



CLASSIC THAI DISHES GET A NEW SPIN AT CHEF IAN KITTICHAJ'S ISSAYA SIAMESE CLUB.



WORKS AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM'S NEW GALLERY HAVE INSPIRED ARCHITECT BILL BENSLEY.

# BANGKOK'S FINEST

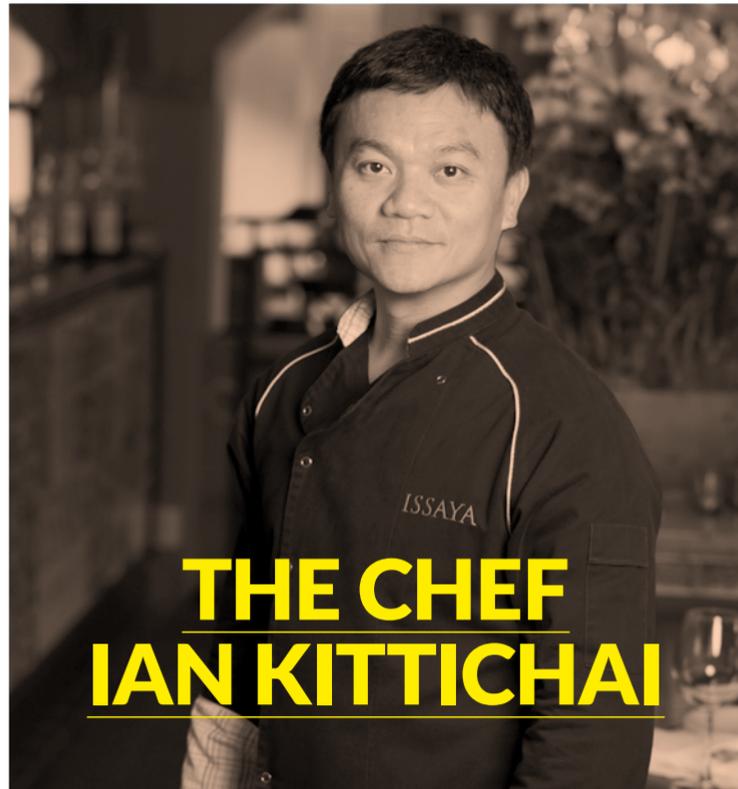
Who better to decipher one of Asia's most dynamic cities than some of its most influential creatives? Renowned for their architectural, culinary and style expertise, Thailand's movers and shakers spill the beans on what's hot in Bangkok.

STORY Diana Hubbell PHOTOS Aaron Joel Santos



IT'S HAPPENED TO BE A CLOSET IS DESIGNER PIM SUKHAHUTA'S TOP HANGOUT SPOT.

One of Thailand's most famous chefs started out selling curry from a pushcart, before honing his craft at restaurants abroad. In 2011, Ian Kittichai launched Issaya Siamese Club ([issaya.com](http://issaya.com)), now one of Thailand's most lauded fine-dining establishments. He has since opened restaurants in New York, Singapore and beyond. He has also authored several cookbooks and is a host of 3 Chefs, 1 City on Asian Food Channel.



## THE CHEF IAN KITTICHAJ

“Thai cuisine is vast and multilayered, in its flavours and history – Thais are proficient at adapting culinary influences and ingredients from the Persian, Indian and Chinese. An example of this can be found at Nahm ([comohotels.com/metropolitanbangkok](http://comohotels.com/metropolitanbangkok)), where chef David Thompson breathes new life into traditional recipes.

“But some of my favourite restaurants in Bangkok serve international cuisine. Chef Goro Takatsu uses only high-quality ingredients at his Japanese restaurant Kom-Ba-Wa ([kombawa.com](http://kombawa.com)). When I'm there, I always ask whether fresh fish from Japan is available and request a selection of sushi or sashimi. The restaurant uses rice from Hokkaido, which has a particularly creamy texture. The fresh, house-made pasta at La Bottega di Luca ([labottega.name](http://labottega.name)) is delicious – order the classic tagliatelle with beef bolognese – while the Oyster Bar ([theoysterbarbangkok.com](http://theoysterbarbangkok.com)) has an amazing selection of sustainable seafood.

