

# 14th and U

BY TANYA SNYDER

## Pad See Eew and Fu Manchu

No one argues that DC Noodles (1410 U St. NW) serves up some delicious dishes – but the décor has raised the ire of some detractors. A local Asian-American woman has mounted a campaign against DC Noodles in protest of a mural she calls racist.

A large painting on the wall of the noodle house shows an Asian man and small child eating noodles. The figures are drawn in a classically cartoonish way, and Katie Seitz says they imitate racist stereotypes of Asians.

“It combines different racist visual stereotypes of East Asian men,” Seitz says, “how they’re depicted in US propaganda to demonize them.”

She points out the similarities between the Dr. Fu Manchu evil genius character and other more buffoonish stereotypes of Asians with slit eyes and bucktoothed grins. When she left after her first bowl of noodles at the restaurant, she left with that image burned into her head.

DC Noodles owners and managers have failed to return repeated requests for comment – both from MidCity DC and from Seitz. An employee of the restaurant allowed that other customers have objected to the artwork, but she says they’re “one in a hundred.”

“I think it’s just for fun,” she says. “It kind of looks like the owner. It’s funny.” (Owner Sak Polter is Thai.)

Seitz doesn’t find it funny. She considers the images “offensive, tired and degrading” – and she wrote to both the restaurant and the artist, telling them so and asking them to change the art.

Artist Tim Conlon did respond to Seitz’s e-mail, saying he was sorry she didn’t like his work. “The good thing about art,” he wrote, “is it gets people thinking and talking, and I appreciate your feedback. I had no intention of being offensive.” He mentioned that the Asian owners of the restaurant had commissioned and approved the work.

Seitz fired back. “Intention doesn’t equal impact,” she wrote. “Because of your ignorance of the history of

racism against Asians, and how that affects popular imagery associated with them, you created a piece of art that is a textbook racist caricature. Your intention was not racist, but your impact was.”

She hasn’t heard from him since. And she still hasn’t heard from the owners at all. So she started organizing. She started a Facebook group called “Boycott DC Noodles and their racist wall art!” It now has 49 members.

That’s not a huge number for a Facebook group (in comparison, a page dedicated to getting Betty White to host Saturday Night Live has attracted 474,000 fans). But, she hopes, it might get the attention of the owners if she shows up with 49 people for a showdown.

## A Bike Shop Without Bike Grease?

A “boutique” woman-friendly bike shop opened at 14th and W streets in September. Owner Stephen Harrell says Bicycle Stations is going for a different kind of aesthetic than most local bike shops.

“We believe that the presence of mechanics doesn’t mean the presence of grease,” announces Bicycle Stations’ website, [dcbicyclestations.com](http://dcbicyclestations.com). “The presence of a mountain bike doesn’t mean the presence of dirt; we believe in clean.”

And it’s true: I haven’t seen many bike shops with elegant exposed brick walls or shop owners in immaculate button-down shirts. The nice thing is, stylish doesn’t mean expensive: Bicycle Stations’ prices are competitive, and they carry a wide range of bikes, from a few hundred dollars to a \$25,000 Porsche bike prominently featured in the store.

But Emma Epstein says that what drew her to the place was just a feeling of comfort. And she’s built a relationship with the store that she couldn’t imagine doing anywhere else.

Epstein is a 22-year-old nonprofit volunteer preparing to ride her bike across the country this summer. She wanted to learn something



Owner Stephen Harrell says Bicycle Stations is a new kind of bike shop. Photo: Tanya Snyder.

about bike mechanics first, so she could handle her own repairs on the road. “I was looking for a bike store I felt comfortable in,” she says, a place where she could “come in, work on my bike for free with someone there teaching me, and make connections with the bicycle world.”

She wasn’t thrilled with City Bikes or any of the other local shops she visited. Then one day during the Snowpocalypse, she happened to notice Bicycle Stations. They agreed to have her come learn and volunteer on Saturday mornings. During her very first session, she helped build a bike from scratch.

Those are the kinds of relationships Harrell is looking to build with the community. He says he’d rather get to know a customer over a long conversation than give a hard sell. He tells me he’s given kids merchandise on the honor system, trusting that they’ll pay him back, and he’ll work with people who need something they can’t afford.

He lures customers in with doughnuts on Saturday mornings and wine and cheese parties some evenings. He’s noticed that a big percentage of his customers are women – something he attributes to the comfortable environment (how many other bike stores have sofas?) and the softer sell. And even before the store opened, he’d donated dozens of kids’ bikes to DC Scores – and he plans to do it every year.

Bicycle Stations is starting bike maintenance classes soon, is planning group rides, and hopes to build a bike team. Oh and those classes? They’ll be catered. It’s a boutique bike shop, after all.

Bicycle Stations is located at 2204 14th St. NW. Call 202-525-3456 for more information. ★



DC Noodles’ controversial mural. Photo: Tanya Snyder