

## **The Patriot Ledger**

**December 20, 2006**

**Taste & Tell: Beni Cafe: Funky, delicious, unpretentious**

**By Jen Wagner**

I'm not one for gimmicks. So I approached the spicy tuna wrap at Quincy 's newest Jimmy Liang and Peter Tse eatery, Beni Cafe, hesitantly. (The adventurer in me, on the other hand, planned to eat it for breakfast.) After all, what's wrong with traditional sushi - spicy tuna maki, for instance?

Well, nothing, actually, the Beni menu retorts: traditional maki is also there. The spicy tuna mixture I so love in sushi is rolled up in a tortilla with lettuce, tomatoes and bean sprouts and is served with the spicy sauce for extra dipping. I learned this only by ordering it; the menu lacks descriptions of the dishes. And I wasn't disappointed by the tuna wrap 's new incarnation. Turns out that it's not really a gimmick. They kept this sandwich simple, not adding anything wacky or weird, allowing the spicy tuna mixture to remain the star. And really, compared to some of the weird stuff Americans have done to sushi - from cream cheese to the total absence of raw fish - this sushi sandwich is pretty respectable.

The menu is small, as is this five-table eatery that's like Tokyo meets "The Jetsons." The decor includes red walls, hardwood floors set diagonally, modern metallic pendant lighting, shiny plastic red and white chairs, three online computers (with funky stools on round, red carpets) for use while you're dining, and wireless Internet access. There's no official table service - you order at the counter - but a nice young woman brought our food and drinks. So what else do you need to know?

Try the ramen - it 's a far cry from what many of us survived on in college. The rich broth is filled with noodles, sprouts, greens and meat.

The most expensive thing on the menu is the eel sushi at \$10; most other main dishes are \$6 to \$7.

The "small eats" section of the menu includes shumai (crab dumplings) and sweet potato fries.

Nothing is more than \$3.50 on this section of the menu.

There 's no liquor license, but there are plenty of great teas, and the option of adding the trendy "boba " to make your tea into what many know as "bubble tea " with tapioca pearls. You don 't have to be a tea lover to love these gems of drinks.

It didn 't ruin our meal, but Beni was out of one too many things that day. I ordered Thai iced tea, but they had none. I took the server 's advice and ordered the milk tea and found it very similar - sweet and creamy. My husband ordered the tuna/salmon sushi combo, but they were out of salmon. Instead they made us two kinds of tuna, and both were spectacular. We wanted ice cream for dessert - mango for me, coconut for him. They were out of both.

Beni bills itself as a teppanyaki and sushi bar, but there's not a huge variety of either. Teppanyaki, a Japanese stir-fry, comes in chicken, beef and shrimp. The sushi menu offers eight combos - two maki (fish rolled with scallions and other things and often with sauces) and two nigiri (pieces of fish, unadorned, on rice). But what they do have is great - in fact, we found ourselves ordering sushi at the counter more than once.

Beni is funky, delicious and friendly. Put the staff in trendier clothing or up the prices dramatically and this place could cross the border into the land of pretentiousness. Thankfully, it does not.

Beni Cafe, 405 Hancock Street, Quincy, 617-657-6018, Open Sunday through Thursday 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Fridays and Saturdays 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.; Major credit cards accepted. Not handicap accessible, on-street parking can be tough; delivery in Quincy.