

# SPIRIT HOUSE NEWSLETTER

## AND THE WINNER IS:

The Queensland floods earlier this year highlighted how vulnerable we all are to the forces of Nature.

Lives lost, homes destroyed, businesses and farmers ruined, highway traffic halted.

The Spirit House staff decided to assist the flood victims with a raffle-to-beat-all-raffles: a trip for two to Thailand on one of the Spirit House Tag-along Tours.

The owners donated return Bangkok airfares with Qantas, plus the 4 day tour cost. The waiters dug deep and raised enough to cover 5 nights boutique hotel accommodation.

Our clients dug even deeper and overwhelmed us with their generosity.

In three weeks, 95 tickets were sold generating \$9500 for the Premier's Flood Appeal. The winning ticket, purchased by Ben and Ari Patten from Brisbane, was sold the night before the cut-off date. Ben and Ari couldn't believe their luck, especially as it was



Helen Brierty presents Ben and Ari Patten with the grand prize.

their first visit to Spirit House and they have never visited Thailand.

The events of those horrific months remind us how dependent we are on each other.

Empty shelves in the fresh section of the supermarkets, chefs despairing because there was no produce available for each day's menu - or it had to be flown from Sydney at exorbitant cost. As owners, we worried how long we could pay wages when there were few clients and even fewer fresh supplies.

In short, these catastrophic floods affected so many people in such a variety of ways. They were a dramatic reminder of how closely we are all connected. From the farmer, to the truck driver, to the chef, the waiter and finally to the diner - we all need each other.

We'd like to thank the Spirit House generous clients who purchased tickets to help total strangers rebuild their lives. The real winners of this raffle are not Ben and Ari, but the flood victims we were able to assist in some small way and to let them know we cared.



Peter Brierty draws the winning ticket.

## COOKING SCHOOL

Hands-on cooking classes, a great way to make new friends and learn new skills.

**Classes:** EVERYDAY FROM 9.30AM TO 2.00PM.  
FRI & SAT. EVENINGS 4.30PM TO 9.00PM.

**Bookings:** SPIRITHOUSE.COM.AU/SCHOOL OR PHONE (07) 5446 8977 (EXT 1)

## RESTAURANT

A small slice of Asia on the doorstep of the Sunshine Coast.

**Lunch:** EVERYDAY FROM NOON.

**Dinner:** WED TO SAT FROM 6PM

## GIFT VOUCHERS

Spirit House Gift Vouchers make the perfect present. Vouchers can be used in the restaurant, cooking school or shop. Go to [spirithouse.com.au/vouchers](http://spirithouse.com.au/vouchers) to order your voucher online or call the office on 07 5446 8977.

## FOOD TOURS

Join us on a tag-along food tour.

[www.spirithouse.com.au/tours](http://www.spirithouse.com.au/tours)

**Vietnam** OCT 30 - NOV 1 2011  
NOV 2 - NOV 4 2011

**Thailand** FEB 15 - FEB 18 2012  
FEB 21 - FEB 24 2012

SPIRIT HOUSE RESTAURANT & COOKING SCHOOL

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# PALM SUGAR

Visit [spirithouse.com.au/movies](http://spirithouse.com.au/movies) to see a short film we made about this article.

## THE NOT SO SWEET LIFE

Westerners have been heading to the sleepy fishing village of Samut Songkram for years. It's off the beaten tourist path now but is famous for two things: palm sugar growers and Chang and Eng Bunker – the original Siamese twins who were discovered in 1829 and exhibited as a curiosity around the world.

Chang and Eng went on to make a great living before settling in the U.S.A, marrying two local sisters and having 21 children between them. When you bear in mind that they were joined at the chest, you can see that things were quite liberal in the Bunker home.

But we're not in a van heading two hours south of Bangkok to find circus attractions or talk about the sex lives of conjoined twins. We've teamed up with Dylan from Bo.lan restaurant in Bangkok to visit two very unique grandmothers/sisters who make palm sugar the traditional way.

There are similarities between palm sugar production and dairy production – especially if your cow is 30 feet in the air and you have to climb a piece of bamboo to milk it. Put that to one side

and, just as in a dairy, every morning and afternoon the palm tree flowers have to be milked.

This involves both of these grandmothers scaling a large piece of bamboo to the top of their coconut trees to collect the tin of sweet sap that has been oozing out overnight. The flower is trimmed with a sharp knife to start the sap flowing again and another tin is tied into place. This process will be repeated later in the afternoon, day after day, year after year.

