

GO!

Rave On!

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Hubba, Bubba

BUBBA GUMP SHRIMP CO. PACKS THEM IN ON THE CORNER OF HOLLYWOOD AND DINE

Watching "Forrest Gump" on the big screen, we had the horrifying feeling that the movie would never end. Much to our dismay, it hasn't. The saga continues each night on Cannery Row as part of a marketing experiment gone horribly wrong.

Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. is the product of Madison Avenue running amok, binding a mediocre movie with heavy-handed gimmicks and formula food — at the corner of Hollywood and Dine.

Run, tourist, run!

Sadly, it's working, and you can hear the cha-ching of cash registers over the waves crashing on McAbee Beach (this chain has 15 locations, including one in Osaka, Japan). It's Saturday on The Row and scores of tourists fight off the approaching fog bank with tank tops and goofy grins. The draw is an oceanside restaurant, buckets of shrimp, cheesy fries, hush pups, frozen cocktails and movie memorabilia like the pigeon-white suit Tom Hanks wore on that park bench.

They wait for a table, along with our party of four, in the courtyard outside the restaurant. They sit on Forrest's bench, try on Forrest's shoes and listen carefully for their name to be called.

Every few minutes, as another shrimp-stuffed group stumbles out the door and onto the boulevard, a sweet-faced



CLAY PETERSON/Special to The Herald

Steve Webber plays Forrest Gump to help draw diners into Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. on Cannery Row.

young hostess invites another party to join in the feeding frenzy, each time punctuating her call by shouting the restaurant's catch phrase: "Hubba, bubba, we got the grubba!"

Thirty minutes pass. Then forty. The novelty has already worn thin for our two young dinner companions, even after a trip to the gift shop, where you can buy Bubba Gump sweatshirts (\$40) and other clothing, knick-knacks and souvenirs . . . but nary a box of chocolates.

We ask ourselves why we even selected this restaurant, and our lie is that we wanted to conduct a sociological survey — to view the tourist in his or her habitat. To answer the question, "Why do as many as 1,000 people a night frequent this castle of crustaceans?" The real reason is two-fold. The kids begged incessantly. And much like a car wreck, we just had to see it.

HE SAID

Our name is called and we push forward, following the painted happy faces on the floor to another line forming inside. Servers wearing high-tech headsets weave through a mass of humanity, many of them elbow deep in mounds of shrimp.

Table for Two



It's quite loud, and I eye the bustling bar to gather a measure of courage as a familiar phrase enters my head.

"Hubba, bubba, we're in big trubba."

The kids had a blast, one ordering macaroni and cheese and fries (\$4.95) off the kids' menu, the other choosing the Chilly Shrimp appetizer (\$7.99), a bottomless bucket of peel-and-eat shrimp with a side dish of melted butter.

They loved all the eye candy and the hustle and bustle, and relished the power of flipping our table's license plate holder to red (servers stop at all tables sporting a red license plate that reads: "Stop, Forrest, Stop!")

I strayed from the shrimp and instead ordered an entrée called "Salmon Says" (clever, indeed). It's described as a charbroiled fillet with "fresh herbs from Mama's garden." The large fillet was either

previously frozen or cooked too long because it was dry. And I noticed few herbs, certainly not fresh ones. The mashed potatoes were yummy, as was the tiny side of cole slaw. But this was no bargain at \$16.59.

Uninvited sampling around the table produced nothing extraordinary for my palate. The mac and cheese was obviously Kraft, the fries cold and the chilled shrimp extremely bland. Melissa's fried shrimp headlined this night, but it failed to elevate much above Sizzler fare.

For me, the highlight was a hand-shaken margarita (\$7.95), made with Hornitos Platinum tequila, cointreau and fresh lime juice. Served in a large shaker, it produced two drinks and numbed an otherwise head-pounding evening.

SHE SAID

Nothing, absolutely nothing, could sufficiently numb one against this experience. Perhaps it's just that no one as uptight as I should ever be caught dead in this place. But as I stood outside waiting and waiting, I was just plain dumbfounded. Why would all these visitors (for surely no locals but us were in attendance) choose this spot as their representative Monterey Bay dining experience? They

all seemed happy enough — elated, even — waiting outside with their new Aquarium sweatshirts and fanny packs and shopping bags, jostling small yowling children on their shoulders, waiting endlessly for their "Hubba Bubba" call. It was like we stepped off the curb and down Alice's rabbit hole. Believe me, no margarita in the world, no matter how it's shaken, is going to get you through that experience.

The thing is, the shrimp were OK but a bit overpriced. The truth is, I really wanted a salad (there are three ranging from \$6.99 to \$9.29: the classic Caesar, with or without grilled chicken or Cajun shrimp, BBQ ranch chicken salad or something called "Run Chicken Run.") But, you know, the whole shrimp thing just sort of got the better of me, and the next thing you know I was ordering something called "Mama Blue's Southern Charmed Fried Shrimp." And yep, there they were, 18 of them, served alongside about a hundred lukewarm semi-soggy fries for \$14.99. We were just starving by then, and almost too tired to eat. It's the only explanation for how those shrimp got eaten. I'm just ashamed to admit it.

To be fair, the menu offers five (of 10) appetizers and seven (of 16) entrées that don't involve shrimp. We might have ordered the 14-ounce Director's Cut Rib-Eye, but would you really want to order such a thing at Bubba Gump's for \$17.99? How about the "Mess' o' Crab Legs with Secret Recipe Cajun or Garlic Spice Blend" at market price? You get my point.

And I'm sorry. I just don't get the gimmick. Call me a snob, but I really did despise that insipid movie. And what does Forrest Gump have to do with Monterey? He was from Alabama (just check the red license plate on your table). And why do people care? The only explanation I can come up with is the insanity of mob mentality. Hubba Bubba . . .

Carmel residents Mike Hale and Melissa Snyder are dining enthusiasts and will approach their reviews from a couple's perspective, each week sharing he-said/she-said insights about local restaurants. Comment at tablefortwo@sbcglobal.net. GO!

BUBBA GUMP SHRIMP CO.

720 Cannery Row
Monterey
373-1884

- ▶ **Hours:** 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. (11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Fri.-Sat.)
- ▶ **Cards:** all major
- ▶ **Wheelchair Access:** yes
- ▶ **Bar:** full
- ▶ **Price range:** Entrées, \$9.99 to \$18.59
- ▶ **Web site:** www.bubbagump.com
- ▶ **Pluses:** Plenty of eye candy for the kids, great view of the bay, fun bar
- ▶ **Minuses:** Gimmicky, crowded and noisy, unremarkable formula food
- ▶ **The Bottom Line:** Fine for a few drinks and people watching but not much redeeming value here.