



top: No pots? No terrace? No problem. This enterprising house in Bangkok Noi hangs plants in old radios. JG

above: Fish at doorways bring good fortune. Here, plants and ponds come in terra cotta dragon jar, which come in many sizes, also with lids for fresh water storage. JG

facing page top: Informal furniture for people in the informal economy. Benches made from old wood are common in places like this Thonburi canal bank. PCS

facing page bottom: Vendors can create temporary dining spaces with a spongy, foldable mat and a low table. PCS

hatchlings.” People often kill cobras and vipers, but may take them to the venom farm. The snake centre in Lad Prao collects up to 600 constrictors a year. Putting them in national parks, however, can unbalance the ecology. Hundreds of snakes dumped just inside one park caused farm animals and pets to vanish from an adjacent village.

The previous abundance of common land – and the historic absence of formal gardens – partly explains the lack of city parks, or even slivers of shade where a bench might be nice. Lumpini Park remained unique in Bangkok for decades after its founding in 1925. Despite the recent sprouting of parks big and small, many are temporary ‘Pocket Parks’ on vacant lots, like the one where the Bangkok Art & Culture Centre now stands. Trees literally can be bought in bunches from markets, with several trunks strapped to a pick-up truck for under \$20 each. A viable park can take root within a year. But by the time it’s mature, the landowner probably wants the plot back, so the park’s trees disappear. It’s that nonchalant.

Urban green space was taken for granted until lost. A campaign by young Thais called Big Trees Project has begun to catalogue Bangkok’s mature trees and raise awareness to preserve them. House owners used to sell edges of their garden for shophouses; now they’re selling the entire plot for towers. Developers typically obliterate all the vegetation from a site before covering it with concrete. And, fortunately, plant pots.

Furniture for Fun

Reinventing the chair – and Thai ways of sitting

What to make of a restaurant diner sitting on a chair cross-legged? Or of a middle-class family gathering on the rug in front of their nice new sofa? Not all Thais seem comfortable in Western seats. Given no chair tradition aside from pulpits and thrones, Thai seats often surprise. The sides of many *sala* (pavilions) form a graceful seating ledge from slats of wood, creating the undulating lyre shape found throughout Thai crafts. Similar flowing lines reappear in recycled furniture that utilises rubber tyres, tree roots or parts of a buffalo cart. A more improvised kind of seating furnishes the street, where the poor construct benches from off-cuts of wood, foam and vinyl.

Thais historically have preferred to sit on the floor, so some furniture creates a kind of platform for sitting. Wooden benches and sofas often come deep and broad enough to sit fully on top of with legs tucked back beside the thighs, providing a more comfy mode of ground-style seating. Stools with six-inch legs are a clean resting perch while squatting – another favoured posture. Thais can balance for ages while folded into the most

