



Saffron Restaurants

"Saffron is the embodiment of Thailand's spirit, a way for me to bring my homeland's magnificent and elegant way of dining to San Diego." -- Su-Mei Yu, owner and chef, Saffron Thai Grilled Chicken and Saffron Noodles and Saté.



About Saffron

The award-winning Saffron Thai Grilled Chicken is San Diego's first authentic Thai restaurant. Owner Su-Mei Yu opened the quaint take-out eatery on India Street's restaurant row in 1985, infusing spirituality with healthy cooking to develop an exotic menu that specializes in one tasty entrée: saffron-marinated chicken prepared with traditional Thai methods. The name Saffron was chosen because it is the traditional color of the Buddhist robe in Thailand and is one of the most luxurious spices in the whole world. The combination of spiritual happiness and cultured food are the essence of Saffron.

Overwhelmingly popular with San Diegans both for its reasonable prices, quick-service atmosphere, and fresh seasonal fare, Saffron's exotic menu is based on Yu's memories of growing up in Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, and visiting grilled chicken vendors who set up their charcoal brazier stands by an old boxing stadium. So popular was the grilled chicken from these food vendors that people would travel from all over the city just to get a taste. The same has proven true for Saffron, which continues to garner numerous accolades and a generous, loyal fan base.

Saffron stands apart from other Thai restaurants because Yu designed her menu with the concept of offering food for the Body, Mind and Soul. Much of Yu's healthy cooking techniques come from the elders in Thailand, who taught her which foods have medicinal properties for the body. Yu continues to follow these methods, serving only the freshest ingredients, using items unique to the season, making sauces and sides from scratch, and preparing everything daily. Most of the dishes

are prepared without the inclusion of trans fats. The result is savory Thai cuisine that is not only economical, but highly nutritional.

With a second sit-down restaurant, Saffron Noodles and Saté, which opened in 2000, the brand has already won the “Best Of” *Zagat* and *USA Today* restaurant polls. *San Diego Home and Garden Magazine* has awarded numerous “Silver Fork Awards” to Saffron Noodle and Saté and to Yu as “Restaurateur of the Year” and *San Diego Magazine* regularly selects the restaurant for its “Best Of” annual awards.

About Su-Mei Yu

Born of Chinese parents in Bangkok, Thailand, Su-Mei Yu came to America at age fifteen where she attended a mission boarding school in Kentucky. After graduation, she moved to California and obtained a Masters Degree in Social Welfare, later joining the Graduate School of Social Work at San Diego State University, as an assistant professor.



Yu soon became involved with Southeast Asian immigrants who'd come to America following the Vietnam War. Noting that they had a hard time finding work in a society where their culture and language were not understood, she founded a cultural center and foundation, the Southeast Asian Alliance, to help these immigrant women sell their crafts. To save expenses on fundraisers for the alliance, Yu often cooked for upwards of 500 people at a time using Thai recipes she learned as a little girl. The experience made her realize that her culinary skills could be turned into a profitable business.

Her background in Thai culture, her mother's teachings, and a lifetime of study and experimentation guided Yu to develop her brand of Thai food. Today, she annually returns to her homeland to research and collect recipes of traditional, authentic foods and methods of preparation.

Yu's passion for food goes beyond the kitchen. She has written two popular Thai cookbooks, and has a third on the way. Her first, *Cracking the Coconut: Classic Thai Home Cooking*, was published in 2000 by William Morrow and received glowing reviews from *The New York Times*, *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and was listed by both *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Los Angeles Times* as one of the “10 Best Cookbooks of the Year.” Yu was awarded The Julia Child Award for Best First Time Author from The International Association of Culinary Professionals.

Yu's second cookbook, *Asian Grilling*, also published by William Morrow, was featured on *The*

Today Show, *Martha Stewart Living*, NPR's *Talk of the Nation* and *Good Morning America*. Her newest cookbook, *The Elements of Life, A Contemporary Guide to Thai Recipes and Traditions For Healthier Living*, was published by John Wiley and Sons in October 2009.

Yu also writes about Thai food and culture for national publications including *Petit Propos Culinaire*, *Food and Wine*, *Fine Cooking*, *Cooking Light*, *Gastronomica*, and *San Diego Home and Garden*.

