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ADOBOS MEXICAN GRILL: TACO SALAD

SAMPLING RESTAURANTS, ONE TAKEOUT AT A TIME

BY SUNIL MALAPATI

Last time I wrote a food column, all of four weeks ago, things seemed to be on the right path. Restaurants opening, some apprehensions about crowds, but also some hope. Oh well, we done screwed it all up again... so, while I keep dreaming of enjoying meals with friends in bustling eateries, I will have to continue supporting our wonderful local food scene with take-outs. So, this column will be about some of my favorite dishes from local establishments.

Let us start with breakfast, apparently the most important meal of the day. Not for me—a pot of coffee often suffices. On those days I need more, I love a Big Apple Bagels with their jalapeño cheddar cream cheese. The bagels have the right amount of chewiness, and the cream cheese juts the right amount of heat that does not overwhelm the bagel. A few of those adorable mini-muffins will not go amiss either. There were many Saturdays that started out right because of this breakfast, and since all days are Saturdays nowadays, this seems a rather appropriate breakfast!

Lunch offers a lot more options, depending on how quickly I want to eat. Sandwiches are of course a lunch staple. If I am going to eat something immediately, the Hula Girl from Knock-out Melts is ideal. The balsamic drizzled shredded chicken and melted provolone cheese are balanced with the sweetness

of pineapple and fresh tartness of green apple. Some jalapeño chips for heat, cold soda, and I am all set. If I need a sandwich that will keep for a while, the Mediterranean Veg-out sandwich from Big Apple Bagels is perfect. The bagel is firm enough not to get soggy with the crisp vegetables, and it is satisfying without feeling heavy in the middle of the day.

If I am in the mood for tacos, the steak tacos from El Paisano are a steal. For about five bucks (including taxes), I can have two tacos loaded with meat and tons of flavor. This no-frills hole-in-the-wall carefully packs their tacos in wax paper and then aluminum foil making it easier to eat. I do love their red hot sauce (really hot) and tangy green tomatillo sauce. Another Mexican takeout favorite is the taco salad from Adobos Mexican Grill. I usually get it with barbacoa—shredded beef slow cooked in a complex sauce of adobo, ancho chile and tamarind. The basmati rice used for cilantro rice is a delightful surprise, and I always ask for the El Diablo sauce, one of the best hot sauces in town. The additional guacamole can help cool down the dish!

If I am in the mood for a substantial lunch, the Vegetable Tempura Lunch Bento Box from Ichiban is a great deal. It is a feast of tastes and textures. The house salad with the tangy ginger dressing opens up my palate. The pan-fried gyoza, usually made with pork and can

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OOLONG ASIAN CUISINE: THAI BASIL STIR FRY

be ordered vegetarian, are crispy with a soft filling and come with a wonderful thick dumpling sauce. The perfectly fried tempura is also accompanied by a California roll and fried rice (make sure to order yum-yum sauce, that delightful fusion of Japanese flavors with American mayonnaise). I always feel sated after pigging my way through the bento box and sometimes even skip dinner!

An individual pizza can be perfect for either lunch or dinner. Magoo's pies are just right for lunch without feeling too heavy. I am partial to their Greek pie minus the olives. The briny artichokes with their astringent notes are balanced by the feta and Parmesan cheeses, the sweetness of tomatoes, the bite from red onions, the overall funk of garlic and everything modulated by olive oil on a crisp thin crust. For dinner, L. May offers a truly sensational Getting Figgy With It pizza. Their spicy Italian sausage has quite a kick to it, and the sweetness of the mission figs and caramelized onions harmonizes with the sausage with Brie and mozzarella cheeses and two sauces: aged balsamic reduction and roasted olive oil sauce. I wish this pizza was always on their menu as it sometimes gets replaced by other seasonal items.

I usually go for Asian cuisines when it comes to ordering takeout for dinner. Stir fries and fried rice dishes are meant to be eaten immediately and do not keep well for the next day, so those are great for a nice dinner for that day. The Thai Basil Stir Fry from Oolong Asian Cuisine is an exception in that it tastes equally good the next day. The cabbage and bamboo shoots add a lot of texture, and

I always ask for the hot oil that makes me a very happy, very sweaty man. Good thing I am doing take out, eh? The Yellow Curry Fried Rice from Lina's Thai Bistro is another favorite: the British concoction known as curry powder makes a wonderful flavor base for the fried rice with carrots, onion and celery.

Asian curries are particularly good for leftovers for two reasons: many of them taste better the next day, and they can be gussied up with home ingredients quite easily. The Red Curry with a basil sauce and Prik King with a delicate Panang sauce, both from Lina's, are great. I like them both with tofu that absorbs all the saucy goodness. The leftover curry can be simmered with some fresh aromatics, chilies and/or chili paste. The Cashew Chicken Curry from House of China is good for about three meals for me! The chicken is breaded and deep fried and comes in a rich brown sauce with vegetables and of course, cashews. I eat up all the cashews the first meal. I can modify the leftovers by simmering with nuts and dried fruit, some chili paste and sometimes a dash of brandy. Some freshly cooked rice and it is a completely new dish!

I don't have that much of a sweet tooth, but am extremely fond of ice-cream. The English Almond Toffee from Betty Jane is very high on my list. I crave it all winter and indulge all summer. Luckily for me, Betty Jane sells them in quarts (pints are for amateurs!) and it helps me de-stress oh so deliciously.

Eating out may be on the very distant horizon for me, but I will continue to eat in, one takeout at a time. ■

SUNIL MALAPATI

SUNIL IS NERDY ABOUT ALL THINGS FOOD, SCIENCE, FOOD SCIENCE AND THEATRE. HE WILL GLADLY ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS (AS WELL AS BORE YOU WITH FOOD LORE) IF YOU EMAIL HIM AT DINING@DUBUQUE365.COM.



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Pepperoni & Sausage OR Canadian Bacon & Sauerkraut	\$10	\$7	\$13

SPECIALTY PIZZAS	13" FLAT	7" PIE	14" PIE
The OTHERSIDE (Pepperoni, Sausage, Canadian Bacon, Onions, Mushrooms, Green Peppers, Green Olives)	\$14	\$8	\$17
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TACO (Beef or Chicken)	\$14	\$8	\$17
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MISS PIGGY (BBQ Pulled Pork, Peppers & Onions)	\$12	\$7	\$15
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 - Bruchetta: \$6**
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