

» **Sahamngkol Film has pushed back the release of two movies. "The Melody" will now premiere on December 8 and "The Kick" on December 22.**



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NATION/MANOJE THIRAPATHI

ROBERT DANHI shows how to cook Thai food at the Coriander Leaf. He's just published his second book, "Easy Thai Cooking".

THE PROOF IS IN THE PORK SATAY

Another foreign expert on Thai food, Robert Danhi is braced for blowback

MANOJE THIRAPATHI
THE NATION
Singapore

You might as well agree with Robert Danhi that he's an expert on Thai food. The American spent the last 20 years travelling around the country studying what we eat.

That didn't make Australian David Thompson an expert in many Thai eyes, though. They decided the chef-owner of Nahm was far too presumptuous.

Regardless, Danhi, 41, is ready to face the heat.

And he was trained by the CIA. Not the spy agency - the Culinary Institute of America.

"Of course there are going to be some Thais and *farang* too asking what makes me think I know Thai food," he says. Stay tuned, though. I joined a posse of Singaporean reporters for a cooking class at the Coriander Leaf, a restaurant on the city's Clarke Quay. He showed us how to make Silky Squash Coconut Soup and Shrimp Cake so that we'd write nice things about his new book, "Easy Thai Cooking: 75 Family-Style Dishes You Can Prepare in Minutes".

Thais might like his version of *thod mun goong*, even though it's pan-fried rather than deep-fried and contains an egg. Singaporeans love it.

Danhi's book covers the iconic Thai dishes you always encounter overseas - pork satay with peanut dip, spring rolls, orange-curry soup, glass-noodle salad, stir-fried pork with basil and chilies, green pork curry and five-spice slow-cooked pork.

There's also a variety of noodle dishes that Thais overseas would be more familiar with, like garlic soy noodles with pork.

"Some of the recipes are authentic Thai and others are contemporary interpretations," the author says. "The coconut caramel with grilled pineapple isn't Thai, but the paste for the shrimp cakes is pretty much how it's made here."

Danhi learned from Thai and foreign teachers including *Ajarn* Kobkiew of the Khao Cooking School and Thompson at Nahm. In fact, when Thompson was testing his recipes for his book about Thai street food, Danhi flew to Bangkok to cook with him.

Danhi runs a restaurant-consulting business called Chef Danhi and Co. He visits Spain once a year to oversee a restaurant chain that serves Southeast Asian food.

His first book, "Southeast Asian Flavours", extended to Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore, as well as Thailand. For "Easy Thai Cooking", he sought out home cooking - with the focus on authentic rather than traditional.

"I'm not Thai, but chances are that 95 per cent of Bangkokians never cook, or don't know how," he says. "You are who you are because of your experience, not because of your ethnicity, right? I know Thai food - I've been there for 20 years."

His dismissal of the ethnicity factor can jolt the natives. One Thai student insisted he was flubbing a dish during a session at the CIA in New York.

"She told me, 'Oh, that's not right!' but what makes her an authority on Thai food - because she's Thai? Does that sound logical?"

Danhi is braced for whatever scepticism arises. David Thompson, he points out, "said something like, 'I came to Thailand to help preserve Thai food.' What's wrong with that? You know he really respects Thai culture. Otherwise he wouldn't have taken the last 30 years of his life focusing on Thai food. So he didn't mean he wanted to 'teach' you."

"But you know what? He does need to teach some Thais - just as I need to be taught by Americans about American food. I don't care where you're from."

"So yes, of course I'm going to get criticised. But let me cook for you! I'm not the best, but I think I'm respectable."

Danhi admits that his knowledge about Thai cuisine "doesn't even scratch the surface". "It's complex. But I think I understand it enough where I can have a discussion with a Thai who knows Thai food."

Danhi regards Thai food as a "party" in the mouth - lively, exciting and vibrant with spices and aromas. He wants to build on tradition to keep it lively. "Before I'm going change it, I first need to know it. For me the bottom line is how it tastes, and don't claim it's traditional if it's not."

The writer travelled to Singapore courtesy of Periplex Editions.



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ROBERT DANHI



MAKE IT EASY

Robert Danhi's "Easy Thai Cooking" from Tuttle Publishing, is available at Asia Books, Kinokuniya and other bookshops.

THAI FOOD, Danhi says, is a 'party' in the mouth. He celebrates with the spiced mango cocktail, left, and silky squash coconut soup.

ON HOLD

EVENTS POSTPONED OR CANCELLED DUE TO THE FLOODS

■ **Toshiba (Thailand)** has postponed the November 2 opening of the art exhibition "For Better Lives" at the National Gallery. A new date is still to be chosen.

■ **Auditions for "Thailand's Got Talent"** Season 2 will be held later: in Bangkok on December 2 and 3 at The Mall Bang Kapi; in the Northeast on December 10 and 11 at the Pullman Khon Kaen Hotel; in the South on December 17 and 18 at Prince of Songkla University; in the North on January 7 and 8 in Chiang Mai.

■ **The Thai Super Model Contest** has been postponed indefinitely. The final round of Miss Teen Thailand has been rescheduled to November 25 at the Bangkok Convention Centre at Central Lad Phrao.



■ **"Help for a Hard Day's Night"**, the flood-relief auction and concert fund-raiser planned for November 6 at the Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit, has been postponed until further notice.

■ **Amarin Printing and Publishing** has postponed its annual Baan lae Suan fair at Impact Arena until next year.

■ **The Krating Daeng Fat Fest Bangkok** set for this week will instead take place on December 3 and 4 at Bangkok University Rangsit. Keep tabs at "fatradio" on Facebook and "104.Fatradio" on Twitter.

■ **The National Institute of Educational Testing Service's** GAT and PAT examinations have been shifted to December 24 and 27.



■ **The Central Anniversary Flower Extravaganza** is cancelled, but the celebrations for His Majesty the King's birthday will take place as planned. The "We Love Our King" sale begins on Thursday and the recording of "Voices for the King" runs from November 9 to December 5 at all Bangkok branches. The Central Midnight Sale is on hold.

■ **Bumrungrad Hospital** has suspended all non-urgent and non-emergency outpatient services through today as part of the flood-related public holidays, but no change in the Emergency Room and inpatient facilities. All existing appointments are being rescheduled. Call (02) 667 1000.

■ **Artist Sompech Wanchit's** show "My Sentimental Reasons" at the Peninsula Plaza has been pushed back to the new year - January 12 to 25.

■ **Acer, HP, Sony, Asus and Toshiba** will check your laptop, computer or other gadget for free and if it needs maintenance, it's half price.