

“Salute the Colonel”

Colonel Tan's is not so much a restaurant as a world unto itself. A world where it's OK to set chrome-rimmed tables with plastic dinosaurs and dangle chandeliers over velour couches and serve mung bean noodle hot pots with fried chicken in a basket.

"It's tongue in cheek," chef Karen Batson says. It's also an echo of Cookie, the popular "beer hall/eating house/disco" she founded at Curtin House in the city. Cookie's collision of Thai food and kitsch furniture is well known but anyone venturing into Colonel Tan's will find this diner rocks to its own rhythm.

Yes, there are betel-leaves on the menu, just as there are at Cookie, but the little bliss-bombs here come as a small salad (\$9.50). Bits of snapper lurk within, tangy with ginger and lime.

Stir-fried pork with red curry paste (\$12.50) is another Cookie classic but the Colonel's version, moistened with kaffir lime is crispy and gelatinous and best savoured with a side of Thai spinach known as Morning Glory. Green peppercorn threads lend extra firepower.

The Colonel in question is Tan Punturaumporn, co-owner (with Camillo Ippoliti) of Revolver and Cookie. He acquired the nickname years ago when a spicy Thai chicken dish prepared by his kitchen brigade prompted him to compare it with the fast food of a certain American gent. Let it be said, there's no comparison. The Colonel's Five Spice Chicken (\$14.50, right) is borne to the table in a wicker tray and these golden nuggets get dunked in a sweet chilli sauce that sings of South-East Asia, not the Deep South.

The weirdest dish is Bangkok Bolognese (\$11.50). In the ochre gloom of a dozen upside lampshades, it resembles the pasta dish we all love and know but that's not spaghetti in front of you: those are "drunken noodles". And that tomatoey mince on top is actually pork, speckled with chilli bits and Thai basil.

Wash your bolognese down with a Spanish prosecco, a Mornington Peninsula pinot or any number of beers. Then order a coconut custard with taro ice cream (\$8.50) ... and salute the Colonel.



Photo by Ben Swinnerton

VERDICT

Bizarrely mixing traditional Thai food with relics of 70's suburbia, Colonel Tan's is kitschy fun. And with talented cooks working the woks, good quality fast food is guaranteed.