

TOM PARKER BOWLES & OLLY SMITH



YOU MAGAZINE'S BRILLIANT RESTAURANT CRITIC AND WINE EXPERT

EATING OUT

Tom feels the heat from a Thai concession tucked away in a London pub

'How hot do you want your som tum?' asks the waitress with a smile. I'm standing by the counter of Khun Pakin Thai, a small and unassuming Thai concession tucked away in the corner of The Salutation pub, on King Street, West London. 'Thai hot,' I reply with a macho growl. Just in case she's mistaken me for some pale, posh Englishman with a pathetically vainglorious view of his capsaicin capacity. She nods and grins. 'So five chillies level? That's pretty hot.'

'Pretty hot', it turns out, is an early contender for understatement of the year. It's a glorious som tum pu plara, no doubt about that, dark as stagnant pond water, the crisp, shredded green papaya dressed in a mixture of sharp lime juice, sour tamarind and pla ra – moody, funkily fermented fish sauce. There are tiny pickled crab, ready to crunch and suck, and the soft base note of palm sugar. And

chilli, lots of it, fresh and dried, enough to halt a rampaging elephant. A distant rumble of heat first, which gradually builds into a terrifying crescendo, a furious inferno that rolls down the throat in great burning waves.

Within seconds, speaking becomes impossible, my tongue

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transformed into a useless lump of gristle. My vision blurs and head turns giddy, as lights become more vivid, sounds more acute. Even thinking hurts. But this is pain of the most exquisite kind, as the som tum is sensationally good. And I just can't help going back for more.

Kung chae nam pla, raw prawns buried under mint leaves



'Fresh, clean and elegantly balanced' – the pork larb is full of zinging vitality

and thin slices of raw garlic, has a brisk rather than brutal heat, the flavours fresh, clean and elegantly balanced. Just like the pork larb, zinging vitality with slivers of red onion and a tangle of fresh herbs.

Not everything is about the chilli. Mu ping, chewy, charred pork skewers, remind me of the sticky Chiang Mai nights, while kho mu yang, grilled pork neck, has tender charm, and a piquant dipping sauce. Khun Pakin was recommended by the lovely people at Jin Da, just around the

corner. Skip past the standard menu, they said, and get stuck into 'Esarn Thai Originals'. Wise advice, and there's so much more to try. This now makes it three serious regional Thai places, mere metres apart. When it comes to good value, pretty exceptional restaurants, King Street can do battle with the best.

About £20 per head; Khun Pakin Thai at The Salutation, 154 King Street, London W6; salutationhammersmith.co.uk

DRINKS: Olly's best wines online

I love hunting online for thrilling wines – bottles of specialist character that light up the moment and live long in the memory. Buying by the case offers the best value and cuts out all the heavy lifting. Try emergingvines.co.uk – superb for English wine – while passionevino.co.uk is great fun for Italian wines and there's a well curated selection of natural wines at nattyboywines.co.uk.



WINE OF THE WEEK
DOMAINE DU MÉTÉORE
FAUGÈRES
LÉONIDES
2018 (13.5%),
£15, gnarlyvines.co.uk. Scented and elegant. Wine of the year so far.



THE WINE ATLAS
FETEASCA
REGALA (12%),
£5, asda.com. Britain's best-value white online – surging with tropical freshness and scented splendour.



VERTIGES 2020
VALLÉE DU
PARADIS IGP
(14%), £10.49,
laithwaites.co.uk. Voluptuous and fruity, sunshine has been lavished on this super-supple red. Absolutely delightful.



RACINE PINOT
NOIR BRUNO
LAFON &
FRANÇOIS
CHAMBOISSIER
2020 (13%),
£12.40, hhandc.co.uk. Light and bright as a cherry swinging from a star. Divinely pure.



PENN CROFT
BACCHUS 2020
(12%), £22.99,
tivoliwines.co.uk. Dazzling, crisp and delicious, this is benchmark British brilliance – splash out on this tangy, zesty treat.