When she's not writing, Yu demonstrates cooking on television, including appearances on *Martha Stewart Living*, *Home Cooking* on PBS, *Home Matters* and *Cooking Live* on the Food Network, as well as *Good Morning America* and *Today Show*. She is a regular guest commentator for San Diego National Public Radio and has lectured at the American Institute of Wine and Food, The Culinary Historians of Southern California, The Culinary Institute of America and The International Association of Culinary Professionals.

History & Awards

Su-Mei Yu opened Saffron's first location, Saffron Thai Grilled Chicken, in 1985 on India Street. With a focus on take-out dining, this small eatery captures the authenticity of popular street vendors in Bangkok. Accolades and awards were quickly received, and Yu's presence as one of San Diego's premier restaurateurs was widely recognized.

In 1988, Yu opened her second Saffron location, Saffron Noodles and Saté, right next door, modeling the concept after the numerous small and informal take-out noodle restaurants found throughout Thailand. Due to its high quality food and quick service, Saffron Noodles and Saté attracts throngs of people and has become a favorite among San Diegans. Decorated with glass art by world renowned glass artist, Dale Chihuly, and paintings from Italo Scanga, the location maintains a loyal crowd eager for a taste of authentic Thai cuisine. Like its predecessor, it is widely recognized as one of San Diego's premier Thai eateries.

Since the opening of her first Saffron restaurant, Yu and her team have garnered a number of awards and accolades for her authentic Thai dishes.

- 1997 – Saffron wins the "Best of" *Zagat* and *USA Today* restaurant polls.
- 1997 – San Diego Critics Poll awards Saffron "Best Thai Restaurant."
- 1998 – Saffron wins Best Take-out Restaurant from *San Diego Magazine* Annual Critic's Poll. Larry Himmel of KFMB Television highlights Saffron on the show *Best Of San Diego*.
- 1999 – Saffron wins Best Take-out Restaurant from *San Diego Magazine* Annual Critic's Poll
- 2000—Yu's first cookbook *Cracking the Coconut: Classic Thai Home Cooking* is published by William Morrow, featuring traditional and authentic recipes and methods of preparation. *The New York Times*, *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

- all give it glowing reviews. *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Los Angeles Times* list it as one of the "10 Best Cookbooks of the Year." Yu also wins "The Julia Child Award for Best First Time Author" from The International Association of Culinary Professionals.
- 2000 – Saffron Noodles and Sate opens next door to Saffron Thai Grilled Chicken serving a broader menu of Thai favorites and offering customers a sit down dining option.
 - 2001 – *San Diego Home and Garden* awards Su-Mie Yu as "Restaurateur of the Year."
 - 2002 - Yu sees an opportunity for expansion. She leases the space next to Saffron Grilled Chicken and converts it to the sit-down restaurant, Saffron Noodles and Saté.
 - 2002- *San Diego Home and Garden* awards the "Silver Fork Award" to Saffron Noodles and Saté.
 - Yu's second cookbook, *Asian Grilling*, is published by William Morrow in June of 2002. It is featured on *The Today Show*, *Martha Stewart Living*, NPR's *Talk of the Nation* and *Good Morning America*.
 - 2003 – Saffron wins its third "Silver Fork Award" from *San Diego Home and Garden*.
 - 2005 – Saffron wins "Best Take Out" from *AOL City Guide*.
 - 2006—Yu wins the "Asian Heritage Award" from Cox Cable.
 - 2008 – Su-Mei Yu's Green School and the Prem Organic Cooking Academy in Thailand are honored by Project Concern International.
 - 2009 – Saffron wins Best Take-out Restaurant from *San Diego Magazine* Annual Critic's Poll.
 - 2009 - Yu's third cookbook, *The Elements of Life*, is published by Wiley Hardcover in October of 2009. It is featured on *Good Morning America*, *Food & Wine*, NPR's *Splendid Table*, *Vegetarian Times* and numerous San Diego television and print media.
 - 2010 – Yu appears on *Good Morning America* to discuss the philosophies and recipes found in her new book *The Elements of Life*.
 - 2010 - *Food & Wine Magazine* features Su-Mei Yu's recipes and labels her a "Thai genius".
 - 2010 – *San Diego Magazine* readers once again select Saffron as "Best Takeout".

Food for the Mind, Body, Soul

Saffron's award-winning menu doesn't just satisfy hunger, it also promotes good health and a positive attitude. This is because Yu has studied with elder cooks and traditional folk physicians in Thailand, who use food not just for its nutrients, but for its medicinal qualities. By only using fresh local ingredients, changing her menu with the seasons, and never including trans fats, many of Yu's dishes promote a healthy lifestyle and help strengthen the immune system.