Dylan discovered these two delightful and, it should be said, athletic grandmothers through a university professor who was studying the traditional farming practices in the area. Dylan uses their palm sugar in Bo.lan. It has a subtly sweet, nutty flavour and silky texture.

Sadly, like many rural industries in Thailand, young people just aren't interested in scraping a living this way, and the children are in the city pursuing less strenuous careers.



Once all the sap has been collected the tins are taken to a shed which houses a tunnel kiln with large holes on top holding three gigantic woks.

The sap is poured into each wok and left to boil away. Impurities are scraped off the top as the liquid reduces. The last two sentences make it sound so easy. To get a

better idea, turn your sauna up high, light a fire in the middle and stand in there for an hour or so. Comfortable? Neither were we!

Once the reduced sap, now a syrup reaches the right consistency, the wok is removed from the heat and aerated with a whisk on a broom handle. Dylan explains that this process helps cool the mixture and starts the crystallation process. The mixture now resembles peanut butter but tastes like smokey fudge. It is then ladled into moulds which will be collected by a wholesaler to be sold in the local market.



Chang & Eng Bunker accomplished the sort of things that most Thai people only dream about today: made a small fortune, emigrated to the USA and married sisters.



Like a ninja, grandma scales a 20' tree and armed with a huge knife, cuts the coconut flower to start the nectar flowing. She's one serious badass.



The clear liquid nectar drips from the cut flower. The flower defends itself with a milky sap that will harden but will be cut off later in the day. Resistance is futile!

# SUGAR

A

## SHORT HISTORY

Around 2500 years ago, Darius was busy bringing democracy, Persian style, to the known world which at that time spread all the way to India.

Along the banks of the Indus river, Darius encountered 'the reed which gives honey without bees'.

Tracing Darius's steps 200 years later, Alexander the Great invaded Asia and carried 'the sacred cane' back to Greece and later Rome.

When the Arabs invaded Persia in the Seventh Century, they took sugar cane home to Egypt, North Africa and Spain.

The Arabs also developed factories for processing the sugar cane juice into crystallised sugar.

And finally, sugar reached Europe with the Christian Crusaders returning from their campaigns in the Holy Lands.

The word 'sugar' comes from the Arabic 'sukkar' which resembles the Persian word 'shakar'.

So sugar spread from India to the West through war and invasion, but was gently introduced to the East through love and compassion - it was Buddhist monks who took sugar cane into China and South East Asia.

Talk about food miles!



Darius loved to travel - with his army. This carved relief shows Darius casually pointing at something in the distance while wiping his feet on the body of a slain local.

# WHY SUGAR IS MORE DANGEROUS THAN A PERSIAN GOD-KING

Apart from the fascinating history of sugar, there's a dark side to sugar's story, commencing in the 1970's.

In 2009, Dr. Robert Lustig gave a 1.5 hour scientific lecture called "Sugar, the Bitter Truth". The video went viral on youtube, over 1 million viewers.

Dr Lustig's expertise is childhood obesity and his basic argument was that a calorie is not a calorie.

In short, your body metabolises 120 calories in 2 slices of bread very differently to 120 calories in a can of soft drink or beer.

For 30 years, the prevailing theory was that high fat diets were the cause of obesity. Overlooked was the fact that Western diets are now much higher in sugar, particularly fructose. To cut Dr. Lustig's long lecture very short, the body uses glucose calories very efficiently (sugar found in bread) but turns fructose calories into fat. The major protagonist is high fructose corn syrup, found in so many processed foods and drinks. Dr. Lustig argues that if you eliminate fructose, you'll reduce the fat - which is why Japanese and the Atkins diets work so well, as they are very low in sugar. His lecture is concerned with more than just 'fat' - he demonstrates how fructose has contributed to the rapid rise in diabetes since the 1970's.

This video will have you looking at sugar in a very different way. The New York Times backed it up with an article arguing that sugar is a toxin/poison causing one of the biggest health crises in the world. Here's a quick link to their article: <http://tiny.cc/zt3m2>

If you'd like to view the original youtube video, this url which will take you about 42 minutes into Dr. Lustig's lecture, which starts with the molecular chemistry explaining how the body breaks down different sugars. <http://tiny.cc/jb4ze>

## EAST MEETS WEST WITH A TWIST

During the March 2011 Spirit House Thai tours, our group dined at David Thompson's new restaurant, 'Nahm' in Bangkok's Metropolitan Hotel.

