusive wall with frosted glass, the patio removes any notion of the urban and replaces it with the notion of vacation. Rattan-inspired chairs, rough-hewn granite table tops and a bar made of textured, dark tiles complete this alternative space, one perfect for a summer luncheon, a romantic dinner or a private party.

The new look was just the beginning. Change occurred at the very core of the restaurant: food production. They have state of the art, stainless steel kitchen equipment and an electronic ordering system wherein well-trained servers have PDA devices that bring the orders from your table straight to the kitchen. Each server also has a beeper that tells them when the food is ready. Should the server not respond promptly, the beeps go to the manager who can swoop in and help out. There are cameras hooked up to a television screen so the kitchen can have a visual of how busy the restaurant is and be prepared. They've also added something for health-conscious California crowd: grilled items, well-liked by all. "Innovation that makes everyone happy and also helps us operate much better," declared Ms. Abraham.

Says Jose Hontiveros, the Senior VP for Fortune Foods, the company that owns the Max's franchise for Southern & Northern California: "It's spectacular. This is not your ordinary Filipino restaurant. This is simply on a much higher level. And it's not just in the trappings, it's the system we've put in place that makes it special. Everything is so integrated, well-thought out and measured."

Ms. Abraham agrees: "we've learned a lot from the West Covina site and everything you see at Max's Puente Hills is a lesson brought to life. Once you know and understand the market and the needs of the restaurant, what comes out will undoubtedly be better than before."

She admits that most of the old customers, the regulars patrons of Max's in West Covina, were surprised at the surface change, but this surprise was for the better. Even non-Filipinos didn't realize it. She recounted a story that happened just the day before - Sandra, a Frenchwoman restaurateur makes it a habit to try out new restaurants. She walked into Max's Puente Hills with her daughter and sat down. When she saw the menu, her jaw dropped. Filipino fare was furthest from her mind. And though Sandra had never tried Filipino food before, she was pleased. Even her daughter gushed, "I love it!"

This is exactly the kind of effect Max's wishes to provoke. Aside from updating Max's for its loyal customers, this site is also a foray into capturing the mainstream market, while staying true to tradition. The mission is to share fine Filipino food to non-Filipinos, those who haven't had the pleasure of growing up with it themselves.

Though it opened without much fanfare, just a few advertisements here and there, the power of word-of-mouth keeps steady client traffic walking through their doors. It is the first Max's in the US to be located in a mainstream American mall and this location actually came rather unexpectedly. Max's restaurants are traditionally free-standing sure, but when Ms. Abraham and her colleagues were scouting for a new site to accompany their new vision, a spot offered by Puente Hills Malls clicked right in place with their plans. There are definitely plans to open another restaurant before the year ends, with Orange County, Los Angeles and North Hills in their sights.

Mr. Hontiveros acknowledged that Max's in Puente Hills was created with a deliberate attempt to make a difference where Filipino cuisine is concerned. "We want to achieve the ultimate in Filipino dining experience. We visualized a goal and took deliberate steps to get there. We have a fantastic menu, and we wanted to translate that into a great experience for our guests." Mission accomplished.

Max's of Manila is located at the Ground Level of the Puente Hills Mall near AMC Theaters. 1600 S. Azusa Ave., City of Industry, CA 91748. Phone: 626-965-0032. Store hours are: Mon-Thu 11am to 10pm / Fri & Sat 11am to 11pm / Sunday 10am to 9pm.*

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A New Face for an Old Favorite

It's been around for ages. If you haven't eaten in it, you would have at least heard about it and if you have no clue what Max's restaurant is about then the question becomes: what rock have you been hiding under these past sixty years?

But something new is afoot in the Puente Hills Mall of the City of Industry. The popular Filipino chain of restaurants Max's of Manila has just opened up what promises to be a new phase in the history of this well-loved dining establishment.

This group of Max's restaurants opened its first location in West Covina. People flocked to it immediately, leading them to open two more stores: one in Vallejo and another in Sacramento. Life was good and

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kung hanap ay lasa



Chow King at Puente Hills Mall

The King's Bold Moves

Chow King has always been a ready destination for Filipinos needing a good bite in good time. And it's ready to spread the love.

Their newest location is a stall in the Puente Hills Mall, the second Chow King restaurant that's located within mall. While only being open less than a week, tables are full and are about to get fuller. A good 50% of the diners here are non-Filipino, says operations manager Andrew Quemuel. "We are poised to crossover into the mainstream American market."

Expectedly, Filipino customers stick to the traditional dishes like the breakfast meals, siopao, soup and pancit. But they try the new things too, like the new chicken line called Chicken Chow, a non-breaded dish with a hint of oriental spices. It is new things such as these that have brought other ethnicities into the Chow King fold, aside from the much appreciated teriyaki chicken, Mongolian beef and teppanyaki tilapia rice meals.

Variety is at the heart of Chow King in the US, a variety that remains loyal to its base while opening up new culinary vistas to new diners. How? They've come up with a "What's New" segment of the menu, a dish that differs from month to month. This allows them to experiment and offer something different on a regular basis, a successful enterprise that has been going on for a year. Seasonal items also come in to spice things up a little bit and some dishes have created quite a following: frozen ube yogurt and kamote (sweet potato) fries are two of these hits.

Much thought is put into every new dish, with a crack research and development team in Pomona, going to food shows and devising new recipes to offer the public. This demonstrates Chow King's recognition that the Filipino-American market is different, so their innovations are theirs alone, separate from Chow King Philippines while maintaining the integrity of the homegrown dishes.

Despite the current recession, Chow King manages to be competitive and aggressively expand their business. Next up is the Plaza Bonita Mall in San Diego. Construction on-going and should open by December 2008. Eight new stores are expected to open by 2009, in malls and tie-ins with premier Filipino supermarket Seafood City.. It may even make its way to the East Coast.

Chow King is located at the ground level of the Puente Hills Mall. 1600 S. Azusa Avenue, near the AMC Theaters, City of Industry, CA 91748. Call (626) 363-1977.

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