“For drinks after dinner, Hyde & Seek has a great outdoor deck separated from the street by a wall. DJs play lounge music here on most evenings. I like its refreshing St Tropez Smash, which is garnished with

fresh passionfruit. A.R Sutton & Co Engineers Siam ([ironballsgin.com](http://ironballsgin.com)) looks tiny from the outside, like a glass and brass greenhouse. But when you're inside, it's like stepping into an antique jewel box. J. Boroski Mixology ([josephboroski.com](http://josephboroski.com)), a hidden bar in the Thonglor area, is quirky with surprising touches, such as big jewel beetles incorporated into its decor. What makes these places so special is the overall experience – from quality ingredients and expert mixology, to service and ambience.

“If you're looking for food that's a little more authentic, explore Chinatown at night when the food stalls are abundant – it feels like you are stepping back in time. For travellers who want a variety of street food in one place, Eathai ([centralembassy.com/eathai](http://centralembassy.com/eathai)) on the lower level of Central Embassy is clean, air-conditioned and has stalls from well-known street-food vendors like Hoy Tod Chaolay. It serves the most amazing Thai oyster omelette – crisp on the edges and soft in the centre, with oysters, bean sprouts, spring onions and white pepper. Also, Or Tor Kor market ([Kamphaeng Phet Road](http://Kamphaeng Phet Road), opposite Chatuchak market) is open every day, with stalls and places to sit and eat.”

Hyde & Seek's Whiskey Rebellion, a cocktail containing vermouth, absinthe and rosemary.



“Thai cuisine is vast and multilayered in its flavours and history – Thais are proficient at adapting culinary influences.”



Pretty tiles line the walls of Issaya Siamese Club.



Issaya Siamese Club's baby back pork ribs with chilli glaze is served on a bed of hot coals.

Issaya Siamese Club's dining room could be mistaken for someone's stylish home.



Kom-Ba-Wa serves Japanese dishes in a boldly modern space.



Tuck into pork noodles from street stalls in Chinatown.





Lifestyle complex The Commons is the new It spot for hipsters.



Lobster pasta with white wine from It's Happened to be a Closet.

“These days, Thai fashionistas are fearless. Don't be surprised if you spot a head-to-toe runway look or an eclectic mix of styles.”



Quaint bric-a-brac can be found at It's Happened to be a Closet.



The original wing of Bangkok's Mandarin Oriental is a charming colonial building.



A pair of earrings from Sukhahuta's label, Sretsis.



Sretsis' elegant flagship boutique at Central Embassy.



Bamboo Bar serves Thai-inspired cocktails.

After an adolescence spent sketching designs and sewing prom dresses, in 2002, Pim Sukhahuta and her sisters Kly and Matina founded Sretsis ([sretsis.com](http://sretsis.com)). One of Bangkok's most successful fashion labels, it offers flirty, feminine creations that have won fans such as Beyonce Knowles and Katy Perry. Though Pim regularly jets to countries like Bhutan to seek inspiration for her collections, the Thai capital remains her home base.



## THE DESIGNER PIM SUKHAHUTA

“In recent years, Bangkok's fashion scene has become more dynamic and diverse. These days, Thai fashionistas are fearless. Don't be surprised if you spot a head-to-toe runway look or an eclectic mix of styles – there are no rules here. The current hipster hangout is The Commons ([thecommonsbkk.com](http://thecommonsbkk.com)), a lifestyle complex with small speciality shops and restaurants. Bangkok's emerging design talent can be found at Siam Center ([siamcenter.co.th](http://siamcenter.co.th)) and for more underground labels, there's Chatuchak market ([chatuchak.org](http://chatuchak.org)), where you'll find unique crafts and vintage items. Another must-visit is unique restaurant and boutique, It's Happened to be a Closet ([itshappenedtobeacloset.wordpress.com](http://itshappenedtobeacloset.wordpress.com)). Its eye-popping wallpaper and quirky curios make you feel like you're dining at a house of an eccentric artist.

Don't leave without trying its lobster pasta and poached pear sponge cake – my favourite dishes. “When the stylish set wants to party, they head to Le Cafe des Stagiaires (142/21 Soi Suksawittaya, Sathorn 12, Silom, Bangrak, Tel: 66 81 207 3077). The place exudes cool, with an arty decor of retro furniture and rock n' roll photographs by British photojournalist Martin Parr. But whenever I'm looking for a touch of old Bangkok glamour, I go to Mandarin Oriental's Bamboo Bar ([mandarinoriental.com/bangkok](http://mandarinoriental.com/bangkok)) for jazz and fancy cocktails. “Meanwhile, Tep Bar (Room 69-71, Soi Nana, Charoen Krung Road, Tel: 66 98 467 2944), in the old town, is rising in popularity among artists and local hipsters. Here, you'll find live traditional Thai music, local street food served in a refined way, and a wide range of yadong (herbal Thai whisky).”

