



Henry Yee at work.



Top Chinese restaurateurs locate along Orchard Lake

By JUDITH BERNIE

Life in the suburbs appears to have had an impact even on Chinese restaurants.

Holding one restaurant's chow mein or egg foo young up against another's is no longer the sole criteria for favoring a particular Chinese dining spot.

Variety, personal attention and ambience are now as high on the menu as egg roll, at least in the little bit of Chinatown which has moved to Orchard Lake Road.

FOUR CHINESE restaurants dot a two-mile stretch of Orchard Lake Road from 13 Mile in Farmington to just past Maple in West Bloomfield.

Oriental food fanciers can pick and choose among Fung Wong Lau, Forbidden City, Rikshaw Inn and the recently opened Wing Hong restaurants.

All have moved into the area within the last three years and each is searching for a unique offering to draw the lunch and dinner crowds in the highly competitive restaurant business.

TWO YEARS in the making, the Wing Hong restaurant is a free standing, Oriental-style, vividly colored building at the corner of 14 Mile where Northwestern comes to a halt.

Inside, owner Hong has spared little expense—importing lanterns from the Far East, creating an original chandelier from china serveware and featuring an exotic bar.

Hong serves Chinese, Hawaiian and Korean cuisine and hopes to add a Japanese steak house in the near future.

He moved to the area in anticipation of its future growth and has set his sights on becoming the leading local restaurant.

According to Hong, the completion of the Ford Hospital and Jewish Center in West Bloomfield should generate a lot of traffic—enough for all four Chinese places to make a living.

"I'LL HAVE to sell an awful lot of chop suey to get his money back," remarks Henry Yee.

Yee, the owner of Forbidden City, followed the patrons of his former downtown restaurant to the suburbs.

As the unofficial "mayor of Chinatown" and a prominent member of the Chinese Merchants Association, Yee located his restaurant with full knowledge of his competition.

Hong, Yee and owner Larry Wong of Fung Wong Lau are all members of the Chinese business group which stipulates a minimum of 600 feet between Chinese restaurants.

"If it's a Chinese operation we have to approve its location," Yee declared.

From his point of view, the concentration should actually draw people to the area.

"I think we'll complement each other," Yee said. "If one of us is crowded, there is always another one."

Yee, who fully believes the owner should be on the premises of a good restaurant, relies on personal attention and made to order dishes.

He is proud of incorporating many American vegetables into his Chinese dishes and says he accommodates weight watchers.

According to Yee, he will leave out cornstarch, MSG or salt per customer request.

Yee reports his evening business is good, but admits he is looking for "a gimmick" to attract the luncheon crowds.

SOMETHING OF A maverick is David Lum, one of seven owners of the Rikshaw Inn in the Orchard Mall.

"This is a corporation looking to grow," Lum reports. "We do not operate as a normal Chinese restaurant."

He mentions that four of the partners are Jewish, one Christian and two Chinese. "We have a very good combination—a sort of United Nations," he adds.

Lum has no use for the Chinese Merchants Association, maintaining it is not relevant to this day and age.

"I consider myself more than anything else an American," Lum said. "I am free to participate in the free enterprise system."

The Rikshaw supplements Chinese offerings with such items as a caesar salad, french onion soup and flaming desserts.

As many Americans wait on tables as Chinese.

"As long as they have the ability to work, why should I discriminate," Lum asks. "I'm a minority myself," he adds.

Lum feels there is "room for everybody" who is presently doing business along Orchard Lake Road.

A recently initiated salad bar and Chinese buffet has helped to increase his luncheon business.

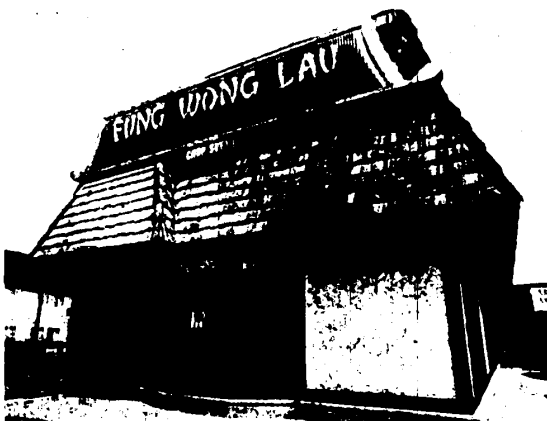
ONLY AT Fung Wong Lau, the first of the four to locate on the Orchard Lake strip, has maintained the style and service of the traditional Chinese family restaurant.

Owner Wong admits his business has been hurt "a little bit" by the other three restaurants.

"I think they made a mistake moving here so close together," he declares.

But within his shopping center location he must also compete with three American-style restaurants.

"Look along Orchard Lake Road," he says. "There are more restaurants than anything else. Everyone would have to eat out three times a week for them all to survive."



'There's room enough for everybody...'

The personal touch is evident among the area Chinese restaurants. Chef Bob Yan (above, left) works at a new dish. Owners Larry Wong (left) and Wing Hong (right) participate in every phase of their restaurant's activity.

