

DINING

# Orchid Cafe offers good, well-prepared Thai food

By ELEANOR HEALD  
SPECIAL WRITER

Until this recognition, Orchid Cafe's first location on Rochester Road in Troy operated quietly since 1991. Sufficiently successful, owners Maria Nguyen, Nivah Savanh and Sengmaly Bounthavongso, opened a second Orchid Cafe on Square Lake Road in Troy in 1995. Both eateries have a following of business clientele from nearby offices and lunch.

At dinner, Troy's sprawling subdivisions provide eager diners.

"After the Taste of Troy awards, we decided to remodel the Rochester Road location," Nguyen said. "We expanded 500 kitchen and made a roomier dining area seating 75, that has a more comfortable feel."

Terra cotta walls with Thai artwork are complemented by recessed ceiling lights bouncing softly off tones of white and

seafoam green. Seating is principally at tables, but four booths are available. For dinner, tables are unpretentiously upcycled with white cloths.

Orchid Cafe is about good Thai food, well-prepared in the Rochester Road location by 38-year-old Laos native Chef Ken Bounthavongso who emigrated to the U.S. in 1981 and now lives in Troy. He has been chef at this location since day one.

"I've been cooking since I was 18," he said. "I love it."

Thai food has a lot of variety in its ingredients such as basil, chilies, ginger and lemongrass, each used to make the dishes different from one another."

Chef and owner Nivah Savanh heads the kitchen at the Square Lake Road location.

Both eateries are also about service, offered by a wait staff in Thai silk uniforms. If you're new to Thai food, each waitperson can explain spicing level options from none to way up there.

**Orchid Cafe**  
Where: 3303 Rochester Road (in Troy Point Plaza), Troy (248) 524-1944 and 56 Square Lake Road (in the Troy Corner Plaza, Troy (248) 828-4149.  
Hours: Lunch 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday-Friday; noon to 3 p.m. Saturday; 3-9:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday, dinner.  
Menu: Traditional Thai dishes, but also special preparations with subtle spicing to get you started on enjoying the flavors of Thailand. Broader selections at dinner than lunch. Meatless dishes abound, and vegetarian preferences can be accommodated.  
Cost: Lunch \$6.75-\$8; dinner \$9.50-\$11.50  
Reservations: Accepted.  
Credit cards: All majors accepted.  
No liquor license  
Awards: In the 1999 Taste of Troy competition among 40 competing restaurants, Orchid Cafe won both the Critics' Choice and People's Choice awards.



STAFF PHOTOS BY DENNA McLAUGHLIN  
At your service: Maria Nguyen (left), Nivah Savanh and Sengmaly Bounthavongso present some of the dishes that are available at Orchid Cafe.



"People who do not know Thai food think it is always fire hot," Nguyen said. "What they do not understand is that spicing with Thai hot chilies is the last step in cooking any Thai dish. Therefore, any selection can be spiced to a diner's preference from mild to very hot. Several Thai dishes can be made without Thai peppers and still taste very good."

Inspired by the Taste of Troy awards, Nguyen and Chef Ken are expanding cooking styles to include more sauteed and grilled items. The latter will be introduced this weekend, beginning Friday, Aug. 13, on the dinner menu only. Grilled whole fish such as snapper or swordfish will be featured along with grilled scallops and shrimp.

From the daily lunch specials, the Lemon-Grass Seafood Combination \$8 is the most popular. It includes shrimp, scallops and crabmeat sauteed with lemongrass-flavored sauce.

Most popular dinner appetizers are Satay, BBQ chicken or beef strips on a bamboo stick,

marinated with Thai spices and served with peanut sauce and tangy cucumber salad. Spring Rolls are the famous appetizer where minced chicken, bean threads and shredded vegetables wrapped in rice paper are deep fried and served with a house sauce.

As a Thai food aficionado might expect, the most popular noodle dish is Pad Thai, sauteed traditional rice noodles are combined with eggs, green onions, bean sprouts and crunchy peanuts.

Among Thai specialties are Pla Lad Prik, crispy red snapper fillet topped with basil, green peppers, garlic, carrots and celery. Bangkok Chicken is sauteed crispy with ginger tomato sauce, garlic, onions, peppers, peapods and carrots. The most traditional Thai specialty is Shrimp & Scallops Pad Prik, where both seafoods are sauteed with Thai curry, baby corn, peapods, mushrooms, napa and coconut milk.

Two duck dishes are gaining popularity because the fat has been trimmed away and the poultry deboned. Boneless Duck Curry is sauteed with Thai red curry, eggplant, green peas, baby corn; red pepper, basil and coconut cream.

Siam Duck is a sliced boneless preparation with baby corn, peapods, green onions, carrots, ginger and shrimp.

As is the case with most Asian-influenced restaurants, there is no kid's menu, but lots of dishes appealing to them such as fried rice, satay, chicken and noodles.

Since there is no liquor license, Thai iced coffee and tea are available along with hot jasmine tea, non-alcoholic beer, lemonade and soft drinks.

For dessert, homemade Thai ice cream comes in three flavors: coconut, mango (now in high season) and Jack fruit.

To leave a voice mail message for Eleanor Heald, dial (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1864.

## WHAT'S COOKING

The Golden Mushroom 18100 West 10 Mile Road, Southfield (248) 659-4230 encourages DSO support. Through March 2000, if you dine at The Golden Mushroom before a Detroit Symphony Orchestra performance, you can get a 10 percent reduction off your total bill. Simply show tickets to your server. When phoning to make a reservation, tell the person you speak with that you're going to the symphony. Your meal will be paced so that you can enjoy it and arrive on

time at Orchestra Hall for the performance.

The Huntsman Hunt Club Dinner 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 17, \$65 per person features five courses, four with wine and kick-off reception with J Brut. The dinner's name relates to the fact that The Golden Mushroom now operates the kitchen, dining room and catering facilities at The Huntsman Hunt Club, a private hunting preserve due north of Rochester, just outside Dryden. The Huntsman's chef Tom

Chappell will work with The Mushroom's Executive Chef

Derin Moore to create the dining feast.

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