

## QUICK REVIEW

## Power Thai

26-year-old chef takes on 25-year-old resto. Does he have the heat to turn it into one of the best of its genre? | By Brad A. Johnson | Photography by Dale Berman |



## TALÉSAI

9043 Sunset Blvd.,  
West Hollywood,  
310.275.9724, talesai.com

HOURS Dinner, Mon. Thurs.,  
5PM-10PM; Fri. and Sat.,  
5PM-10:30PM; Sun., 5PM-  
9:30PM; Lunch, Mon. Fri.,  
11:30AM-2:30PM

ABOUT THE COCKTAILS *The Mekong Old-Fashioned (with lychee) still needs work, but the Ginger Trip (rum, ginger beer, fresh ginger) is very refreshing.*

WHERE TO SIT *The picture window overlooking Sunset offers a different show every night. In the span of one hour, we witnessed six traffic citations, a bicycle with more lights than the Eiffel Tower, two fistfights, seven low riders and one limo with hot tub in the back (it was February!).*

WHAT IT COSTS *Appetizers, \$6-\$18; entrées, \$10-\$23; desserts, \$8; bar snacks, \$6-\$15; corkage, \$15; valet parking, \$4.50*

The best thing about the grungy little restaurants in Thai Town is the gusto of their flavors, the deep souls of their spices. The worst thing about the restaurants in Thai Town is the utterly abysmal quality of their meats. It's as if their beef comes from tough, shriveled cows that have outlived their usefulness as milk makers.

But this is not a review of those restaurants or those cows. This is a review of Talésai in West Hollywood, where the best thing about the green curry... is the beef.

I am in love with Talésai's green curry, which arrives with huge chunks of short ribs, slow braised and so tender they can be dissected and devoured with nothing more than a spoon. For years, I have searched for the perfect green curry, and I've found some strong contenders but never one where the meat was the star. The chewy, gray beef was always just a garnish, a convenient texture, something to chew on while the curry's heat pulsed through my veins. And now I learn that it doesn't have to be that way. So, is Talésai's the perfect green curry? No. It needs to be spicier. Still, I'd rather be complaining about timid spice than about shoe leather grade meat.

The 25 year old Talésai reopened late last year after a three month renovation (and the addition of a beautiful wine cellar). Kris Yenbamroong, 26, son of the original owner and grandson of the original chef, is now in charge. He's the one wearing a buttoned down oxford shirt and necktie beneath a freshly starched apron. He's introduced an almost entirely new menu, eschewing most of the ubiquitous classics in favor of his favorite discoveries from time spent living and studying in Thailand. And he's upgraded the quality of everything in his fridge. The *larb* appetizer is made with minced filet mignon, and thus I'm now completely spoiled. I've never eaten larb that didn't include at least a few bites of gristle or knuckle or hoof or something slightly unidentifiable and oddly textured.

There's a great pork ragu served over Western style pasta, which is apparently something the chef discovered in northern Thailand. It's fantastic and one of the restaurant's spicier dishes. Yenbamroong's *tom khar* (shrimp and coconut milk soup) is one of the brightest and best I've ever tasted, really pure and clean, with beautiful shrimp and not too heavy on the coconut.



GENERATION NEXT *From top: Panang curry lamb chops; Thai style duck "tamale" in a banana leaf. Far left: Talésai's new chef, Kris Yenbamroong.*

I'm initially intrigued by an appetizer listed as "Panang curry spiced and charbroiled" lamb chops, but while the chops themselves prove to be of very high quality, I sadly can't detect even the slightest influence of Panang. Where is the kaffir lime? Where is the chili? Where is the soul? The sauce underneath tastes to me like a very basic brown sauce straight from a French cookery text, not the exciting, exotic dish that it should/could be.

And therein lies the problem. In many respects, this is the finest Thai restaurant in California. No others use the quality of products that Yenbamroong brings into his kitchen. But I'm still waiting for the young chef to fully embrace the vibrant spirit of Southeast Asian cuisine. I wish he would stop holding back. We can take it. After all, we've been eating Thai food in this town for 25 years. 🍲

## CELEB SPOTTING: A BEST ACTRESS, A FEW STANDARD HOTTIES AND SOME PUPU



WE WERE PLAYING HOOKY AT SHUTTERS ON THE BEACH ONE DAY AND SPOTTED ZAC EFRON (SPORTING AN UPDO) AND VANESSA HUDGENS HAVING LUNCH AT THE HOTEL'S COAST RESTAURANT. KATE WINSLET CAUGHT OUR EYE AT BLVD 16. WHILE DINING AT CRUSTACEAN, A FLASH WENT OFF, SO WE QUICKLY TURNED AROUND TO LOOK JUST IN TIME TO SEE GEORGE CLOONEY AND DON CHEADLE COME IN. OUR FEMALE POWER COUPLING OF THE MONTH WAS SHARON STONE AND MELANIE GRIFFITH, LUNCHING TOGETHER AT JOAN'S ON THIRD. THE TOWER BAR ALWAYS OFFERS A SMORGASBORD OF CELEBRITY OF VARYING DEGREES, AND ON OUR LATEST VISIT WE COUNTED GINA GERSON, PETER MORTON AND JACQUI GETTY. WE SAW ARTIST SHEPARD FAIREY AND HIS WIFE, AMANDA, AT TIARA CAFÉ, AND WE NOTICED CATHERINE ZETA-JONES AND MICHAEL DOUGLAS AT LUAU, WHERE THEY APPEARED TO BE ENJOYING A PUPU PLATTER.