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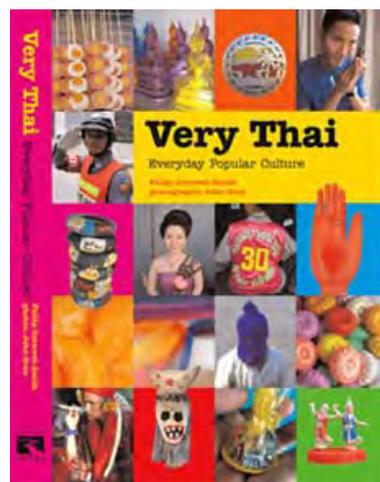
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Recorder Read: "Very Thai – Everyday Popular Culture"

BangkokRecorder | 31.08.2006

Forget Lonely Planet, *Very Thai – Everyday Popular Culture* takes readers on a far more in-depth foray into Thai culture, one you won't see on the Tourism Authority of Thailand's website.



This techni-coloured book is packed with explanations of modern-day phenomena, ranging from the everyday to the cosmic. For foreigners, it answers a thousand puzzling curiosities, from why tangled webs of electrical wire are proudly displayed as symbols of modernity to how whisky tables reinforce social hierarchy. Thai people themselves seem to have a more bemused attitude to *Very Thai*, delighted that such recognizable objects are the subject of a best-seller.

Before casting cynicism over the English author of a book called *Very Thai*, consider the detached and non-judgmental approach the writer, Philip Cornwel-Smith, has adopted in presenting popular Thai culture. Sometimes it takes an outsider to see value in the simple things.

What better perspective than a 12-year resident of Bangkok and founding editor of Metro magazine? We sat down with the British-born Philip to discuss sex, tattoos and rock 'n roll...

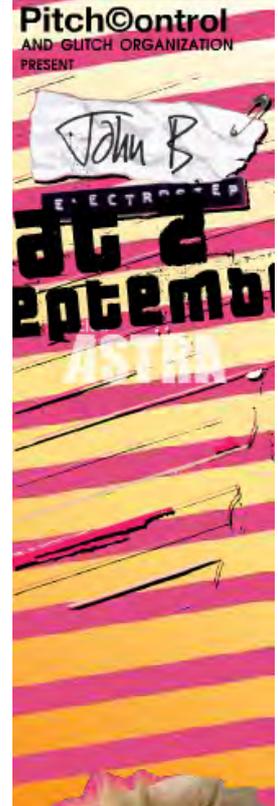
BR: Mercifully, you seem to steer clear of hackneyed explorations into the Thai sex industry, was that a conscious decision?

P: The point was to focus on stuff that people hadn't looked at it... Nothing has been more exhaustively and exhaustingly covered than the sex industry here. I don't pretend it's not there... but I talk about it in a very matter-of-fact way. Nothing in this book is about sensationalism. I'm absolutely certain that if I had written about it as a chapter heading, there'd all kinds of hysterical, sensationalist writing all about that chapter and ignoring the rest of it. And with Bangkok Inside Out, that's exactly what happened. There's a lot in *Bangkok Inside Out* that's worth looking at, but the publicity was all about when it tackled Patpong... it was very unfortunate. I don't think that book merited banning.

BR: Yes, your book seems to be a winner among Thais and farang, how did you manage to keep this book on the shelves here?

P: I had [the book] rigorously checked. It was published by a Thai publisher and any of the traditional subjects went through several traditional experts from universities. Also, it was edited by Alex Kerr, who is internationally recognised as an expert on South East Asian culture... There were a lot of filters to stop making any crass errors.

It's a question of approach... I was really aware when I was writing this book that I just have to present things in a way that was respectful, and not looking down, ever... There's no excuse for condescension, there never is. People don't like condescending people, and they don't like condescending



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