"Food is not only the sustenance that nurtures us," says Yu, "it is also a remedy, which keeps us healthy during abrupt and unexpected climatic changes. It is the medicine that heals us in time of sickness."

The roots of healthy cooking run deep in Thailand. While Yu was growing up in Bangkok, if someone

in the family developed a fever, or was out of sorts, Thai cooks in the neighborhood would cook *yah nang* greens to cure the fever. Yu's mother's remedy was a rich chicken soup seasoned heavily with ginger, scallions, and sesame oil. For insomnia, elderly Thai cooks made a stew with leaves of Siamese cassia in creamy coconut milk, while Yu's Mother cooked red beans with sweet Chinese dates to calm the nerves. Today, these various natural formulas with foods fitted to each changing season are the backbone of Saffron's menu.

Yu goes back to Thailand at least once a year in search of these ancient recipes. She spends time with elders who teach her their own medicinal secrets and discuss the best seasonal ingredients for each dish. The healing remedies, the elders explain, are cleverly hidden in the tastes, flavors, and aromas of these natural ingredients. The bitter taste in bitter melon, for example, cools and lessens fever, while the sweetness in sugar palm increases the body's heat. The spicy taste of chiles enhances the appetite, while the pungent flavors in ginger and shallots reduce bloating.

All of these teachings come together at Saffron, where Yu devises seasonal dishes that please the palate and nourish the soul.

Saffron Catering

Saffron's award winning menu is the best way to spice up your next party. From intimate affairs of just five people to parties of several hundred guests, Saffron offers numerous catering services and an exotic Thai menu that ensure the success of any get together.

Customers can opt to pick-up their order, choosing package deals off of Saffron's catering menu, which features finger foods, rolls, Saté, curries, jerkys, rices, noodles, soups, stir frys, and much more. This option is a popular choice because Yu and her team only need 24 hours notice to prepare the dishes.



Customers can also choose to mix and match items from Saffron's generous menu, creating a menu all their own. Once the menu is set, customers can either pick up their food or have it delivered and set up (an additional fee may apply depending on the location). Saffron will even loan out steam tables with a small fee to help make serving guests easier.

Saffron offers a popular full service catering option as well. Not only will Saffron's staff prepare the food, but they will also decorate plates with seasonal flowers and serve guests. If customers are using an additional party rental service, Saffron will help coordinate with other service companies to ensure the right equipment.

"We are willing and able to talk with our customers and tailor our catering menu to meet their specific needs," says Su-Mei Yu. "Our catering is very cost-effective, and costs less than comparative catering services offered throughout San Diego. Our food is always cooked fresh and uses only the highest quality of local and seasonal ingredients resulting in healthy and unique Thai flavors."

Menus

The menus at Saffron's two locations are rich in authentic Thai cuisine, designed seasonally, and prepared fresh every day. The signature dish, roasted chicken, is prepared the way it has been in Thailand for generations, infused with healthy herbs, spices, and sauces made from scratch. For a healthy twist, almond milk substitutes the traditional coconut cream in the marinade. Best of all, each individual item on the menu is cost-effective, with most dishes priced below \$10. These healthy authentic Thai dishes comprise some of the best and most delicious deals in San Diego.



Locations

Saffron Thai Grilled Chicken opened in 1985 as a take-out location based on grilled chicken street vendors in Bangkok. The intimate location reflects the friendly sense of mingling around a grilled chicken vendor in Bangkok, where locals grab a meal and say a quick hello to friends. It is a local favorite with San Diegans who want a healthy Thai dish that's prepared fresh and easy to bring home.

In 2000, at the time she was releasing her second cookbook, Owner Su-Mei Yu opened a sit-down restaurant, Saffron Noodle and Saté, right next door to Saffron Grilled Chicken. The award-winning location duplicates the feeling of a being in a noodle restaurant in Thailand. Saffron Noodle and Saté offers a menu rich in flavor and ancient methods of Thai cooking.

Both locations reside on the popular India Street Restaurant Row, just south of San Diego's oldest community, Old Town, and only a few miles from Little Italy, Balboa Park, and Hillcrest. Together, the two locations have garnered numerous accolades for Yu's Body, Mind, and Soul style of cooking.

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