David continues to raise the culinary bar for all aspiring Thai cuisine chefs. Regional specialities were executed with sophistication and finesse together with a delicate balance of flavours.

Another memorable dining experience was with chef protégés of David, owners of the new Bo.lan

restaurant on Sukhumvit Soi 26. Bo and Dylan both worked with David at his 3 Star London restaurant. Their passion is reviving traditional Thai fresh ingredients - like the sour Som Sa fruit which is so important in dishes like Mee Krob, but is now usually substituted with lime.

It's interesting that two Australian chefs are at the forefront of re-igniting the use of traditional Thai recipes and ingredients in Thailand. A concept which is being snapped up by wealthy Thai locals and tourists alike.

# SPIRIT HOUSES

Visit [spirithouse.com.au/movies](http://spirithouse.com.au/movies) to see a short film we made about this article.

The two spirit houses at Spirit House are looking a little like their ageing owners. Tired, faded with years of wear and tear, plus a few parts are missing (or do we mean 'souvenired'). In fact, our spirit houses are very ragged around the edges - and most certainly past their prime.

So on a recent trip to Bangkok, Helen decided it was time for a spirit house renovation. A sentimental, but practical decision, similar to deciding to replace your comfy old lounge suite, sagging in the middle and decidedly

dated, but which has stood the family in good stead for over 25 years. Time to move on. Out with the old, in with the new. (But don't suggest that to the current owners.)

We head to a spirit house showroom in downtown Bangkok - Helen, son Acland, head chef, Ben and long suffering Thai friend, Suvit, who has been nominated as 'negotiator'.

Helen, being a woman, focuses on colour and style. Acland and Ben, being young guys, worry about camera angles, lighting and will the freeway

traffic interfere with the sound. Suvit, a serious businessman, concerns himself with quality of workmanship and price.

Several hours, (and much video film later), the choice is made, prices agreed, documents signed.

You will see the results mid-winter along the Spirit House pathways. Hope you enjoy Helen's Bangkok retail therapy!



*The master at work: Applying the fiddly finishing touches before painting.*



*The body of the Spirit House is cast from a mould. The filials etc. have to be applied manually.*



*It sucks to be the new, young guy on the job: Every nook and cranny has to be sanded by hand to a smooth finish.*



*Some say, 'You don't pick a Spirit House, a Spirit House picks you.' - they obviously haven't seen this photo. Helen and Suvit choosing the right colour and size for our new Spirit House.*



*Ben checks his exposure and composition - Helen needs to learn to use fill flash.*



*Even Suvit finds it fascinating to see how Spirit Houses are made. In the background are all the filials and other details that make a Spirit House an intricate work of art. No wonder good spirits want to live in these beautiful houses.*

# RESTAURANT

## TAPIOCA PUDDING

with Palm Sugar Sauce

Serves 6–8

Fruits like banana or mango can be served with this pudding and the tapioca takes on the rich caramel flavour from the palm sugar syrup together with the richness of coconut cream.



8 CUPS WATER

1 CUP TAPIOCA OR SAGO

200 GMS DARK PALM SUGAR  
*chopped*

150 MLS WATER

200 MLS THICK COCONUT MILK OR  
CREAM

½ TEASPOON SALT

2 TABLESPOONS FRESH COCONUT,  
*shredded (optional)*

Bring water to the boil and add the tapioca, stirring well to stop the grains clumping together. Simmer until just translucent, about 5 to 10 minutes, then strain, rinsing well under cold water. Divide between serving bowls, then pour over the palm sugar sauce, followed by the coconut sauce. Garnish with shredded coconut.

### TO MAKE PALM SUGAR SAUCE

Combine the chopped palm sugar and water in a saucepan and bring to the boil. Simmer until the sugar has dissolved. Cool before using.

### TO MAKE COCONUT SAUCE:

Gently warm the coconut milk with the salt until dissolved. Cool before using.

## HOT PLATE BOOK Now Available

Last edition, we announced we were publishing a new BBQ recipe book, Hot Plate, which has since been flying off the shelves and from our on-line shop.

Interestingly, apart from the great recipes, the most popular feature is the spiral binding – something that makes mainstream book publishers sneer.

The recipes lie flat and there's no stress on the book spine. Plus the pages are coated so you can wipe off any spills or stains.

