

# “Brilliant Thai food”

I share a birthday with Elvis - January 8 - so, naturally, I've been thinking a lot about the King. As I sit at Colonel Tan's, a fantastic hawker-style Thai kitchen in the upstairs warren of Revolver, I'm wondering if Elvis might like it here. And, you know, I reckon he might.

For a start, they've got the Colonel's five-spice fried chicken (an all-time Elvis favourite), plus a bumper crop of about 50 beers and a decorating theme that would fit in seamlessly at Graceland. There are umpteen velour couches, chandeliers and even some retro floral plastic tablecloths.

So far, Colonel Tan's has managed to avoid the food press. It's the latest project by Karen Batson, who also helms the kitchens at Cookie and the Toff in Town (Revolver's sophisticated siblings and part of the Ivy League family of bars owned by nightclub guru Camillo Ippoliti and Thai pop star Tan Punturaumporn). Colonel Tan's is the cheaper, grungier and much quieter version, with a pithy menu and the same brilliant Thai food.

Dishes are whipped up in the tiny kitchen with one fryer, four burners and one wok. The chefs are all from Thailand and they don't dumb down the heat for Western palates (unless requested), so there's a liberal use of chilli and fresh ingredients such as kaffir lime leaves and galangal.

Many of the dishes cross over from Cookie but are worded differently. Cookie's "drunken noodles" is Colonel Tan's "Bangkok bolognaise", a tomatoey minced pork dish bitey with chilli and the aniseedy kick of Thai basil.

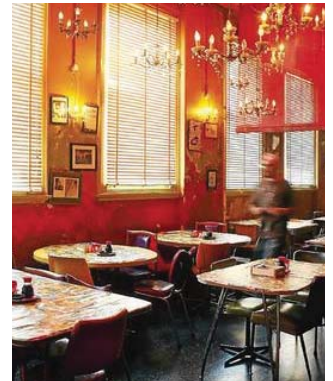
Snacky bar food includes chilli peanuts; corn fritters; zesty chicken and kaffir lime nuggets; and a minced-chicken rendang that rocks with lemongrass — it's served with roti that's pan-fried in butter.

Mushroom, beef and lotus-root salad is a spin-off on the traditional Thai beef salad, with a fiery heat - the beef cut thin and cooked rare - and there's texture in the form of grilled field mushrooms and pretty rounds of lotus root.

There's a couple of curries. One is the green chicken with a salted egg salad. The other is the earthy yellow fish curry, a jungle curry that's thinner in style, without coconut milk. It's chunky with snapper and pieces of spongy green papaya that soak up all the juices. White rice and a shredded omelet come on the side, to help cool the spice.

The other thing? The staff have fun. Not in a "hey, hey, we're so wacky" kind of way but in a "this is a good place to work" kind of way - the sort you can't fake. So the chefs giggle away as they cook and will give you a big wave and a smile as you leave and nothing's too much trouble for the bar staff.

Thursday is locals' night - produce ID that shows you live in postcode 3181 and the food is half price. Old-school games are available, too, so you can relive the '80s with a few rounds on the Commodore 64, Nintendo or Atari. Frankly, I think the King would be hooked.



Photographer: Rebecca Hallas.

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Where: Upstairs at Revolver, 229 Chapel Street, Prahran, 95215985  
Prices: Entrees \$3.50-\$10.50; salads \$8.50-\$11.50; curries \$12.50-\$14.50; stir-fries \$9.50-\$12.50  
Cards: AE, DC, MC, V, Eftpos  
License: Fully licensed  
Open: Open Tue-Thu and Sat, 5-11pm; Fri, noon-11pm  
Cuisine: Thai  
Ingredient watch: Pick up some lotus root (frozen only), galangal, Thai basil and roti bread from Asian supermarket Minh Phat Grocery, 178-180 Victoria Street, Richmond, 94294028. Also try Siam 1, 65 Koornang Road, Carnegie, 95717334.

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