

# Thai Inn

# Style

## 夜宿泰國

Story and photos by LEISA TYLER

Bangkok's hotel industry has been transformed by a fresh breed of small, art-driven properties

泰國泛起小型精品酒店潮，  
一新泰國酒店業的面貌



Nice spot: pink leopard in the Dream Hotel

Dream Hotel裡放置了一頭粉紅斑點獵豹



Nissan Figaro installation in the Siam@Siam lobby

Siam@Siam酒店大堂裡的日產Figaro敞篷車

La Fenix  
restaurant lobby

La Fenix的餐廳大堂



Reflections, where  
the art hotel  
movement started

掀起藝術酒店風潮的  
Reflections酒店



**WHEN IMPORTER-EXPORTER** Anusorn Ngernyuang opened the 32-room hotel Reflections in 2004, he changed the face of Bangkok's lodging scene forever. Startling in raspberry-pink, its guest rooms festooned with kitsch pop art, the hotel sent shockwaves through the relatively conservative neighbourhood of Soi Aree – once dubbed “Millionaire's Lane” for its plethora of old mansions – and started a flurry of rumours that Aree would become Bangkok's answer to SoHo.

“When we first opened, many people thought the hotel was just plain weird,” says Anusorn, sitting on a plastic chair covered with bright pink daisies with matching shag rug at his feet. “But after couple of years, locals even started to paint their houses the same colour as the hotel.”

Anusorn is putting the finishing touches to another Reflections in nearby Pradipat Road, having recently closed the Aree Hotel. In common with the original, the new one is employing up-and-coming artists to design the guest rooms. Each is whimsical and unique: audiophiles should check into “Listen” (room 305), which is practically glowing in retro pink, with a piano couch, bright fuchsia headphones on a black skull and ballerina figures on the walls. Accessory designer Wannasiri Kongman's Fitting Room (room 206), reminisces on the trivial nature of the fashion world, with paper cut-out Chanel bags in display cabinets and clocks set for the homes of the world's top fashion designers – Rome for Valentino, London

for McQueen and, perhaps a little ostentatiously, Bangkok for Reflections.

“[Before we opened] there were so many underground artists and designers in Bangkok but a very weak arts ‘scene’, with few places to display work,” Anusorn says. “So we decided to open a gallery, but inside a hotel.”

Anusorn's boldness has since prompted a wave of young, experimental hoteliers to come to the fore, transforming Bangkok's lodging scene from mass-formula chain hotels to self-conscious and sometimes outrageously designed spaces, adding a fresh vibe to the city's humid, congested streets.

Art, architecture and design in Thailand have come a long way since the hyper development of the '90s when skyscrapers were built to look gaudy. No longer a haven for cheap rip-offs invented elsewhere, Thailand is forging its own homegrown identity. Thai design shops such as Propaganda and Anyroom fill the top floors of the city's glitzy shopping malls and several Thai-language interior-design magazines (including *Wallpaper\**) line the newsstands.

The fashion industry is booming. Retailers such as Soda, Fly Now and Greyhound are competing with some success with big European labels and every year hot new Thai designers make it to the catwalks of Paris and Milan. Bangkok even has its own annual fashion week.

In terms of hotels, the city's big architectural transformation came in 2003 with the opening

Funky TV in Reflections'  
Dressing Room suite

Reflections的Dressing  
客房裡的古怪電視機



of Christina Ong's Metropolitan Hotel. Moody with dark makha wood trimmings, clean lines, ambient lighting and references to traditional architecture, its minimalist but distinctly Thai design became the benchmark for a style now mimicked in hotels, bars and restaurants from Surin to Koh Samui.

At Seven, a petite townhouse turned six-room hotel, minimalist design has been combined with a liberal dash of tradition. Themed on the seven colours according to the days of the week in Buddhist philosophy (the seventh room is the lobby), stark white rooms blaze to life with ceiling-to-floor murals inspired by traditional Thai art.

Some people say this newfound inspiration is a spin-off from the Asia financial crisis of 1997 that sank the Thai baht and made it more difficult for people to study and travel abroad. As a result, they started looking inwards, reinventing the region's tremendously rich artistic legacies, rather than borrowed ones from the West.

