

## HOT LIST



Photographs by FRANCINE ORR Los Angeles Times

**MEANG KHUM:** Coconut, ginger, red onion, dried shrimp, peanuts and tamarind sauce, served on spinach leaves.

**EARLY BIRD:** Celadon Thai Kitchen

## Friends find Thai that binds

Opened by Joey Tate and Bangkok-born Santi Boonleerawath, Celadon stresses authentic cuisine.

JESSICA GELT

### Celadon Thai Kitchen

**Where:** 11364 W. Washington Blvd., Culver City

**When:** 11 a.m. to 11 p.m., daily

**Price:** Appetizers, \$4.95 to \$8.95; entrees, \$7.95 to \$18.95; noodles and curries, \$7.95 to \$8.95

**Contact:** (310) 823-8100; [www.celadonthaikitchen.com](http://www.celadonthaikitchen.com)

Finding the culinary treasures hidden in the concrete quilt of Los Angeles' strip malls is one of this city's hallmark traditions. Given the wealth of options, it's especially satisfying when you get in on the ground floor of a discovery. Which is why you might want to pilot yourself to an odd corner of our metropolis where Marina del Rey, Venice and Culver City rub noses to a new restaurant called Celadon Thai Kitchen.

Opened by lifelong friends Joey Tate and Santi Boonleerawath Celadon celebrates simplicity and consistency with attention to detail. "We try to stick to the basics," Tate says. "I've seen Thai fusion, and personally, it just turns me off. I want people to know that we're focused on Thai food, and it's what we do best."

To that end you'll find the usual stars on the menu: pad thai in a tangy peanut sauce; juicy chicken satay; rich *tom kha gai* soup in a peppery-red coconut broth; tongue-tingling *panang* curry; tender beef with chili and mint leaves and the attendant Thai iced tea (a beer and wine license is pending).

Food comes on white plates with dainty dishes of subtly spiced sauces and pretty piles of bright green lettuce, red onions and bright orange carrots. The service is thoughtful, and servers are happy to give their opinions on what they like best. One such recommendation was the royal shrimp appetizer, which is shrimp wrapped in a light crust, flash fried and served with a sticky sweet-and-sour sauce. The dish is remarkably fresh and not the slightest bit greasy, which can be said of the menu across the board.

The food's quality is not a surprise, given that Bangkok-born Boonleerawath has spent the last 20 years building business at his flagship Hollywood Thai restaurant, Pink Pepper. Tate, who is of Irish-Croatian descent and was raised in Louisiana, worked at the Pink Pepper while putting himself through nursing school.

The men have made many trips to Thailand together over the years. "I developed a passion for the culture and the food," says Tate, who has also taught himself to speak Thai.

The restaurant gets its name from the green pottery that was originally developed in China to mimic jade. To play off the theme, the restaurant employs the color celadon as the guiding light for its design scheme. Architect Anthony Eckelberry, who has worked with Boonleerawath (as well as David Myers and Wolfgang Puck), created a clean, contemporary look marked by white wooden wall niches, which are lighted and filled with statues of Nang Kwak, the goddess of abundance and a traditional symbol of luck for Thai businesses.

There are only nine tables in the restaurant, which has large windows overlooking Washington Boulevard. This affords the kind of intimacy you want from a strip mall find; one day, it might make for the kind of wait for a table that will assure you that you are, in fact, onto something special.

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**THE LOOK:** Architect Anthony Eckelberry, who has worked with co-owner Boonleerawath, designed Celadon.