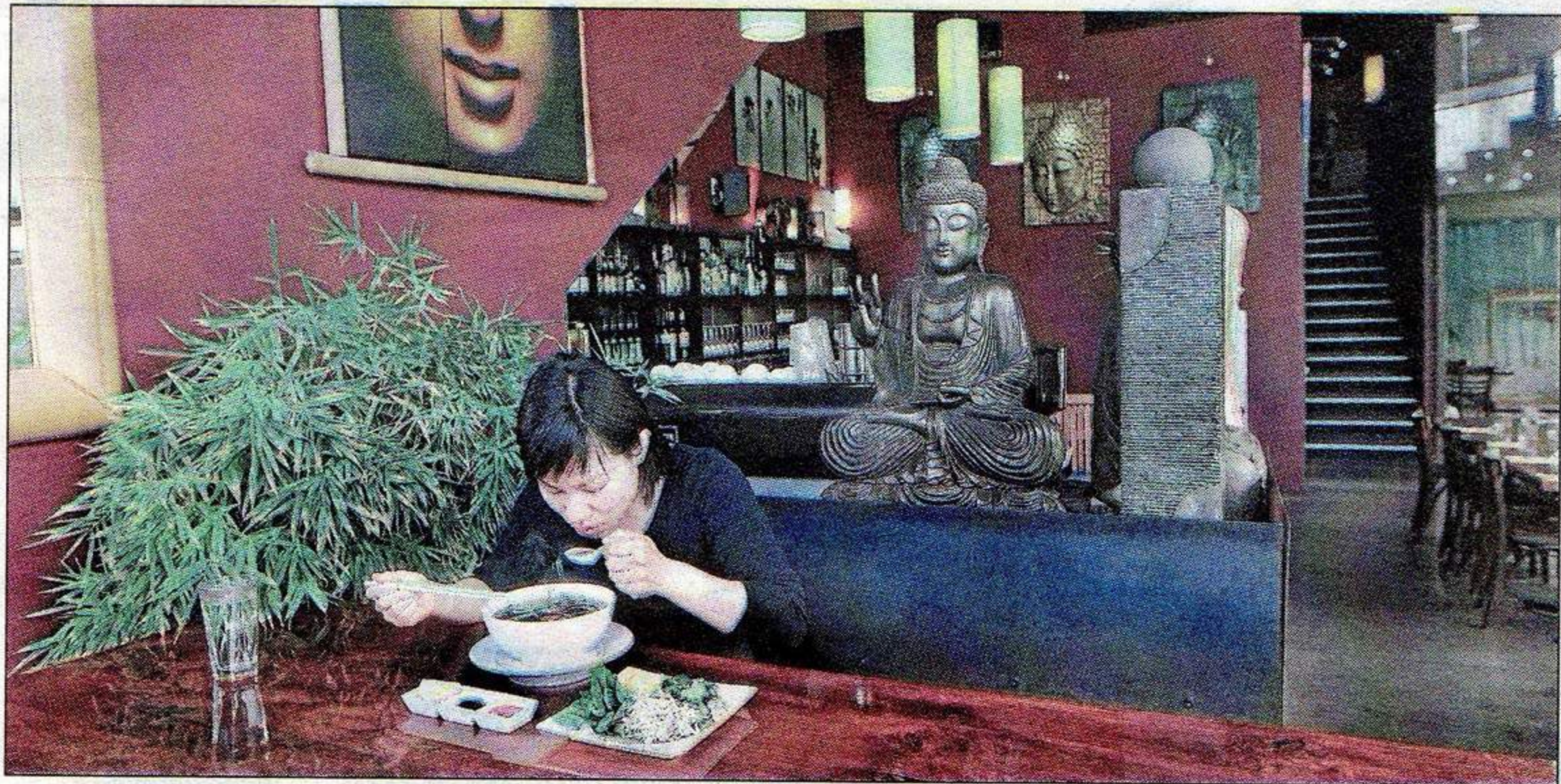


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FOOD & DRINK / reviews

Vietnam, close by



Wellington's Restaurant 88: Metropolitan Vietnam has fare that's great to look at and delicious to eat.

Photo: Kevin Stent

RESTAURANT 88: METROPOLITAN VIETNAM 3.5/5

WHERE: 88 Tory St, Wellington CBD,
ph (04) 385-9088.

WHEN: Tuesday to Sunday, 5.30pm-late;
Thursday to Sunday, 11.30am-2.30pm.

HOW MUCH: \$58.50 for two lunch
mains, two desserts and a beer.

WHAT'S TO EAT: Fresh, delicious
modern Vietnamese cuisine.

WHAT DO WE THINK: Fantastic service
and food, all very reasonably priced.

UNTIL I manage to travel there, one thing I can do that takes me close to a Vietnamese experience is to eat the cuisine – full of salty, sour, sweet and spicy flavours.

Restaurant 88: Metropolitan Vietnam is a place where vicariousness is not a requirement but an empty stomach is. Bamboo plants swish in the wind as we enter on a particularly rainy cold Sunday. The wooden slat panels create cosy nooks in what is a large open space with maroon walls and huge hanging green lanterns. The statues and images of Buddha, along with the trickling water feature and elephant statuette all

further set the scene.

We are welcomed with a smile by our waitress who is prompt and observant throughout our time in the restaurant. My beer, a Saigon 333 with faint floral and honey notes, arrives in less time than it takes to choose it from the menu of great beers. We go straight for the mains, mine being a brilliant steaming hot bowl of Vietnamese prawn noodles with pork dumplings. There's more broth than I could dream of polishing off, some of which inevitably ends up on the front of my brand new All Whites' shirt. It's heavier on the spicy prawns than the dumplings and loaded with noodles, mung beans, spring onion and coriander, creating a superb bowl of flavour.

Laura's dish of Vietnamese lemongrass chicken with steamed coconut noodles is delicious – the chicken pieces are juicy and crisp, and the noodles fragrant and creamy. It's laden with julienned cucumber, chopped nuts, coriander, mint and amazingly good prawn crackers and she loves it.

Despite the waitress looking at

the rain and wind outside and asking why she would pick something so cold, icecream lover Laura jumps at the toasted coconut icecream bowl. The chocolate bowl that it comes served in sounds exciting but unfortunately tastes more of sugar than cocoa. The serving of icecream is generous and the fact that it is smothered in coconut milk, shredded coconut and chopped nuts compensates for any lack of coconut flavour in the ice cream itself.

I love the sound of the super hot chocolate brownies and it's both great to look at and delicious to eat; soft, chewy and drowned in hot chocolate fudge and raspberry sauce. The fresh fruit and squiggly chocolate decoration atop both desserts add both visual and flavour kick.

With food this decently priced, fresh and filling there aren't many other places I'd prefer to go for a lunch. However, after one wash I'm starting to get worried that the chilli broth may not come out of my All Whites' shirt.

■ Tim Herbert