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## Thai Derm houses a long, rich culinary legacy

Dec. 12, 2002  
 M.J. Pleasure

Thai Derm debuted in Silver Spring in 1983, before Thai food was trendy. It may be the county's oldest Thai restaurant. The self-styled "noodles house" is actually in a house, just off Georgia Avenue, next door to the Roger Miller West Afro-Caribbean restaurant. Suton Thumprasert and his wife Sirikunya preside over an unpretentious establishment that features the cooking of central Thailand. This region, famed for its culinary abundance and noodle dishes, is the seat of government, attracting people from all over the country. Thai Derm, with two dozen typical noodle dishes, is a magnet as well.

But noodles aren't the only draw. Three dozen chef's and kitchen specialties, highlighting seafood, chicken and beef, and a variety of vegetarian dishes fill out the menu. Many are served with rice, a staple that some sources believe may have originated in Thailand.

Variety is the certainly spice of Thai cuisine. Using abundant herbs and spices and incorporating Malay, Chinese and Indian influences, Thai chefs have crafted a vibrant palette. This food packs a one-two punch -- not necessarily knockout spiciness (although that can be arranged), but rather a pleasing awareness of a succession of flavors. Stir fries with basil, mint and lemongrass are refreshing. Curries prepared with so-called Indian spices -- cumin, coriander, turmeric, cinnamon, cardamom and cloves -- add zest.

Daily specials are listed on a large chalkboard: one evening, cabbage salad with Thai dressing, Penang chicken, crispy fish with chile and lemon juice, chicken with red curry, potato and lotus seeds and stir fried shrimp with garlic sauce. Just reading them sets the taste buds tingling.

A Thai meal gets off on the right track with soup, perhaps tom yam koong (shrimp with lemongrass and Thai herbs) or the velvety gai tom kha (chicken with lemongrass, coconut milk and herbs). It's not a bad idea to do as the Thais themselves do: sip the soup along with the entrees as a break from the spicier dishes.

Noodles mean rice noodles; one egg noodle soup is the exception. These can range from very thin noodles (similar to angel hair pasta) known as vermicelli to broad noodles. Koong obb is a fragrant vermicelli dish with shrimp and vegetable, steamed in a small casserole. Pad Thai, the national dish, embellishes linguine-size noodles with shrimp, bean sprouts and fresh herbs in a mildly seasoned stir fry. Drunken noodles assertively teams chicken and chiles with broad noodles.

In addition to pad Thai, Thumprasert cites other native favorites among the noodles: geuw teow ped toon (noodle soup with stewed duck), yen tao foh (a red soup with noodles, roast pork, bean curd fish ball and watercress) and giew jab nam sai (noodles with pork, pork liver, pork maw and bean sprouts, with or without broth).

The red or green curries are not to be missed. Most Thai curries are made with a basic paste of ground spices. A special, steamed salmon filet with red curry and vegetables is superb, the coconut milk moderating the spiciness. Gang gai, a



At Thai Derm in downtown Silver Spring, owners Sirikunya and Suton Thumprasert proudly present gai saporod (left, chicken with pineapple sauce and vegetables) and gai non rang (chicken with crispy Chinese broccoli leaves).

Laurie DeWitt/The Gazette

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lively chicken in green curry, hits the mark as well.

As a traditional stir-fry, pad khing with beef (chicken or pork are other options) resonates with fresh ginger and onions.

When it is time for dessert, treat yourself to homemade coconut ice cream with real chunks of coconut. Mango and sticky rice is another popular choice.

Unlike some Thai restaurants, Thai Derm does not indicate the degree of spiciness of the various dishes on the menu. Instead, it relies on the wait staff to ask whether patrons want their dishes mild, American spicy or Thai spicy. Our spicy dishes arrived pleasantly so; milder dishes were enticingly seasoned. Everything was so fresh and delicious it made converts of people who rarely venture into Thai restaurants. Now that's praise.

*Thai Derm*

*939 Bonifant St., Silver Spring*

*Hours: Monday-Thursday 11 a.m.-3 p.m.,*

*5-9:30 p.m., Friday 11 a.m.-3 p.m., 5-10:30 p.m., Saturday noon-3 p.m., 5-9:30 p.m., Sunday*

*5-9:30 p.m.*

*Entrée prices: \$7.45-\$9.45*

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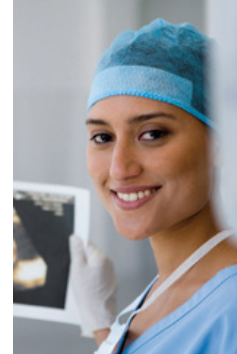
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