



SEARCH

Home delivery

Contact us

Site map

Traffic | Weather | Your account

Movies | Restaurants | Today's events

Home
Search
ARCHIVE
Help
ENTERTAINMENT
Movies / showtimes
Restaurants
Events
SEARCH LISTINGS:

Living: Sunday, April 25, 1993

John Hinterberger's Table

# East Meets Ballard -- Thai Siam Is A Neighborhood Place That Crosses Borders

John Hinterberger

YOU HAVE TO WONDER, SOMETIMES, how certain ethnic restaurants ever got to be where they are.

That certainly must have been the case with **Thai Siam**, a splendid little Southeast Asian restaurant on the far fringes of north Ballard. It has been there six years, occupying space once dedicated to a turkey house (the Golden Turkey didn't house turkeys, of course, but cooked them).

We now have **Thai** restaurants all over the city. Still, north Ballard?

This is a part of town not known for adventurous dining. Solid blocks of solid citizens - many of them older or retired - form the sturdy backbone of Seattle's most predominantly Scandinavian population. Lutefisk, yes. Black sticky rice? Uff da.

Discouraging demographics notwithstanding, Vhanthip Bhorayasupatt opened her warm little restaurant, with its high-backed booths and bright hanging fans and umbrellas, back in 1987, and waited for the local Nordics to discover her culinary wonders.

It took time, but they did. So did much of the rest of the city.

V.B. (she is often called, simply, "Nancy") perhaps had a better read on what social enclaves would learn to accept than most cooks: She had come from Bangkok to Seattle years earlier to study sociology at the University of Washington. She giggles now and then at the recollection.

"I started by cooking my mother's and grandmother's recipes for my friends at the university," she said, "and they would say, `Vhanthip, this is so good! You have to open a restaurant.' So, eventually, I did."

Not without misgivings.

"We now have a lot of support from the people around here," she said. "They are really beautiful people. But at first, what we had were many older, retired Scandinavian people, who might not like spicy food. But after a while, they started to come."

And come. **Thai Siam** is often jammed to distraction - and for good, highly seasoned reasons.

The menu is very affordable. The portions are more than ample. The presentations are bright and colorful, and if you need to, you can have the red chili sauce applied with restraint.

Speaking of fires, many of the menus sometimes look as if they'd been subjected to cigarette burns. Not the case.

ADVERTISING

ADVERTISING

Buy a NWad
------------

### NWsource shopping

**Local sales & deals**  
Search retail ads

Today's featured ads  
[More ads](#)

**Don't miss it**  
[Shopping events](#)  
[Create sale alert e-mails](#)

[Store guides](#)  
[Grocery coupons](#)  
[Travel deals](#)

[Looking for a car?](#)

The restaurant is now completely smoke-free, a recent change.

"It's the candles," sighed V.B. with a bemused smile. "We have small, open-flame candles on the tables during dinner. When people open the menus up, they sometimes put them over the candle flames, and . . ." she raised her palms upward in the universal gesture of bewilderment.

Ignore the burns. The menu is chock full of items almost as hot.

You might want to start with the Angel Wings (\$5.95), larger here than at most **Thai** outposts. The boneless chicken wings are jammed with cubes of chicken, ground pork (with an occasional piece of gristle) and cellophane noodles, and garnished with cucumber chunks, carrots and a rather sweet-tart dipping sauce.

Another option: Mee-Krob, crispy-fried rice noodles, are served with shrimp and pork in the **Thai** Siam's special sweet-and-sour sauce and a heaping accent of fresh bean sprouts.

Soups are important in all Asian cuisines, and **Thai** meals are no exception. Except that their bold, sometimes aggressive, seasonings tend to be exceptional in their own right. I like to try every **Thai** restaurant's Tom Yam Gai (\$4.95 for a small bowl that will easily feed two; \$8.25 for a steaming cauldron for a crowd).

Many of **Thai** Siam's customer swear this is the best sweet-hot-spicy chicken soup in town. I filled up half a bowl for a taste; thought a bit, filled it to the brim for self-indulgence (hadn't I skipped lunch?), finished that off - and filled the bowl again to brimming. It is that appealing.

