



right Eunice Siek and Liz Quek spice up their lives with Renn Thai

left Inviting and warm teakwood interiors



sugar and SPICE

Renn Thai means "traditional Thai house" and it is arguably a rather luxurious Thai home at that. Pass through an onyx marble entrance, polished to high sheen, then move into a teakwood sanctuary with carved screens, champagne-hued upholstery, golden statues of Buddha and other Thai artefacts. Formerly called Baan Thai, it has been well over a year since this well-located restaurant at Ngee Ann City was taken over by the hugely successful Katrina Holdings group which also counts two Bali Thai Restaurants and a plethora of foodcourt outlets under its operations.

Liz arrives wearing a fabulous piece of jewellery, a bold and dramatic statement against her chic black top. Made with a giant sea-shell and strings of luminous seed pearls, it was a recent "find" and "must-buy" from her trip to Bangkok the weekend before. Fortunately, Liz whose friends adore her candid humour says: "Strangely enough, I didn't eat much Thai food on my last trip. Instead I chose Korean and Western meals, so I'm quite happy to have Thai today." When Eunice appears, Liz's cheerful demeanour and bubbly personality is infectious and they slip into the easy chatter of schoolgirls, updating each other on the latest news about town.

"I always think of her as my baby cousin," declares the Hong Kong bred and North American-educated Eunice. It is hard to believe that this youthful looking lady, who is

Although Asia's City of Angels may be a short flight from here, cousins Liz Quek and Eunice Siek deign to dine at Renn Thai with TANG WEN LI to see if it measures up to the Kingdom's well-known hospitality

a spicy dressing. The spicy dressing and slivers of green mango provided the perfect foil for the deep-fried, cracker-crispy dried fish pieces.

The dish that followed — fish and prawn cakes with a plum sauce dip — only served to heighten our anticipation of the rest of the dishes. The restaurant serves the usual favourites such as boneless chicken stuffed with minced meat that has been gently infused with the scent of herbs and prawn cakes accompanied by a special sauce. Those who prefer something a little more refreshing have a choice of mildly spiced fruit-based salads of pomelo, Thai mango or papaya.

Although tom yum soup is like a cliché these days, the version served at Renn Thai is not one to be missed. Renn Thai's offering consists of a clear piquant broth, brimming with prawns, squid rings and chunks of straw mushroom. Infused with lemongrass and kaffir lime, the broth gets its robust kick from roasted chilli paste — the secret weapon that makes this soup diabolically good and exceedingly hot. For those who prefer something more soothing and mellow, Renn Thai offers the chef's specially prepared fish maw soup, which is equally delicious — a thick flavourful stock is the base for melt-in-your-mouth fish maw pieces and succulent crab meat.

Renn Thai attracts both the local shoppers and international visitors and for this reason alone, Chef Kesinee Sae Jung, who began her culinary career in the kitchens of various restaurants more than 15 years ago, finds it a challenge to keep pace with the varied tastebuds of her diners. Her dishes are reminiscent of home cooking — tasty and yet simple. "It is also interesting to learn that

while some diners may find certain dishes too rich with coconut milk, others have found them wonderful. We are always looking for a balance." Needless to say, her dishes have won many fans as she is well-tuned to the palettes of local diners, having worked in the various countries in Asia including Taiwan, Indonesia and now, Singapore.

The chef also offers her version of beef rendang, a spicy Indonesian dish cooked in coconut milk and spices, which is a tad on the sweet side. A personal favourite is fried eggplant (or brinjal) with minced chicken and basil leaves seasoned with fermented beans (taucheo) and fresh red chilli.

There are several dishes that are usually associated with Thai food and they are worth trying as well — the pandan-wrapped chicken, which has been marinated and deep-fried and pineapple rice topped with a generous serving of pork floss. And what would a Thai restaurant be if it did not offer the perennial favourite, the Thai fried kway teow (flat noodles). This dish comes with ample servings of bean sprouts, prawns and chilli powder.

Thai desserts are not to be missed and Renn Thai offers the usual spread found in other Thai restaurants. A sampler plate of all-time favourites such as glutinous rice with mango topped with coconut milk, beautifully crafted bean cakes shaped into mini fruits and vegetables, mini water chestnut tako and many more, is a must for those who cannot decide on just the one. The chef takes personal pride in the preparation of the desserts — she especially makes the effort to offer some of her favourites and it is no

wonder that many of us feel that the desserts looked too beautiful to eat. Renn Thai attracts a good crowd particularly in the evening. Reservations should be made to avoid disappointment. ☎

Renn Thai Restaurant
#04-23 Takashimaya Shopping Centre
Ngee Ann City
Tel: 735 5562

Lunch: 11.30am to 3pm
Dinner: 6pm to 11pm
Last orders 2.30pm and 10.30pm

Major credit cards accepted. Prices are subject to 10 percent service charge and four percent government tax.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT
Seafood otak in young coconut, assorted Thai desserts, red curry and crispy fish with vegetables

For those who are a little bit more adventurous and love spicy dishes, there are several choices, which include the curries. One of the more unusual dishes is the dry yellow curry with prawns. This is a "heavier" version of the curry topped with spring onions — the presence of egg adds to the richness of the dish — and it pairs well with white rice. Seafood lovers, especially those partial to prawns, have a choice in the way they would like their prawns cooked — grilled with chilli paste or in a curry are two popular choices.