"In Thailand people used to live and work inside the frame," says Sanya Saengboon, the genial General Manager of nine-month-old hotel Siam@Siam. "Now they are starting to move outside of it. It's like they are finally daring to dream." Having spent the past 20 years abroad and interstate, including stints in Berlin and Chiang Mai, Sanya recently returned to Bangkok to "live the city's new vibe".

"Daring" and "extreme" is how Saengboon describes Siam@Siam: industrial chic, with a Nissan Figaro convertible in the lobby where two angels greet guests; a big blue foot on the pavement and crooked lamp shades held up by spindly unpolished tree branches. Built with raw concrete, recycled timber and scrap metal, the hotel almost feels like a factory, but a distinctly Thai one, with graceful service, Mae Fah Luang (a non-profit

Reflections hotel  
Listen roomReflections酒店的  
Listen客房

foundation using Thai hill-tribe weavings) rugs and Thai silk.

What's more, you don't have to compromise on facilities – there is also a swimming pool (don't miss the views over the city at night), a 1,000-square-metre spa, bar, restaurant and even an executive club.

"It's really quirky," Californian guest Charles Thomas says at the breakfast bar one morning. "I usually stay at one of the five-star properties in Bangkok, but this is much more entertaining."

Quirky seems to be Bangkok's new hotel theme. Vikram Chatwal, a 36-year-old New York socialite and entrepreneur dubbed The Turban Cowboy, opened a Dream Hotel on Sukhumvit 15 – he opened the first one in New York. Sleek and glamorous, there are three mosaic-tiled stupas submerged in a pool of water in the lobby. The mishmash of stripes and stars in the Flava Bar might be a little too busy on the eye, but the bright pink leopard and blue tiger peeking behind glittery screens are outrageously eccentric and fun.

The hotel is what Chatwal calls "Hautel Couture", although this version seems decidedly more casual than catwalk; most people checking in are European travellers heading to the beach or flashpackers splurging on a night or two in the city.

Concerned with style, design hotels can be frequently more pretty than practical. The Dream Hotel nails both, however; in guest rooms ethereal blue



Cathay Pacific Airways  
flies five times a day  
to Bangkok.

國泰航空每日有五班飛機  
飛往曼谷。

#### WHERE TO STAY 住宿選擇

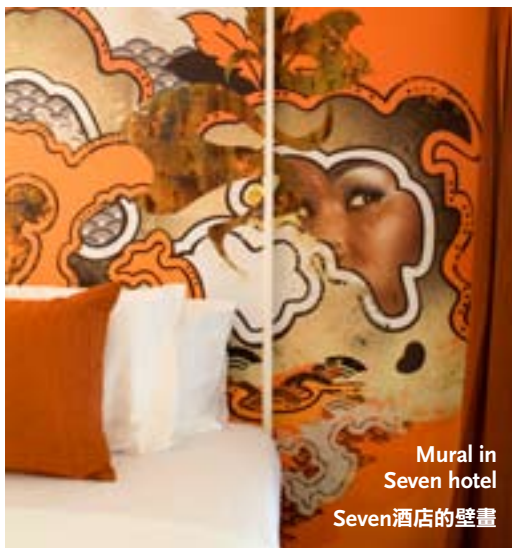
**Reflections**  
224/2 Pradipat Road,  
Sapan Kwai; +66 2 270  
3344; [www.reflections-thai.com](http://www.reflections-thai.com); Double  
rooms from US\$65.

**Seven**  
313/15 Sukhumvit 31;  
+66 2 662 0951; [www.sleepatseven.com](http://www.sleepatseven.com);  
Double rooms from  
US\$130.

**Siam@Siam**  
865 Rama 1 Road, Siam  
Square; +66 2 217 3000.  
[www.siamatsiam.com](http://www.siamatsiam.com);  
Double rooms from  
US\$120.

**Dream Hotel**  
10 Sukhumvit Soi 15;  
+66 2 254 8500; [www.dreambkk.com](http://www.dreambkk.com); Double  
rooms from US\$140.

**Le Fenix**  
33/33 Sukhumvit Soi 11,  
Tel: +66 2 305 4000;  
[www.lefenix-sukhumvit.com](http://www.lefenix-sukhumvit.com); Double rooms  
from US\$60.

