



Mondo - Mek and his world view between Art, Design, Tradition and Modernity

Dal nostro corrispondente a Bangkok - 03 lug 2023 (Prima Notizia 24) Interview with Kanakom Chuprajitt (Mek) founder and owner of Charoenkrung Bar & Bistro, an absolutely special location that best expresses the conjunction of traditional Chinese art and style with Thailand and the contemporary

world.

Bangkok's China Town teems with life, sounds, and energy. The industriousness of the Chinese who have variously intermarried with the Thais over decades and centuries is the main feature of this area of the Thai megacity, a city moreover referred to as "the city that never sleeps." This District is called "Yaowarat" and it too sleeps very little. Charoenkrung Road is the artery that runs through the District, and throughout its length it declines in the styles that come one after the other: you find, thus, old buildings, with doors and windows with wooden frames, stylings of a past now sunk in Time and more modern buildings, showing that concrete has made its way especially from the 1950s until today. Street food vendors, amulet stores, elderly people selling used watches, stalls selling Lottery tickets, the ever-present 7Eleven stores, lacquer-red paper lanterns, and small alleys (they are called Soi) where the sunlight becomes dim and where they crowd, mass, stores and small stores where everything, practically everything, is sold. In recent times, more and more new locations are opening up, especially run or owned by young entrepreneurs full of vitality and energy, featuring a fusion of styles and designs from various corners of the world. The impression one gets, is that this area of Bangkok is transforming -step by step- like a piece of Paris but declined in Asian language, especially Thai. At times it feels like a Parisian Seine Left Bank vibe, modern locations, bars, cafes, and restaurants where you can have brunch, lunch, or dine with friends and listen to live music. Mek (Kanakom Chuprajitt), 24, is one such young Thai man who decided to invest his whole self in this very special venture. When was Charoenkrung Bar & Bistro born? Basically, the bar officially opened just before Covid, of course no one could have foreseen what would happen shortly thereafter, i.e., the mandatory and strictly regulated closures, the prohibition of alcohol mixing, and the hours of opening and closing to the public. It was a dark, sad period full of doubt. Certain traces of that historical phase are still evident today. The habits of Thais have changed, although seemingly everything is back to the way it was before the outbreak, in fact, certain habits induced by that context such as being able to order food via app and having it delivered to your home, or choosing a newly produced movie with dedicated channels on request, without having to stand in lines at the box office, buy tickets, are conveniences that are certainly appreciable on the one hand but -at the same time- indicate that certain freedoms of movement that were more carefree afforded to us before Covid, are still to be achieved today, at least are still to be achieved at those levels. Even life outside the home, let's say, what used to characterize

Thais the most not only in Bangkok, is more limited today: you go to work, after the work cycle is over you go home, friends you hang out with mostly on weekends. If opening before Covid was a fluke, deciding to keep the place and wait for better times was an act of courage and hope. How does Charoenkrung Road Bar & Bistro characterize itself? In fact, this space was formerly a traditional Chinese-style home furniture store. My mother is of Chinese descent and my father is Thai, they are the perfect example of what is the spirit that animates this District of the city. The traditional Chinese furniture store was my gateway into interest in Art in general, Design, knowledge of tradition and projection towards modernity. The wall mural paintings made by an artist friend of mine are precisely the conjunction of ancestral and ancient figures meeting contemporary stylistic features. They are flanked by tables, chairs, carved wood panels, red-colored rice paper lamps, all typical traditional Chinese, but the glue that holds it all together is the look toward the contemporary world and the union of Chinese and Thai languages. My mother works in the kitchen, directing and managing it, the dishes that are on our menu are also in a mixed style between Chinese and Thai but there is no shortage of ample references to the international dishes that are most in demand even by the people who come here from the various corners of the Planet, just as they are also in demand by the curious Thais who come to Charoenkrung Bar & Bistro. Same goes for the cocktails and spirits, which is also somewhere between local and international tastes. Charoenkrung Bar & Bistro tells very clearly how fast Bangkok and the whole of Thailand is changing. The coexistence of Tradition and Modernity does not hide the speed of progress and the desire to project into the future by following its own path. Yes, actually, it is like a summary of what is happening in terms of evolution and development here at home. The Western world, it is still an important reference point, in various areas, in Technology, in Art and Design, just to give examples. Here one admires how much Art has been expressed in Italy, France and other nations. But the youthful, forward-looking spirit here in Southeast Asia, in Thailand, in Bangkok in particular, seems to run with far greater speed. Actually, those who love Art are not subjected to the barriers of Time, those who come here to Charoenkrung Bar & Bistro are lovers of Art, live Music, good living, chasing a relaxed version of being together in good company. Charoenkrung Bar & Bistro, Charoen Krung Rd, Khwaeng Talat Noi, Khet Samphanthawong, Krung Thep Maha Nakhon, 10100

di Francesco Tortora Lunedì 03 Luglio 2023