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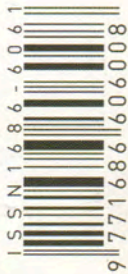
A Living Lifestyle Magazine

## Very Thai

The Contemporary Thai Living Issue

เล่นนี้  
ไทยดี  
มากมาย

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มีเรื่องของคนที่อยู่บนปก  
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## Sunny Day



Philip  
Cornwell-Smith

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## Sunny Day



'I came to Bangkok when I was 28 on a two months tourist visa after I had been backpacking around Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand. I'm 42 now so I've been here for a third of my life.' (laugh) recalled Philip Cornwell-Smith, author of the book 'Very Thai' - which is said to be an eye-opening perspective into the contemporary Thai pop culture. And when asked to show us the place where he thinks is "Very Thai", without the slightest hesitation, he brought us here to Tha Prachan and Tha Tien.

'These two areas are such perfect examples of Thai popular culture that still exists in the city. With many different layers of things occurred in one place. Here you've got very ancient layers and communities along the Chao Phraya River that have been here since the start of Bangkok.'



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And you've got the picture of how the city was built and reshaped. 'My last job in the UK was at TimeOut, the first city listings publisher, where I learnt a lot about precisions and accuracies. So I came from that background of looking minutely at restaurants, museums, sights, all this different things, and finding ways they're related to people that make sense. And I applied that approach to Bangkok.

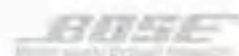
Once or twice I heard foreigners said, 'What right do you have to speak about Thai cultures?' and I said back to them 'Well, do you think Thai people don't have their rights to comment on anywhere in the world?' (laugh) I'd love to have a Thai take on my culture, because I think it could be quite surprising and almost shocking to see how people of a different mindset look at what we do. You can have more knowledge by seeing your own existence from another perspective. Sometime that happens by being an outsider in your own culture.



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My impulse for doing the book "Very Thai" was mainly to explain things that are not explained to outsiders, the everyday things that are so familiar to most of the Thais. And they're often regarded as not being a formal culture. But it's the thing that foreigners see more than anything else. Where do you see the teak buildings or Thai dancers? Those are only minority or occasional things, not how most of the people lived in Thailand.

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What I'm seeing is a transitional culture. Basically it's the modern world hitting the traditional world. A lot of things I put in Very Thai are slowly disappearing and are not archived properly. But they're actually crucial to this land and its people because they're the way Thailand dealt with modernism and they said so much about the attitudes and beliefs of the people.'



OOM asked Philip whether it's those beliefs and attitudes that keep him here for more than a decade.

'I love the positive ways that Thais absorbed everything but with different principles from where the original is. And that is always surprising. Whenever there's a new trend, like green tea, what Thais did to green tea is not what the Japanese will do to green tea. (laugh) But it's delightful. And that's how your food became so interesting. After 14 years here, I still tasted something and it was like 'Ha...another new thing!' (smile)

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Another thing is freedom. Although Thai people are very pressed and they put up with an awful lot, they are very patient to make do with what they have. They have the apparatus to be happy among themselves. And that's a freedom in a way.' We ended our conversations and started walking to the riverside. Through the evening crowd in the square, one can see the juxtapositions of the old and the new world. Layers and layers of modern activities pile up on the pavements and small streets branching off the shophouses along the river. In the warm evening sunlight, a westerner is looking across the reflection of the sky that dances before his eyes in the Chao Phraya River and the Thai society we're all living in.

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