Mural in  
Seven hotel  
Seven酒店的壁畫Metropolitan Hotel's  
minimalism  
設計簡約的Metropolitan Hotel



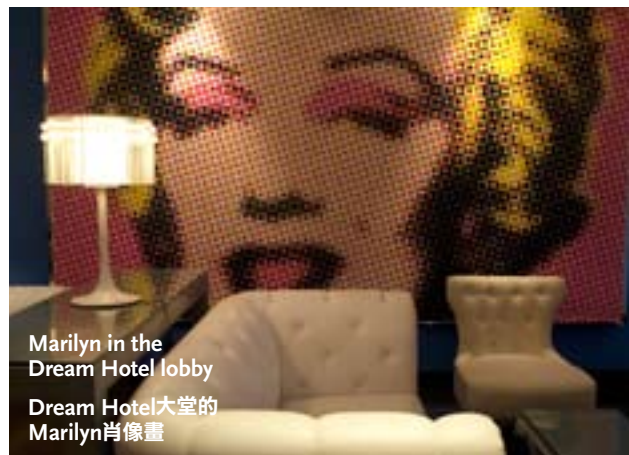
Dream Hotel's swimming pool  
Dream Hotel的游泳池

lighting that seeps out from under the bed sets a surreal tone and wenge-wood furniture, spacious glass-top desks, iPod docks and allergy-free goose down make it contemporary and convenient.

At nearby Le Fenix, coolness surpasses practicality. Just steps from Bangkok's most iconic high-design landmark, the restaurant and nightclub Bed Supperclub, the six-month-old property is already fraying at the edges – its terrazzo furniture chipped and swirly carpet stained and scuffed. To emphasize a jigsaw look on the outside, big slabs of concrete block out views and daylight.

But these are early days for art and design hotels in Bangkok. Aloft, the little sister of W Hotels, has announced its plans for a 308-room property on Sukhumvit Road. Designed in conjuncture with David Rockwell, it will set new standards for design and style in the city.

When that happens, no doubt Bangkok will become even cooler.



Marilyn in the Dream Hotel lobby  
Dream Hotel大堂的Marilyn肖像畫

## › BOUTIQUE HOTELS

A backlash against Bangkok's ever-increasing number of glitzy and glamorous skyscrapers, a group of hoteliers have recently converted the city's old wooden houses and townhouses into mini hotels. Modelled on British bed and breakfasts and with fewer than 20 rooms per property, they offer visitors to the kingdom's capital a more personal and authentic experience.

### ARUN RESIDENCE

Elegant wooden house on the Chao Praya River with views of the 19th-century Temple of Dawn; the Arun Suite has a private viewing platform.  
36-38 Soi Pradoo Nok Yoong, Maharat Road; +66 2 221 9158; [www.arunresidence.com](http://www.arunresidence.com); Double rooms from US\$95.

### THE EUGENIA

Colonial grandeur in a late 19th-century mansion with a dash of African game-lodge; four-poster beds, hand-beaten tubs, animal skins on the floor, a 1958 Mercedes Ponton out the front.  
267 Soi Sukhumvit 31; +66 2 259 9017; [www.theeugenia.com](http://www.theeugenia.com); Double rooms from US\$180.

### LUXX

Sleek townhouse near the river and touristy Silom Road; 13 rooms all have Japanese bath tubs, polished wooden floors and ipod docks.  
6/11 Decho Road, Bangruk; +66 2 635 8800; [www.staywithluxx.com](http://www.staywithluxx.com); Double rooms from US\$95.

### OLD BANGKOK INN

Intimate family-run guesthouse with 10 rooms that champions responsible tourism, using solar hot water, recycled timbers and augmenting guest donations to local charities

dollar for dollar.

609 Pra Sumen Road, Pra Nakhon; +66 2 629 1787; [www.oldbangkokinn.com](http://www.oldbangkokinn.com); Double rooms from US\$100.

### PHRANAKORN NORNLÉN

Tucked into verdant gardens, the former hotel re-modeled into a guesthouse and artists' retreat has quirky and cosy rooms with vintage prints and recycled furniture.  
46 Thewe Soi 1, Phranakorn; +66 2 628 8188; [www.phranakorn-nornlen.com](http://www.phranakorn-nornlen.com); Double rooms from US\$65.



