

## Restaurants Story

# Secret Thai Garden, Otahuhu

3:00PM Thursday March 15, 2007  
By [Ewan McDonald](#)

**Herald rating:** 3 1/2 out of 5

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away ... Oh, all right, back in the 90s, in Otahuhu, Nobby Clark and his wife, Aranya, had the idea.

For the next 10 years they dreamed of running a Thai restaurant. More than that: they wanted to bring an authentic Thai dining experience home.

Home was an ordinary suburban bungalow in Station Rd, which runs off Great South Rd, the main drag in the town.

Well, from the street it looks like an ordinary suburban bungalow. Inside the gate, it's anything but. Nobby and Aranya spent two years transforming the backyard into a kitschy-kool Thai garden.

You walk in, down what once was driveway but is now a boardwalk tunnel lined with plants and tusk-like arches. Little Buddhas. The pitter-patter of tiny waterways.

Around the corner of the old house, handmade teak furniture from Chiang Mai sits, off-kilter, under trees. A pebble path wends to a covered deck that looks – and often is – a wedding chapel.

Nobby starts most evenings behind the bar but is soon in the garden, chatting and chirping to diners, many regulars, most known by name.

For food there are two choices, both relatively limited. You can order a la carte but you'll be gently steered towards the \$35-a-head set menu.

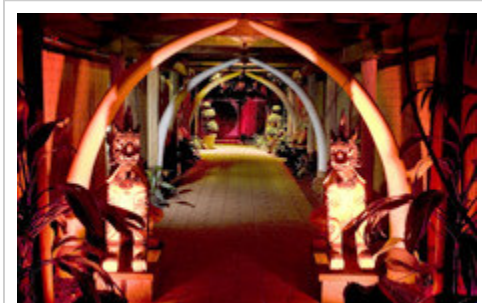
I don't have a problem with this. No one ever criticises those oh-so-quaint little auberges in the heart of France where Maman tells you what you're darned well going to eat tonight, merci; and, let's face it, aren't there times when you should just recognise that the kitchen knows what it does best and let them get on with it?

To be honest, I had little choice. Tom and Sue had been once or twice before – enough for Nobby to know Tom by his first name, which isn't Tom, any more than the other bloke's is Nobby – and they told us we'd get a taste of everything from the set menu.

And they were right. Nicely paced, the evening began with a platter of nibbles. Angel wings, or chicken thighs, stuffed with pork mince and vermicelli, steamed and lightly fried; tiny, handmade spring rolls; light, golden fish cakes.

To supplement the usual dipping sauces, Sue asked for a dish of chopped Chernobyl-heat chillies, plucked from the garden.

As usual, the next round was soup, but this version is lifted a little out of the ordinary. They improve the usual sweet and spicy chicken, mushroom and spiced broth by adding lime juice and lemon grass.



The Secret Thai Garden offers a fresh take on your neighbourhood Thai restaurant. Photo / Babiche Martens

Hot, sour, sweet and spicy soup, they call it.

We enjoyed mains such as prawns, stir-fried in the wok with soya bean and chilli paste, cashews and veges and my favourite, green chicken curry. Yes, chicken: none of your flash Ponsonby Thai duck with grapes in red curry here.

Last post was "our chef's special traditional Thai dessert". Instead, Sue suggested fruit and out came a platter piled with mango, melon, pineapple, grapes. Fresh. Cleansing. Simply sliced, not carved into little rosebuds.

We finished the last of our BYO wine (there's a small wine list and a better beer selection) and the tables were turned. Tom and Sue asked me what I thought.

I thought it was a good night out. The atmosphere, the service and fresh ingredients. Thai simply cooked, subtly improved, tastier and lighter than I've paid much, much more for closer to the city.

**Address:** 25 Station Rd, Otahuhu

**Phone:** (09) 276 3093

**Open:** Mon-Sat from 6pm

**Cuisine:** Thai

**From the menu:** Handmade fish cakes; sour, sweet and spicy chicken and mushroom soup; wok-cooked prawns with soya bean and chilli paste

**Vegetarian:** Ask your waitress

**Wine:** BYO, limited house selection

Web: <http://www.secretthaigarden.co.nz/>

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