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NOW OPEN

By Rick Nelson; Staff Writer

When a friend relocated from New York to the Twin Cities a few years ago, the thing he missed the most wasn't what I'd expected. Not Barney's, Crunch, the Metropolitan Opera or his East Hampton time share. He'd whine about noodle shops.

"Manhattan and every other civilized city is crawling with noodle shops," he'd kvetch. "But here? Nada."

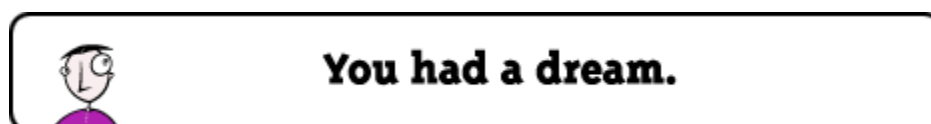
And although he moved on to greener - and noodle-ier - pastures a while back, he immediately came to mind when I walked into the new **Tanpopo Noodle Shop**, which just opened at Selby and Western Aves. in St. Paul in the sweet storefront that was most recently home to Hai Nam Express.

The small menu includes a half-dozen steaming bowls of broth (\$5.50 to \$7.50) loaded with soba or udon noodles and shrimp tempura, beef, wild mushrooms or just plain old green onions. Nothing terribly adventurous, but it's satisfying, just the way a good noodle shop should be.

There's also a daily entree or two, served with rice, miso soup and a vegetable and bargain-priced at \$7. Side dishes (\$2.50 to \$5) include California and vegetarian rolls, edamame (fresh soy beans) and deep-fried tofu. Dessert is green-tea ice cream and sinful chocolate truffles from Grand Avenue's Just Truffles.

The soothingly minimalist setting is just right for a quick Japanese meal, and service is friendly and fast. My friend would have been pleased.

Tanpopo Noodle Shop, 367 Selby Av., St. Paul, 651-228-9967. Open Tuesday through Thursday from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., Friday from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. to 9 p.m., Saturday from noon to 9 p.m., and Sunday from noon to 8:30 p.m.



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