

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

<http://www.thespec.com/article/596876>

[Close]

DeLuxe looks to the future

The long-closed diner, a Dundas landmark with Hollywood appeal, reopens as a Thai eatery this fall.

JON WELLS

The Hamilton Spectator

DUNDAS (Jul 9, 2009)

The frozen-in-time DeLuxe Restaurant, a monument to another era, has long been the source of mystery for visitors in town who stop by to peek in the front door. Does the place on King West with the retro neon sign and soda shop interior ever actually open?

The answer has always been no, but that's about to change. The DeLuxe, the sequel, premieres this fall. The restaurant, dormant for 35 years, is being renovated and receiving new life in October as a Thai eatery.

Not that there hasn't been activity at the DeLuxe over the years. Its throwback small-town America diner look has long been coveted by Hollywood as a set for movies and TV shows. Movie companies sometimes paid \$7,000 a day to film there; Robin Williams arrived in 2005 to shoot Man of the Year, as well as Mischa Barton for Closing the Ring, and The Incredible Hulk's crew set up two years ago. The West Wing TV series shot there, with actor Jimmy Smits having ice cream inside.

With the arrival of the new place, which will be called Bangkok Spoon DeLuxe, some will lament the end of the monument. Others will celebrate that the DeLuxe now becomes the rare story of a historic family-owned retail landmark being reborn rather than completely eliminated.

It opened in 1940, owned by Du and Sue Wong. Sue designed it herself, installed 18 wooden booths, five spinning stools and air conditioning -- a luxury that was trumpeted on the sign out front (along with "Chinese foods" and soda bar). Back in the day of the powder-blue menu, you could get a T-bone steak, milkshake and "french fried" for \$2.70.

Du died in the late 1970s, and while Sue continued living above the DeLuxe, she never operated but never shut down the restaurant, keeping it as is, a shrine to her husband, the pop rack still stocked, boxes of cigars and other dime store items behind the counter.

She put plants in the window and kept it in darkness but absent a Closed sign in the door.

Sue, who was famously reclusive but also beloved in Dundas, died in 2003 four months shy of her 104th birthday. Her four kids live in Canada and Hong Kong. Her grandson, John Paul Yuen, the executor, oversaw the place, and encouraged Hollywood to come. He has a photo album with pictures of himself on sets inside the DeLuxe with famed director Richard Attenborough and also Mischa Barton. (He didn't know who she was at first, he asked the starlet if she would take a photo of him with the director and she happily agreed.)

John Paul could never sell the restaurant, but has long searched for the right tenant and was approached by about 100 prospects over the years. He finally found the one in a Toronto restaurateur who goes by the nickname Neil (his full name is Teeradech Pramauntanyatath).

Neil, John Paul is convinced, is the kind of man his grandmother would want to run a new business in the old DeLuxe.

"Neil is old school, sincere and kind, the type of person we were looking for. And I've tasted his food, it's fantastic. This will be an exciting place for Dundas."

Neil had been looking to expand on his two Toronto Thai eateries, but in a quieter location. He searched through the GTA, St. Catharines and London, and when he visited Dundas, he was hooked.

"The people were the most friendly there, it is such a peaceful place."

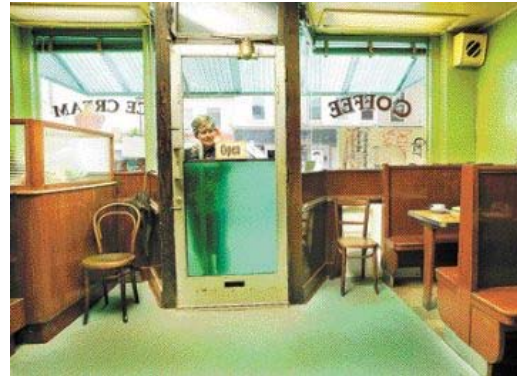
Neil will put in a new floor, knock down a wall to make it bigger, replace the narrow booths that were a cosy fit in the 1940s but are cramped today. He is bringing in new furniture all the way from Thailand, including a 2.5-metre running water fountain.

But he is also determined to meld the new and the old. Bangkok Spoon DeLuxe is a spinoff name of the Bangkok Spoon he owns in Toronto. And a few items on the menu will sport the DeLuxe tag as well.

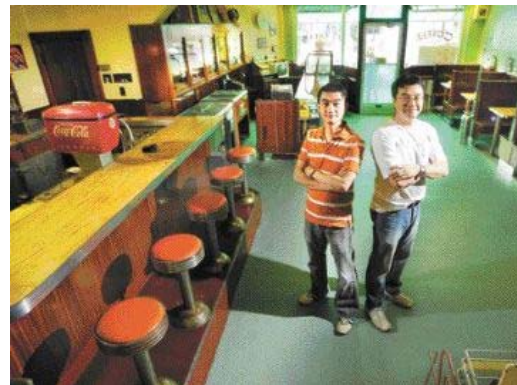
"The name means so much to the people of Dundas," Neil said.

The rusty neon sign, meanwhile, is the largest store sign in Dundas because it predates modern bylaws. In order for Neil to keep the size of the old DeLuxe sign, he believes he will need to refurbish it without actually taking it down. And that is his intention. (An official with the city's building department says they will need to review the plans to see the extent of the refurbishing, to determine if the sign can remain.)

The lease is still under negotiation but will run between 10 and 15 years. As for the memorabilia inside, an auction will be held Monday at the restaurant. John Paul will keep a few things -- family photos, and he had to have the fish and chips sign and the milkshake sign. Neil hopes to keep the jukebox in the new place.



Ron Albertson, the Hamilton Spectator



Photos by Ron Albertson, the Hamilton Spectator, Hamilton Spectator File Photos



Ron Albertson, the Hamilton Spectator



Hamilton Spectator File Photos hamilton spectator file photos

Those who hoped that the original DeLuxe would never change will be upset. A King Street resident phoned The Spectator, aghast that the DeLuxe will be "destroyed" and "guttled." But Stan Nowak, president of the Dundas Valley Historical Society, says it's time for a new start.

"It's time to make it a viable business again, and ideally preserve the heritage. It all sounds like a nice tie-in."

John Paul Yuen does feel a slight tug at the heart that his grandmother's shrine will have a new operator, even though he's thrilled that it's Neil. After all, it's like seeing your first house occupied by someone else. John Paul lived over top of the DeLuxe as a baby and until he was four years old.

"But for Dundas," said John Paul, "it's a nice opportunity to have a beautiful restaurant, bring people here to enjoy great food, instead of just peeking in the window."

jwells@thespec.com

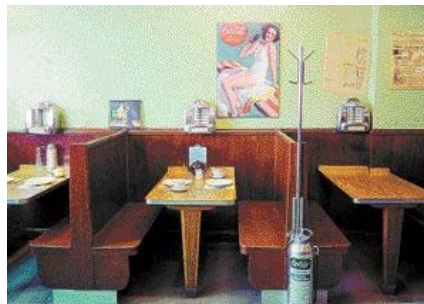
905-526-3515



Hamilton Spectator File Photos

thespec.com

<http://www.thespec.com/article/596876>



Ron Albertson



© Copyright 2007 Metroland Media Group Ltd. All rights reserved. The reproduction, modification, distribution, transmission or republication of any material from www.thespec.com is strictly prohibited without the prior written permission of Metroland Media Group Ltd.

