



## A Restaurant By Any Other Name: Tottie's Asian Fusion vs. TOTT's Asian Diner

By Wynter Holden

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A memorable name can make or break a restaurant, whether it's something delightfully amusing like Santa Cruz's 99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall pub or snicker-inducing raunchy -- for example, Portland's **Hung Far Low** or the forthcoming **Beaver Choice** in Tempe. So I was surprised to find two Asian restaurants with similar names, both of which came highly recommended for their egg rolls, within miles of each other in the East Valley.

Thus the bell rang on a Battle of the Egg Rolls, with **Tottie's and TOTT's** in the ring. Read on and try to keep the two restaurants straight.

**In One Corner:** [Tottie's Asian Fusion](#)

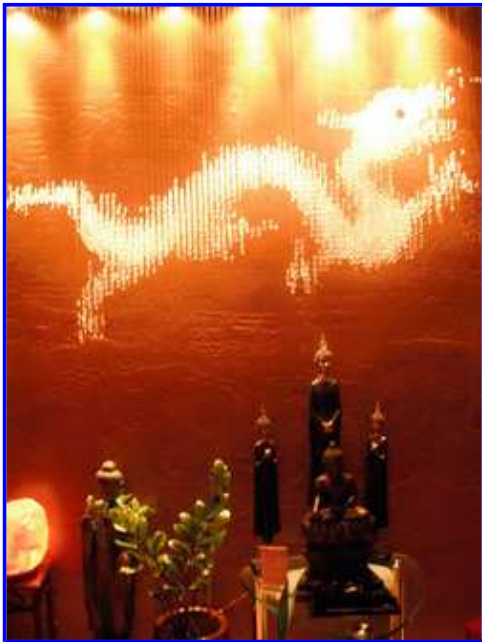
7901 E. Thomas Rd. in Scottsdale

480-970-0633



Tottie claims her rolls are the best.

**Tottie's Asian Fusion** is what I call a **strip mall surprise**. Not "surprise, it's in a strip mall!" of course, being that 90% of Phoenix seems to be made up of these bland one-story buildings. More like, "surprise, it's in a strip mall and doesn't look like a takeout joint." Inside, Tottie's is bold and exotic, with a traditional red and gold palette and some very non-traditional art.



An infinity mirror that reflects mini LEDs simulates a tunnel of lights behind the large corner bar. Plush upholstered booths perch beneath **sensual drawings** of Asian women covered in colorful tattoos and henna. A sitting area with leather couches, fountains and a dragon sculpture made of dozens of hanging crystals is stunning. There's literally something to look at on every wall and in every corner of the place. Pretty sweet for a strip mall.

Tottie's loves to brag, especially about their signature **Tottie Rolls**, which the menu claims is "**the best egg roll you'll ever have.**" Uh-huh. I can tell you how these crazy boasts usually end up, and it's not pretty (try inserting "crappiest," "soggiest" or "least palatable" in place of "best" and you'll get the idea). Needless to say, my friend and I were not fooled. We passed on the standard egg rolls and ordered the supposedly fabulous Tottie Rolls stuffed with pork and veggies.

The rolls arrived on a cheap plastic platter in the shape of a leaf, with a pile of romaine lettuce leaves and various herbs. Our server explained that you pick off the herbs you'd like and place them inside the lettuce leaf, then place the Tottie roll inside and eat the whole thing like an Asian burrito. Funky, but interesting.

I bit in and was surprised as the combination of lettuce, mint leaves and well-spiced ground pork that mingled in my mouth. "Tottie might have been right," my friend said with a sheepish look. "I don't usually like egg rolls, but this is amazing. The pork is **tender and flavorful.**"

The consistency of the pork -- ground finely together with carrots, mushrooms and a nice Asian five-spice blend -- was a little mushy, but it was easy to overlook when contrasted by the **crisp wonton wrapper** and lettuce leaf. The wrapper didn't have a spot of grease on it; extremely unusual for fried food. The dish was light, with an added brightness from the fresh mint and cilantro. I was halfway through my first Tottie Roll before I even realized there was a dipping sauce.

The rolls were so nicely spiced and filled with complex flavors that they really didn't need any extra assistance, but the pungent vinegar-based condiment gave the palate even more to ponder. This was egg roll zen. Score one for the Tottie Roll, aka the best egg roll I'd ever eaten. Woah! Truth in advertising...

Did TOTT's **Giant Pork Roll** topple its worthy competitor? Find out after the jump.

**In the Other Corner: [TOTT's \(Talk of the Town\) Asian Diner](#)**

1817 East Guadalupe Road #102 in Tempe

480-897-7928



Egg rolls fit for a giant.

**TOTT's Asian Diner** couldn't have been more unlike Tottie's. Perhaps the owners planned it that way, as the names are so similar. TOTT's is more of a Pei-Wei style eatery, with red accent walls, an ordering counter and a drop ceiling that's been removed and painted red to give the place more of a modern, urban feel. Yeah, still looks like a **takeout joint**.



The menu features noodle and rice dishes, along with several types of spring and egg rolls. We opted for the pork rolls, described as being GIANT. Could both Asian diners possibly be accurate in their menu descriptions?

Apparently, yes. About fifteen minutes later, two **massive egg rolls** arrived on a thick paper plate. "Now, that's what I imagine when I picture an egg roll," voiced my dining companion. In contrast to Tottie's four slender, light brown rolls, these babies were deep golden brown and about the size of a Rubio's burrito.

I bit into the crisp outer layer, which was deep-fried and therefore much greasier than its Battle of the Dishes opponent. The filling was more **traditional**, with heaps of cooked cabbage, mushroom bits, carrot shreds and pork. It was savory and appealing, with a hint of spice. The cabbage was cooked well, just enough to retain some of the natural crunch without getting soggy.

But the best part of the dish was the meat -- big, chewy chunks of **Chinese barbecued pork** with spicy pink marinade (MSG-free, according to TOTT's!). The flavor was delicious, though the meat was a bit dry. A side of sweet-and-sour sauce for dipping helped to mitigate any dryness, as did the greasy shell.

Another truthful menu claim. TOTT's didn't say their pork rolls were the *best*, just that they were *big*.

**The Winner:** Both were worthy contenders, but **Tottie's signature rolls** really were the best egg rolls I've ever eaten. So far...

***If you know of another spot for great egg rolls in Phoenix, or have a suggestion for an upcoming Battle of the Dishes, please leave it in the Comments section below.***