

John Gilchrist: Pad Thai kicks up the cuisine a notch with a dash of Chinese influence

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Restaurant owners Patcharin Smith (R) and Pornuma Worasuksri stand for a photo at Pad Thai, Thai Noodles and Cuisine, in Calgary, Alta., on Thursday, March 2, 2017. Shot for John Gilchrist's Off the Menu column. Lyle Aspinall/Postmedia Network *LYLE ASPINALL LYLE ASPINALL / LYLE ASPINALL/POSTMEDIA NETWORK*

Pad Thai. The ubiquitous stir-fried rice noodle dish is a national favourite in Thailand, possibly the most

popular and recognizable Thai dish around the world. It's also a favourite name for Thai restaurants. It's surprising that with all the Thai restaurants in and around Calgary, none of them have been named Pad Thai.

Until now.

Pad Thai opened at 3106 4th St. N.W. (403-800-0567) a few weeks ago in the space that previously housed Shigatsu. Partners — and sisters — Patcharin Smith and Pornuma Worasuksri have converted the former sushi bar into a charming Thai restaurant. Helping them along the way is Sam Chanhao, the affable owner of Thai Sa-on and Tuk Tuk Thai.

Smith worked with Chanhao when he opened Tuk Tuk Thai on 17th Avenue S.W. so Chanhao is now returning the favour. He's supplied the partners with Thai carvings and wall hangings, adding character to the black-and-red, 40-seat space. With his wealth of wine experience (Thai Sa-on has one of the best wine lists in the city) Chanhao has also advised them on beverages. (Theirs is a much shorter list but nonetheless well selected.)



A sculpture stands inside Pad Thai. *LYLE ASPINALL* *LYLE ASPINALL* / *LYLE ASPINALL/POSTMEDIA NETWORK*

Smith's recipes encompass the central-north areas of Thailand where she learned to cook from her mother and where there is more Chinese influence than in the south. For instance, her pad se ew rice noodles are stir-fried with soy and egg in the Chinese style and the "money bag" dumplings are wrapped in won ton paper and drizzled with garlic oil and soy sauce. Her pad Thai is doused with tamarind sauce and topped with egg, bean sprouts and tofu as well as chicken and prawns.

Smith also kicks up her papaya salad with both lime and tamarind and employs the full five Thai curries (red, yellow, green, Panang and masaman) on the menu. She also includes some unique dishes such as lava pork of barbecue pork with rice crumbs; pineapple fish in a chili-pineapple sauce; and lucky chicken ground with shallots, mint and chilies in a lime dressing. Prices are reasonable with most dishes in the mid-teens and lunch specials at \$12. And the Tuxedo location provides an abundance of parking.



Lemongrass Chicken Wings and Green Papaya Salad is served at Pad Thai. *LYLE ASPINALL* *LYLE ASPINALL / LYLE ASPINALL/POSTMEDIA NETWORK*

Quickly does Taiwanese with style

Something we haven't seen much of around Calgary is Taiwanese cuisine. But Quickly, the Taiwan-based fast-casual restaurant chain, is on the move with four shops opening in the past few months and two more in the works. Quickly specializes in bubble tea, smoothies, "snacks" and Taiwanese dishes, all in a casual and stylish — for a fast-casual chain — setting.

I took a look at Quickly Forest Lawn at 3111 17th Ave. S.E. (the other outlets are in Kensington, Chinatown and in Pacific Place in the northeast). This one and the Kensington location are owned and operated by Arce Morales, along with partners Yujin Liang, Bin Zhao, Chi Kit Yau and Canadian franchise organizer Kristy Yu. (Note: Morales is also a vendor at the recently burned Symons Valley Ranch Farmers Market. SVR is operating a parking lot market at their 14555 Symons Valley Road N.W. every second Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The next market will be held March 18.)

The Quickly style is order-at-the-counter from an overhead menu, wait a few minutes and the food arrives. Much of it is done for takeout but Quickly has a very pleasant dine-in area. Lined with a long black banquette and lit by shaded lamps, the room is trimmed in wood and filled with about 40 very comfortable seats. This is not hard plastic under harsh fluorescent lights.

Quickly's teas come hot or iced in jasmine green, oolong or traditional red (black) options with more add-ons, toppings, flavours and bubbles than even Starbucks could dream up. You can have a Taiwanese tea latte with caramel, winter melon and taro or a fruit smoothie with passion fruit and lychee or an avocado-based avo-sno-ly smoothie all with a choice of "jelly" (green apple, grass, coffee) or "bubble" (mango, strawberry). It's mind boggling.

As for food, Quickly does popcorn chicken and chicken wings (again in numerous flavours), Singapore curries, Taiwanese braised ribs and laksa (a Singapore-Malaysian coconut milk soup). Plus desserts of Hong Kong puff waffles with fruit or ice cream or green tea pudding plus, of course, many more options. And where else can you get palm-starch sago pudding? Amazing variety with nothing over \$14 and most things under \$10.

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