“Visit Wat Pho at four or five in the morning, before tourists arrive. Seeing the pagodas and forms of the rooftops at this time of day inspires a sense of peace and serenity.”

## BUILT ON SPIRITUALITY

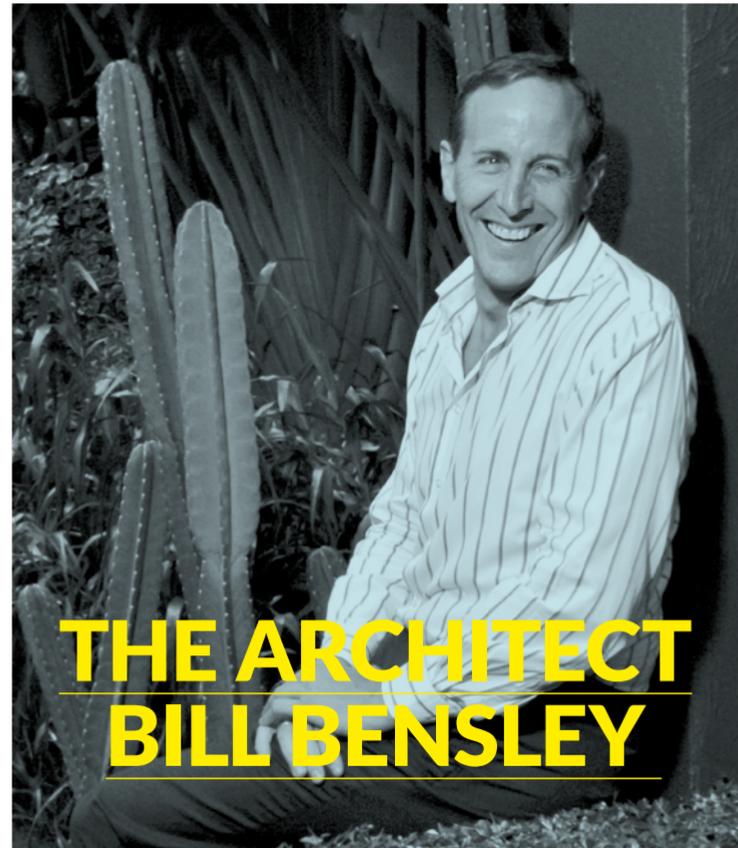
One of Thailand's greatest living architects, **LEK MATHAR BUNNAG** is known for creating buildings that both celebrate Thailand's ancient heritage and embody contemporary innovation. In 2012, he was recognised as a National Artist of Thailand.

“To know our ancestors could do great things, and that we can do great things of our own, should make us proud to be Thai. However, if we get stuck in the past, it becomes the enemy of creativity. I try to be aware of my attachment to history, and this awareness has allowed my architecture to become freer. We must train ourselves to truly look at things and to experience and confront monuments by ourselves. To that end, I often seek serenity in temples.

“I like to go to Wat Suthat (*Bamrung Muang Road*) and Wat Pho (*Maharat Road*; pictured). Visit the latter at four or five in the morning, before tourists arrive. Seeing the pagodas and forms of the rooftops at this time of day inspires a sense of peace and serenity. These feelings give me a sense of place and let me know I'm in Bangkok. When an architect does a good job of creating an urban space, it can stir a sense of identity and belonging.

“If you have time, there are a few sacred spaces in Thailand that never fail to make me feel good. A one-and-a-half-hour drive from Bangkok, the city of Ayutthaya has roughly 500 temples, and tourists go to only about 10 of them. In Phitsanulok province (a 50-minute flight from the capital), visit Phra Buddha Chinnarat, the most beautiful Buddha image in Thailand. Farther afield, Wat Si Chum in Sukhothai makes you feel as if you were born 500 years ago, and I love to climb up to Doi Suthep in Chiang Mai to watch the sunset.”

Famed for creating lushly decorated resorts such as The Leela Palace Udaipur, Phuket's Indigo Pearl and The Siam in Bangkok, American architect Bill Bensley has become a leader in the design world since setting up shop in Thailand more than two decades ago. From the Bensley headquarters in the Thai capital, he oversees a team of artisans, landscapers, architects and interior designers, who bring his whimsical visions to life.



