

Time For Thai

Ta Ra Rin finds the right recipe. BY MELISSA BEARNS

Restaurants have come and gone from 1200 Oak St. faster than New Yorkers file through the revolving doors of their office buildings at rush hour. But Ta Ra Rin Thai Cuisine may have found the recipe for success where others have failed — good food, good prices and excellent service.

The well-lit dining area, with its cushy booths and wide tables, makes up for its lack of intimacy with a laid-back feel well-suited to diners looking for a relaxed, casual meal and families with kids of all ages.

Skip the appetizer sampler and order the best item included on it instead: the Chicken Satay. Lightly marinated in a teriyaki BBQ sauce with a hint of garlic, the chicken is juicy and flavorful, especially when dipped in the wonderfully mild peanut sauce. The Royal Pumpkin is an excellent vegetarian choice, served piping hot, fried in a tempura-like batter until it's a crispy golden brown. Luckily this appetizer can stand on its own because the lackluster dipping sauce that comes with it does little to enhance the pumpkin's subtle, earthy and sweet flavor.

Thai food doesn't usually inspire visions of leafy greens and salad, but Ta Ra Rin does it right when it comes to raw veggies. The cucumber salad has a lightly sweetened dressing that brings out the flavor of the cucumber and adds a hint of spice. The green papaya salad was one of the best I've had. With a well-balanced blend of tart lime, sweet vinegar, pungent fish sauce and the spicy bite of red chilis, it complimented the delicate, crisp, white, thinly-sliced papaya.

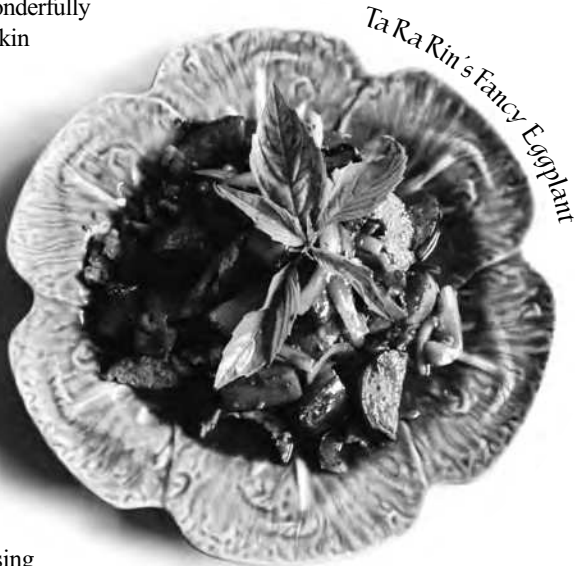
Throughout the meal the servers were attentive yet unobtrusive. The food was served quickly, making Ta Ra Rin a good choice for lunch during a busy business day, as well as dinner. Dirty dishes disappear. Water glasses stay full. And each course arrives just as you finish the last one.

The Fancy Eggplant was the highlight of the meal, both in quality and presentation. It appeared from the kitchen trailing fragrant steam on a lovely green plate that looked like a giant leaf. The plate accentuated the inky purple of the eggplant, the dark green of the fresh basil and the deep red of the sweet peppers. A mildly spicy dish, the sauce was a delicate blend of basil and garlic, with chili paste and a hint of sweetness that brought out the flavor of the eggplant. Thoroughly cooked but still tender and firm, the texture of the eggplant was a perfect contrast to the crunch of lightly sautéed peppers and onions.

The Pad Woon Sen was unexciting with glass noodles that overwhelmed the subtle flavors of the mushrooms, peppers, green onions and thinly sliced beef. With hints of ginger and garlic, this dish lacked spice and flavor, especially compared to the others.

Save room for dessert and order the Crispy Bananas with Coconut Ice Cream. Made from scratch at the restaurant, the creamy, light ice cream is worth a trip to Ta Ra Rin all by itself. But when you combine it with the slices of banana, fried inside flaky square pastries perfect for dipping into the ice cream, this dessert is pure heaven.

Ta Ra Rin is open for lunch from 11 am-3 pm and for dinner from 5-10 pm. **EW**



Ta Ra Rin's Fancy Eggplant



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