

THAI DAI

In case it hasn't been brought to your attention before, restaurant critics are jive. Taking on fuel is vital to weekend funquests and the restaurant reviews help you find edible food about as well as those cretin movie critics help you find a flick worth watching. For one thing, restaurant critics are totally ignorant of the three basic food groups; namely intoxicants, bodily fluids, and chocolate chip cookies. Secondly, they are always suggesting weird stuff to eat instead of normal, muscle-makin' fun foods. For instance, they are big on ethnic restaurants. Not your normal ones either; there is, after all a well-defined line between the exotic and the alien.

Well, we aren't going to start a restaurant reviewer review here, because somebody would just review THAT, then there'd be a review to the fourth power and where would it all end, I ask you? But neither are we going to waste your time mentioning eateries like the newly opened Sock Mow Yo Ying, featuring authentic Vietnamese dishes from the sixties. Like Cold Rice Dinky Dau, Black Market K Rations Fu Loi, and the classic Rat Napalme. Nor will you presumably be bummed to miss out on a critique of that new Ethiopian restaurant. No menu there, folks. You get nothing to eat and have to have a rock concert to pay for it. We'll also slide right over the new wave of hybrid cuisine, like Cajun Sushi and Nouvelle Barbecue and Cornpone Asada.

Where we will go is to a Thai restaurant. Every city worth its refugees has at least one. Many have names like "House of Bangkok." Now mature, sophisticated writers like us would not think of making funny little puns on a name like that. Nor would we spin out a bunch of lame little limericks like "Thai one on", the sort of thing you constantly see the reviewers from the dailiesdoing. Food is serious business, old chump. Without it, where would you be? You are what you eat and, need we add, if you don't, you ain't.

My dining companion drew the usual stares. She was, after all, voted Miss Tarzana, California not too many years back. Back before she fell into reduced circumstances, diminished alternatives and (I hasten to add the obvious) disreputable company. Not that being a restaurant reviewer

groupie is the end of the line or anything, but hardly what we would want for our own loved ones, is it? Nevertheless she gets by quite fine, thank you, except for the obnoxious little trait of occasionally swiping food from my plate after distracting me with gambits like telling me a wrecker just drove by followed closely by my car, or pretending to spot celebrities like Vanna White. Which wouldn't be so bad, except that she often replaces the remnants of such portions if they don't suit her jaded tastes. Which in turn wouldn't be so bad if she didn't wear thick coats of raspberry lip gloss.

She also disappointed me severely when I discovered that she had no tiger skin lingerie. Apparently Tarzana, the city, has nothing whatever to do with Tarzan, the former matinee idol (and a seminal influence on my own philosophy and table manners.) Of course these minor peccadillos are a small price to pay for getting to eat (not to mention sleep, shower and inventory lingerie) with a former beauty queen. But enough of my companion's shortcomings, on with the chow.

We began by noshing (now there's a Yiddish word for you, like David Letterman or those coastlier-than-thou "Spy" magazine twerps might use at any time. We're not completely uncultured here in the weekly market, you know, whatever the snots-about-town might have to say on the topic). Noshing, as I say, on a chilled plate of celery and carrots (cunningly carved to resemble orange french fries, though this is probably done with some Occidental device like a Kitchen Magician or router) dipable in a delicious mixture provided for that purpose. A mixture, so they tell me, of peanut butter, oil, and other ingredients the nature of which I was too wise to press them for. Oil and peanuts or not, it's exceptionally tasty. Make sure you get some. If they fail to provide you some, make a scene. Loudly mention the name of a reviewer for the "Tribune". Or even the mucoidal Mr. Letterman, See what it gets you.

Every time I go to a Thai place I mean to order something new, but I never do. I always get Nam Man Hoi because it's so fine. I recommend it. In fact, I insist. It's in oyster sauce, which is one of those Eastern ideas that works out much better than it sounds, like Tantric sex. And contains mushrooms, bamboo shoots, scallions, either chicken, beef, or pork, and those scrumpy little tiny corn on the cob dealies that used to fascinate you back before you lost your capacity for fascination--ones you snatch piles of from salad bars every chance you get. And if that doesn't do it for you, for a buck more you can get it with shrimp. Need I say more? How many

in your party? Smoking or non?

My faithless companion, the queen of former beauty, had the Paht Grapow (and, I've reason to believe, a substantial share of my chicken.) It's a choice of chicken, pork, shrimp or (of all things) squid, cooked in a garlic and mint sauce with red chiles. She seemed to like it, judging by the sounds she was making, but I can't tell you about it for sure because she was too stingy even to give me any. Can you believe it? Hell with that bimbo, just get the Nam Man Hoi. Or perhaps the huge shrimp in garlic, pepper and curry sauce. Or when was the last time you had duck salad, complete with lemongrass dressing and cashews? These dishes, by the way come on trays for you to serve yourself, and you get a big bowl of rice to dish up as you best see fit. All reasonably priced, probably due to the fact that life is cheap in the Orient. (Or anywhere for that matter.) And they have frequently have fried bananas and coconut ice cream. Can you stand it? Now that's exotic dessert. (An example of an alien dessert would be squid ice cream. There's a place for each mollusk and every mollusk should be in its place, I always say. Frequently, anyway.)

One major point at the Thai places (and I want to stress this) is not to miss out on the Thai Iced Tea. It's way better than Caucasian iced tea. For one thing, it has cream in it. Never thought of putting cream in iced tea, did you? That's because you haven't been around for thousands of years and Thai culture has. Not that it would make any difference if you had been, because you'd probably have spent those formative thousands of years hanging around McDonalds and Video Arcades anyway and ended up just as uncultured after all. But that's your problem. There are other ingredients in the tea, one supposes. They are secrets. And inscrutability counts heavily in Asia. The point, however, is simple and well-taken. Namely, DO IT...try the damn tea. Why is that so hard for you to grasp?

Don't expect fortune cookies. The Thais do not make them. Neither do they make televisions or tennis shoes or boomboxes or motorcycles. No crackbrain management theory books either, come to think of it. Nor do they subject us to sneak attacks, religious fascists, or military embarrassments like some Oriental countries I could mention. For Asians, the Thais are really not a bad sort at all.

If I had even one small complaint about the House it would be that some of my chicken seemed a bit nibbled and had a pronounced raspberry

taste, which clashed with the other flavorings. And now that I come to think of it, I also wonder what made me think that Vanna White would be doing in a restaurant full of names nobody could possibly spell.

I know this will come as a great a shock to the conscientious reader as it did to me, but it seems there are those who are taking a rather loose approach to these columns--scanning over them lightly, not really getting involved. Not, in short, getting much out of our wisdom for lack of putting much of themselves in. Now I'm not going to embarrass you by mentioning any names here in front of everyone, but you know who you are. Let me suggest the following:

- 1. Shape up punks, or ship out,**
- 2. Read The Weekend Warrior over several times--there are many nourishing nuggets of nonesuch that will otherwise escape you,**
- 3. Use a yellow highlighter pen to accent particularly sage phrases and salient truths (I realize this is difficult, because of their very number, but try--and remember neatness counts),**
- 4. Get together in small groups to discuss the column...be prepared to defend critical viewpoints, preferably with your life. There will a test afterwards. We are creating pop culture here--you've got to expect an occasional pop quiz.**