By keeping the design so simple we can print Hot Plate at a local business, MBE in Maroochydore, on their Xerox copier. We mention this because Xerox were so impressed with the production quality of the book, they awarded it a prize at their national sales conference. And they ordered copies for all their sales staff as an example of what's possible with good design and some creativity.



## IRON FAIRIES

Here's a lesson for any business, not just restaurants, on how to be successful. In a tiny shop, on a busy Bangkok road, West Australian, Ash Sutton, located a small foundry - yes you read that right - where he makes his Iron fairies. To enter this store is to step into another world. It's dark - coal miner's lamps illuminate the work areas. The fairies are an adjunct to a popular book that Ash wrote while working in the mines in Western Australia. But it's what happens after 6PM that is truly incredible. Ash's tiny shop turns

into Bangkok's trendiest burger and absinthe bar. Customer's pack into this tiny magical space, sitting alongside sewing machines, hammers, fairy dust bottles - it's truly a unique experience.

What really struck home was just how important ART and creativity are to any business's success - they should teach art at business school.

If you're in Bangkok you can visit Iron Fairies at 394 Soi Thonglor, off Sukhumvit Road.

# EXPLORE

An old photo of the original 'Yandina' homestead, restored by the Schmidt family.

## STAY IN LOCAL HISTORY

The thing about the past is that it's all around us in the present - if you care to look!

Just ten minutes drive from Spirit House is Yandina Station. No, not a railway station, but the original cattle station on the Sunshine Coast which, in 1853, encompassed 100,000 acres stretching from the Maroochy River along the coast to Tewantin and inland to Mount Timberwah through to Cooroy, Eumundi, Doonan and Yandina.

The Schmidt family, owners of the property for many years, have lovingly preserved the original buildings - the timber slab homestead, the dairy, creamery and sawmill - complete with all the old tools, drays, gear and paraphernalia used to operate a working cattle property. Recently they have added three stunning two bedroom accommodation units overlooking the former grazing

paddocks, which now feature kangaroos warily feeding at dawn and sunset.

If you are looking for a unique getaway with a difference on the Sunshine Coast (and only 10 minutes drive from Spirit House or the Coolum surf beach) Sally Schmidt has offered Spirit House clients a great deal of \$500 for two nights per couple in her luxury cottages. Offer includes French champagne, farmhouse breakfast provisions, hand made chocolates and local organic skin care products. (Usual rate \$650). Quote 'Spirit House' when booking on 07 5446 6000. Valid for bookings until September 1st, 2011.

[www.yandinastation.com](http://www.yandinastation.com)



## MIX 'N MATCH

In Thai cooking, sweet balances heat. If you have a mouthful of searing hot chilli, sugar will neutralise the burning sensation - not yoghurt, milk, or even beer.

On this point, there are sweeter dry wines which match beautifully with hot Thai dishes, helping to balance the flavours.

On our current menu is a German Balthasar Riesling, which is sweeter than local riesling. Try this wine with the yellow curry of duck because the sweeter wine offsets the spiciness of the chilli in the curry paste. Sure, it's not the sort of wine you'd quaff when you arrive home from work each day, but then again, you don't eat a hot curry daily either.

Wines should be as much an enjoyable taste adventure as the food when dining at Spirit House.

Jess da Costa, our restaurant manager, does a lot of research to find wines which will mix and match with Thai flavours.

Enhance your dining experience by trying wines like an Albarino, Pinot Gris or Gewurtztraminer from Alsace in France - our waiters are trained to help you make an appropriate choice.

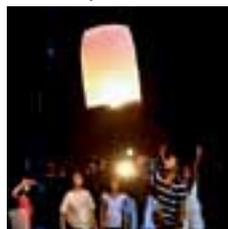
With your dining companions, taste for yourself how sweet balances heat. That's the joy of adventuring with food.

## TAG-ALONG NEW DISCOVERIES

With every Thai tag-along tour it seems we uncover something new to explore. Earlier this year we managed to get caught up in a small Wien Tien ceremony in which people light a small lamp under a paper lantern which floats up in the night sky taking their problems and worries away. Or, as in one case, an unlucky couple's problems got carried into a nearby tree and burst into flames.

One group of tag-alongers were keen to visit more temple ruins in Ayutthaya leading us to discover some seldom visited complexes that will definitely be

on the list for next year's trip. And just maybe, we can see again the mahout washing his elephant as a van of monks drive by.



Tag-along Tour Dates:

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