

Secret garden enthralls

By: HELEN PERRY | Thursday, 23 February 2012

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INNOVATIVE: *Several dining 'rooms' add to the intrigue.*

Group dining can prove a challenge when seeking a venue that offers ambience, intimacy, good food and prices that most people can afford.

But one place that combines the lot and literally takes one to 'another place' leaps to mind. Secret Thai Garden opened in Otahuhu more than 10 years ago and remains at the top of its game.

We recently chose this magic spot for 10 of us and had one of those lovely evenings where the conversation is easy, the service excellent and the food provided a range of flavours to suit all.

Initially, our first thought was to choose an Indian restaurant for our Indian guests.

However, because I wanted them to experience a very different setting and I also knew they enjoyed Thai food, Secret Thai Garden it was.

What's more, I did relish the puzzled looks on their faces when I said we were heading for Otahuhu. I knew they were trying to think of which venue I could have chosen over the many fine restaurants in our own area.

Strange, really, because, after a decade, this restaurant is well known to some, yet still remains a 'secret' to others.

And come the night of our dinner date our guests certainly were surprised. They had no expectation of what they would encounter behind a nondescript wall on Station Rd – first the

traditional Thai entranceway, followed by an enchanting boardwalk which winds around, passing lights, water features and art works to the leafy, semi al fresco restaurant which is, indeed, a secret garden.

Owned by Nobby Clark and his wife Aranya (known to many customers as Tommy), the restaurant sprung from the couple's years in Thailand and their desire to bring an authentic Thai dining experience to New Zealand.



EXOTIC: The hidden world of Secret Thai Garden never fails to fascinate. Photos supplied.

Today, the setting with its beautiful, out-door teak furniture, palm trees, bure-style covered dining, lush, landscaped gardens and sculptures, remains quite extraordinary.

While Secret Thai Garden has many loyal regulars from all over the city it is, of course, perfect for special celebrations such as weddings as well as corporate entertaining and for smaller groups such as ours.

Although it is fully licensed, we took advantage of the BYO wine option and had planned to order the banquet menu but on perusing the regular menu we finally decided each couple should order a dish and then we would double the quantity so as to have enough for everyone.

Between us we ordered a couple of vegetarian tofu dishes, a mix of curries and stir fries (no beef) and an extra of Pad Thai noodles. But first we started with a large platter of vegetarian and poultry-based entrées.

The food was tasty and generous but if I were honest, we were all talking so much, it wasn't a night for close examination of every mouthful.

Instead, we tucked in with gusto, laughed, talked and celebrated the happy wedding (just days earlier) of one couple in our party who were set to return to England. I have to say that the staff at Secret Thai Garden really made our night. They were attentive and readily accommodated special requests.

We were almost the last to leave, but there was never any pressure for us to pack up and go. Instead, even though it was late, we were warmly offered deserts but we were all much too replete to manage another course.

When it comes to ambience, you don't get much better than Secret Thai Garden and even when you have eaten there several times, it can still take one by surprise making it the kind of secret you just want to share.