



# Thai-dal

*As Thai moves mainstream, operators inch toward chain expansion.*

BY STACY SHOEMAKER

An intimate cafe sports the decor of a funky local dive. Maroon, gold and sea green walls complement light wood tables covered by white linens. During warm months, window panes along the front wall roll up like a garage door, letting the fresh air circulate the smells of Thai spices and chatter from the patio filter into the main dining room.

Steve and Bo Kline, owners of Portland, Ore.-based Typhoon!, plan to export their two-unit casual Thai concept to the Seattle area by the end of the year, tapping a national trend that portends that Thai's time has come.

#### The Tide Is High

According to Packaged Facts, a New York-based market research firm, retail sales of

Pacific Rim foods are expected to reach \$285.3 million by 2001. Today, Thai food has become the third-most-eaten "ethno" cuisine in the world.

"The Thai trend was a sleeping monsoon waiting to happen," says Dean Small, managing partner for Laguna Niguel, Calif.-based Synergy, a menu consulting company. "Thai restaurants have the opportunity to explore menu options and bridge cuisines with a palate of ingredients that were not readily available five years ago to make high flavor profile foods that are both recognizable and memorable."

"Thai food is the tastiest food in the world since it offers such a balance of flavor and spices, and you don't feel stuffed after eating it," says Tommy Tang, owner of a two-unit eponymous concept based in Hollywood, Calif.

With a PBS cooking special and branded spices, Tommy Tang (r.), hopes to leverage his celebrity into a QSR chain.

Tommy Tang's Melrose, Calif., location was designed to look more Manhattan than Southern California.