The reason I like it has to do with the flavor balance of the soup. It is discernibly sweet - from the coconut milk, I imagine - but not enough to be cloying. The rest of the elements (heat from a light sheen of pepper oil) and the tart pull of galanga root and lemon grass, lend an almost irresistible tang to the floating pieces of mushrooms and the submerged sections of tender boneless chicken.

One quibble: Usually the dish is made with canned "straw" mushrooms - so-named for the medium they are grown in. These were, instead, domestic button mushrooms, sliced in half, and perhaps not quite as gentle and exotic as the intended fungi.

In any case, I strongly urge against consuming two bowls of it. After all, you have some main courses coming - and dessert. And this is one Asian restaurant in which you don't want to consider skipping dessert. More about that later.

Garlic Shrimp (\$7.25) are absolutely terrific. Heady with garlic, but not harsh, the dish just sings with fundamental tastes and aromas. A dozen medium-sized creatures (either very large shrimp or somewhat small prawns) are marinated in hot chilies and oil, then sauteed with green onions and served over a bed of wilted lettuces in a silky-hot oils, alongside a mound of shredded red cabbage and a chiffonade of carrot.

Heavenly Chicken (\$6.95) is, well, heavenly. A half fryer-roaster is sectioned into about a five or six pieces and marinated in an Indian style (yellow) curry sauce, **Thai** soy sauce, along with minced garlic and coconut milk. It is dusted with "special herbs" and is finished simply and quickly over an open-flame grill.

By the way, in small print at the bottom of each page of the menu are the words: "Contains no monosodium glutamate." Meaningless to some, but of great importance to others.

We had a rather ordinary dish of Phad **Thai** (\$5.55) one evening, which seemed to have been overdosed with fish sauce, although on a couple of other occasions, the dish was fine.

The Beef Massaman curry (chicken is also available for the same price, \$5.95) is a

pleasant, creamy curry blending onion, potato cubes and peanuts, with some chewy cubes of beef.

Desserts at the **Thai Siam** are a revelation, and for many of its customers a primary reason for gathering on Crown Hill.

All are made fresh on the premises. Priced from \$2.50 for coconut ice cream or a delectable Black Sticky Rice to \$3.75 for sweet white sticky rice with fresh mango in season. Sweet sticky rice with **Thai Custard** (\$3.50) is a voluptuous must. And the **Thai Bread Pudding with Whipped Cream** (\$2.50) is as good, if not better.

The cook that turns out all these wonders is Kiatsuda Bhokayasupatt, Vhanthip's niece.

A neighborhood restaurant is not a business that makes its living from a nearby clientele. It is an entity that coexists and interacts with the people it serves.

**Thai Siam** has a motto. "Rejoice with them that rejoice. Weep with them who weep."

Each August, Vhanthip Bhokayasupatt hosts a fund-raising buffet for Children's Hospital, the Union Gospel Mission and the Foundation for the Blind (Thailand). Each Christmas she provides free meals for the homeless, the poor, the disabled and older shut-ins.

The place doesn't look much like the old Golden Turkey. Colorful hand-carved bas reliefs of **Thai** village life adorn each booth.

"I had once intended to return to Thailand," Bhokayasupatt smiled, "But here I am and I love it."

# # 1/2 \$ **Thai Siam**, 8305 15th Ave. N.W. Lunch (\$5 to \$6) 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Dinner (\$5 to \$7) 4:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Saturday; Sunday 4:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Beer and wine. No smoking. Reservations: 784-5465.

(Copyright 1993, John Hinterberger. All rights reserved.)

John Hinterberger's food columns and restaurant reviews appear Sundays in Pacific and Fridays in Tempo. Benjamin Benschneider is a Seattle Times staff photographer. Cece Sullivan of the Times food department tested this recipe.

**THAI SIAM SWEETENED BLACK RICE** 4 servings 1 cup black sticky rice 2 1/2 to 3 cups water

Approximately 1 teaspoon tapioca flour

About 1 to 2 tablespoons sugar

About 1 to 2 tablespoons honey 1 cup coconut milk

1. Place the rice in a fine sieve and rinse well with water.
2. Combine the rice with the water and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover and simmer 20 minutes or until tender. Sprinkle with the tapioca flour, stirring well to thicken.
3. Remove from the heat and stir in the sugar and honey, adding more to taste if desired.
4. Pour the coconut milk over each serving and serve warm.

Copyright (c) 1993 Seattle Times Company, All Rights Reserved.



[Search again](#)