## THE ARCHITECT BILL BENSLEY

“A major trend in Bangkok design now is the rustic warehouse and loft style. We’re seeing lots of exposed filament bulbs, concrete, steel and ferns. Unfortunately, it’s often done with new materials made to look weathered and old. The result is a somewhat inauthentic feel. The secret to getting this right is using antiques and reclaimed materials, which is precisely what we did with The Siam ([thesiamhotel.com](http://thesiamhotel.com)).

“In 2007, the luxury hotel was a seafood restaurant and parking lot. Now, guests walk in and say to me, ‘Geez, Bill, you’ve done a great job renovating this old building.’ The creative director, Kriss Sukosol, asked us to build a 39-room, all-suite resort on the Chao Phraya River, which would fit into the 150-plus-year-old neighbourhood. Kriss loves antiques – as do I – so we used them in the design. If you visit the hotel, make time to look at the rare books in the screening room.

“One of my favourite buildings in Bangkok is Scala Theatre (*Rama 1 Road, Wang Mai, Pathumwan, Tel: 662 251 2861*). I like it because of the attention given to

decoration. Built in 1967, it’s a great example of taking modernist architecture – which was popular worldwide at the time – and making it uniquely Thai by using natural motifs such as lotus flowers and water lilies, much like the ones used to decorate temples.

“For a more contemporary view of design in Bangkok, the National Museum (*Na Phra That Road, Phra Nakorn District, Tel: 662 224 1333*) has just finished a new wing. The complexity of its collection and simplicity of the display are spectacular.

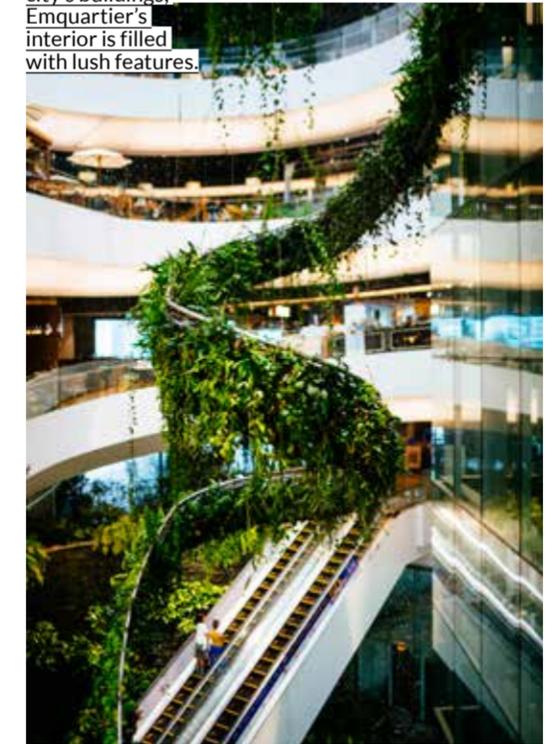
“The Never Ending Summer restaurant at The Jam Factory (*41/1-5 Charoennakorn Road, Tel: 662 861 0950*), by Duangrit Bunnag, gets industrial style right. This simple and elegant renovation of an old riverside warehouse brought out its best qualities, while creating a hip feel. Meanwhile, Osha Bangkok ([oshabangkok.com](http://oshabangkok.com)) is modern, Thai, bright and in your face. This place is screaming and the food is just as far out as the design – it tastes really good too. It brings the best of psychedelic San Francisco to Thailand with an intense interpretation of Thai cuisine.”

Ancient relics at the National Museum.



Bangkok has its share of starchitect-designed buildings, like the “pixelated” Mahanakhon by Ole Scheeren.

Like many of the city’s buildings, Emquartier’s interior is filled with lush features.



Oriental artworks adorn the walls of The Siam’s pool villas.

“With The Siam, we used antiques and reclaimed materials.”

### Fast Facts

**CURRENCY**  
Thai Baht  
US\$1 = 35.3THB

**VISA**  
Requirements vary. Visit [mfa.go.th](http://mfa.go.th) for details.

**BEST TIME TO VISIT**  
June to September is monsoon season, when rains come quickly and heavily, especially in the afternoon, so you may want to avoid this period.

**HOW TO GET THERE**  
Singapore Airlines flies 34 times weekly from Singapore to Bangkok.

**MORE INFORMATION**  
[tourismthailand.org](http://tourismthailand.org)

Scala Theatre is a striking example of modernist architecture with Thai accents.

