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## First Lamorinda boba tea opens in Moraga

By *Sophie Braccini*

Customers get their boba tea at i-Tea in Moraga  
Photo Sophie Braccini

Boba tea, also known as pearl milk tea, is an interesting concoction that, according to CNN Travel, originated in Liu Han-Chieh's Chun Shui Tang teahouse in Taichung, Taiwan in the 1980s. It has since spread to all the corners of the world, including the Bay Area for a few years and to Lamorinda since last November, with the opening of i-Tea at 1460 Moraga Road, in the Moraga Shopping Center.

Set in the Moraga Center shopping area, at the corner of Moraga Way and Moraga Road, where Asia Palace used to be, the new franchise is owned by Moraga residents and owners of Golden Palace, Jay Liu and Krystal Chang. The new restaurant also serves food all day long, such as ramen soup bowls or popcorn chicken.

For those familiar with boba tea as well as novices, the experience is pleasant and easy to customize. This reporter's favorite is an Oolong tea with boba and soy milk, no sugar, no ice. Most of the teas are served cold in a large plastic cup, sealed, and presented with a big

straw. The ritual consists in taking the big straw out of its plastic wrapping and firmly piercing the plastic opercula with the pointy side of the straw. Bobas are gobbled through the big straw as part of the drinking experience.

The tea is brewed in the shop, most of the time a milky texture is achieved with a plant-based creamer - no dairy there, and customers can add all kinds of supplements to their drink: boba pearls made of tapioca, jelly, pudding, or red beans. Liu says that customers can taste the additions prior to purchasing it. I-Tea also serves regular hot tea, and a large range of iced tea from Jasmine to fruit teas.

Liu and Chang are eager to show off the tea house's kitchen and prep area. All the teas are labeled in sealed packages in the back kitchen. These are loose-leaf teas that are provided by i-Tea. Liu explains that the basic teas are prepared according to the franchiser's recipe and made fresh every four hours. Besides the basic teas, the tea house has tea machines that can make instant tea on demand using specialty leaves also provided by i-Tea.

The owners followed a three and a half month training in the Hayward i-Tea headquarters to learn the subtlety of making a perfect tea that never becomes bitter, bobas that will stay tender but not soggy, and smooth milk teas.

As for any franchise, the benefit to customers is a consistency in taste and quality. The décor is also exactly what the brand has designed, a great improvement over the old Asia Palace, in soft greens and purples.

Crowds of young people have been fast to find the place, from Miramonte, just a few blocks away, Campolindo, Saint Mary's students and younger middle school children. Free Wi-Fi and a pleasant atmosphere also entice professionals and families.

On a given afternoon, one can find there friends having a bowl of ramen for a late lunch, students out of school relaxing before homework, young children with their moms. Jorgen Jensen from Canyon noted that the broth for the ramen he was having was particularly tasty. Liu is quick to show the huge pot in the kitchen where the broth is simmered for eight hours. Two Orinda high school students noted that their boba tea is just as good as anything they have tasted elsewhere and rejoice that this is now available so close to home.

Liu and Chang, husband and wife, have a daughter at Rheem Valley Elementary School and say that they are happy to support the local schools and sports teams. The owner explains that he has started discussion with a group of Miramonte students who want to raise money for their school; he will agree to sell them a large number of teas at a discount with the difference being their fundraising.

One of the only spots open a bit later at night in Moraga, i-Tea is open seven days a week, 11:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., and until 10 p.m. on Friday and Saturday nights.

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