

# Philadelphia WEEKLY

NOVEMBER 27, 2002

## Critic's Pick



### Vietnam Restaurant

*221 N. 11th St., 215.592.1163*

Vietnam Restaurant's ambience feels far from Chinatown, and it begins the moment you come upon its charming stucco facade, its balcony and awnings resembling those of a European cafe. Inside, the mood turns part Japanese tea room, part Bombay Company, relaxing but not austere, with rich wood paneling, banana yellow ceilings, diminutive lamps and touches of palm and bamboo. The barbecue sampler platter is a hefty rotating and apportioned wooden bowl offering up one tantalizing snack after another: perfectly grilled chicken strips, golden spring rolls studded with slivers of meat and mushroom, grilled pork meatballs and grape leaves encasing an addictive mixture of beef and roasted sesame seeds. To finish: thin rice vermicelli, exceptionally fresh lettuce and mint leaves, thick slices of cucumber and pickled carrots, everything you need to roll up any of the appetizers into the accompanying rice-paper crepes. Then there's the dipping. Take your pick of nuoc nam, a vinegary-sweet fish sauce, or hoisin, a plummy bean-based dip sprinkled with ground peanuts. This is Vietnam's signature dish. You will see patrons greedily dipping into it at most tables. You can view a photo of it on the website ([www.eatatvietnam.com](http://www.eatatvietnam.com)). And unless you've just come off a hunger strike, you and a friend can share it and call it dinner for \$16.95. (R.R.)