# A Favorite Thai Place Adds Location to Its Menu

Thursday, November 20, 2008

I first heard about Spice Cuisine from Baristaville's sign king J.C. Aviles in early 2007. At that time, the little Thai restaurant in an out-of-the-way Bloomfield location was positioning itself as a place where you could get Thai food and Italian. Since then, the Italian side of the menu has been abandoned, but Spice has become, both for my real and my Baristanet families, one of our favorite places to go out to eat in Baristaville. It's my Cheers, and also the place where we said goodbye to Katie before her grand trip out West.

Let's stipulate that the food, and the prices are excellent. It wouldn't be a favorite place otherwise. But the main attraction is the restaurant's owner Sheree (aka Ruenboon Sarabhayavanija). Lesson to any entrepreneur, food or otherwise: the secret ingredient in any new enterprise is connecting with your customers. She does it so well that my family has long called Spice "Sheree's place," as in "Do you want to go to Sheree's place tonight?"

Well, good news: Sheree has a new place, and it's not in a dark corner of Bloomfield. She's moved, metaphorically speaking, from Baltic Avenue to Boardwalk.

This is the scene that people who went to the Tony Bennett concert at the Wellmont saw last night when they got out of the concert at 9:30. A warm little restaurant done in reds and ochres: fancier that Sheree's old place, but still down to earth. Spice II is located at 399 Bloomfield Ave., in the spot formerly occupied by Pinatas, and before that, Deja Vu. Last night she filled it with friends, family and business acquaintances. J.C. Aviles, who is making Spice II's new sign, was there. So was her new landlord.

Prices are a little bit higher than at the original Spice, but they are still a steal by Montclair standards. Most standard Thai dishes (we were served a delicate Ginger Chicken and a robust Massaman Curry) are $10 with chicken, $12 with shrimp. Soft-

shell crab (prepared with either green curry, basil sauce or garlic) is the most expensive thing on the menu at $18. Pad Thai and other noodle dishes are $9 with chicken, beef or pork, $10 with shrimp. You also don't want to miss Sheree's appetizers, especially the curry puffs, and desserts. And the Thai custard is comfort food that will get you through any recession.

Of course, the best addition to the menu IMHO is the Barista Soup. This is a somewhat spicy broth-based vegetable and seafood soup, which is as delicious as it is healthy. It's $7.50 and good for a full meal, at least for somebody watching their calories. Of course, you'll blow the diet if you decide to redeem your coupon and add some curry puffs. That's up to you.

*Spice II is at 399 Bloomfield Ave., Montclair. 973.509.2110/2117. Open for dinner seven days a week and lunch every day except Monday*