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Soul Food Mahanakorn: Thai food, strong drinks, no fuss

An American food writer is quietly earning a fanbase with cuisine inspired simply by what's fresh in the markets -- and super strong cocktails

By Nick Satraoj | 4 October, 2010

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Soul Food Mahanakorn is in three-floor shophouse, which took owner Wrisley four months to convert.

Enough about Michelin stars (which don't actually exist in Bangkok) and Thai fine dining in swanky hotels.

While [Sra Bua by Kiin Kiin](#) and [David Thompson's Nahm](#) may have serious pedigrees, along with the [controversies that come with them](#), over on Soi Thonglor a former food writer is quietly making

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his debut with a homey restaurant and bar in an unassuming shophouse.

The concept of Jarrett Wrisley's [Soul Food Mahanakorn](#) is neatly summed up on its website: "Wholesome ingredients. Honest cooking. Serious drinks."



A bowl of gaeng om, a northeastern-

style Thai curry soup.

So we don't really need an amuse-bouche before our curry after all.

"There are so many reasons I decided to open a place, but the main one is that I have great affection for Thai food and I wanted to serve it in a different format -- in a comfortable bar," says Wrisley. "I love Thai street food and shophouse restaurants. But sweating on a wobbly plastic stool is not comfortable."

Serving whatever's fresh in the markets

The warm glow of Soul Food Mahanakorn does beckon you in from the street. Low-key lighting and wood finishing define the cozy interior of this three-floor shophouse, which took four months to convert.

"I've tried hard to create a space that feels warm, sort of like someone's home," says Wrisley.

Although Thai dishes dominate the menu, the young American warns the purists that he's not targeting traditional authenticity.

"I know being foreign and serving Thai food may arouse some suspicion so I'll say this: all I want to do is serve slow, soulful, deliberately cooked food made with good ingredients," he says.

Thus Soul Food's kitchen revolves around what's fresh in the markets -- seafood from Sam Yan one day or meats from Or Tor Kor another. Healthy organic food stuffs, such as rice, meats and some vegetables, are sourced from organic farmers in the northeast, namely Surin and Yasothorn.

"The menu has no boundaries save that things should be

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delicious," says Wrisley. "We serve dishes from the north, like a Burmese-style hang lay curry (150 baht) and Chiang Mai sausages, alongside traditional southern Thai dishes like khao mok gai (chicken biryani) and crispy samosas (110 baht), along with Issan grilled meats and crunchy papaya salads.

"Everything except for our fish and soy sauce is made upstairs -- the sausages, curry pastes, the chili jam (nam prik pao), the yogurt for the samosas ... everything."

Cocktails inspired by Thai cuisine

This emphasis on homespun originality extends to the cocktails, which are receiving rave reviews from patrons. Collaborating with his favorite bartender Markus Bernthaler, Wrisley spent a week testing different concoctions. Some of the results will leave you floored (all pours are doubles) and others such as the spicy Bun Bang Fai (190 baht) will set your lips buzzing.

While a dinner and night out at Soul Food won't come cheap, the cocktails in particular are good value, for the Thonglor neighborhood at least, and should ensure it becomes a popular late-night meeting spot.

"I wanted to use local ingredients and recreate some of the flavor profiles of Thai food in our cocktails," Wrisley says. "Things like palm sugar, pomelo, chilies, basil, ginger, lemongrass. The drinks are supposed to pair well with the food, too. But if you want a whisky sour or a gin and tonic we can do that."

Soul Food may not get the hype of other openings this year, but it deserves notice. While tourists and gourmands may prefer to eat at splashier destinations, one imagines the famous chefs of those establishments sneaking off a bit early to Soul Food for a relaxed bite and drink.

Soul Food Mahanakorn

56/10 Sukhumvit Soi 55 (Soi Thonglor), Bangkok

Tel. +66 (0)85 904 2691

Open Tuesday through Sunday, 5:30 p.m.-12:30 a.m.

www.soulfoodmahanakorn.com

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