To Die For's courtyard lounge

To Die For 的庭院休憩區



Thong Lor is a shopper's paradise

購物天堂 Thong Lor

## ▶ THONG LOR

Formerly the domain of wedding studios, noodle shops and second-hand car dealers, Thong Lor (a thoroughfare road otherwise known as Sukhumvit Soi 55) has been reinventing itself as Bangkok's epicentre of cool. Dubbed the new neighbourhood of fashion and design, the wedding studios now sit alongside sleek furniture showrooms boasting Cappellini and Kartell, up-and-coming fashion designers and lifestyle venues such as J Avenue – where the jet-set crowd goes to be-and-be-seen – and design hub Playground!

### PLAYGROUND!

Sleek, black slate “concept-store” filled with designer clothes (Elixir, Tube Gallery and Best Behavior), household items, books, magazines and CD's. 818 Soi Sukhumvit 55; +66 2 714 7888; [www.playgroundstore.co.th](http://www.playgroundstore.co.th)

### SHADES OF RETRO

Sixties era collectibles: Danish vintage furniture, vinyl records, early Bang and Olufsen audio kits. 522/3 Soi Sukhumvit 55; +66 2 714 9657

### BASHEER BOOKS

Titles on design and art, plus the peculiar and hard-to-find, like *How to Keep Your Volkswagen Alive*. H1 Place, 998/7 Soi Sukhumvit 55; +66 2 391 9815.

### SUNNY ROSE

Glamorous Swiss designed jewellery adorned with feathers, beads and fake chunky

jewels. 916/2 Soi Sukhumvit 55; +66 2 714 7990; [www.sunnyrose.ch](http://www.sunnyrose.ch)

### TO DIE FOR

Smart bar and restaurant that has a serene courtyard to lounge in – perfect with a Champagne cocktail and plate of roast quail with foie gras and figs. H1 Place, 998 Soi Sukhumvit 55; +66 2 381 4714

### RED

Innovative Indian cuisine blending traditional cooking styles with Oriental flavours: “Fusion, but not confusion food,” says chef Gagan Anand who used to cook for India's Prime Ministers. Don't miss the superb Tasmanian salmon tandoori with wasabi mustard or the golub jamun with raspberry puree.

124 Sukhumvit Soi 53 (Thong Lor Soi 9); +66 2 259 7590; [www.redbangkok.com](http://www.redbangkok.com)

## ▶ 夜宿泰國

Anusorn Ngernyuang於2004年創辦Reflections，旋即為曼谷酒店業帶來翻天覆地的轉變。這間前衛酒店以32個佈置俗艷的客房作招徠，一時間震撼整個Soi Aree區，似有將整個社區變成曼谷蘇豪區之勢。

Anusorn 憶述謂：「最初，人們覺得那是一幢古怪的酒店。但幾年下來，連當地人也開始為自己的公寓，塗上跟酒店相同的色彩。」

Anusorn現已於Pradipat Road附近開設新一間 Reflections 酒店。一如它的姊妹作，新酒店亦擁有設計獨特趣怪的客房。音響發燒友千萬不要錯過「Listen」客房（305號房），內有鋼琴型沙發及鮮紫紅色耳筒。而「Fitting Room」客房（206號房）則由配飾設計師Wannasiri Kongman主理，飾櫃內放有Chanel手袋剪紙，房內時鐘更是依著各著名時裝設計師居住的城市的時間運行。

Anusorn基於曼谷缺乏讓地下藝術家展示作品的場地，因此開設Reflections，並成功啟發無數年輕冒險精神的酒店經營者加入這創新行列，合力將曼谷由大型連鎖酒店壟斷的局面，變成時尚甚至前衛酒店的角力場。

不再是盜版之都的曼谷已踏上建構自我形象的康莊大道。泰式設計精品店如Propaganda及Anyroom相繼進駐購物中心，而泰文室內設計雜誌亦如雨後春筍般出現。

市內的建築大革命始自2003開幕的Metropolitan Hotel，業權人為Christina Ong。其簡約而富泰國特色的設計成為全國各地度假酒店的模仿對象。

由住宅改建而成的Seven，是擁有六間客房的酒店（第七間房是酒店大堂），設計糅合簡約與傳統風格。酒店以佛教教義中一星期七色為主題，以泰式壁畫裝飾潔白的房間。

有說這股新設計風潮是1997年亞洲金融風暴後泰銖疲弱的副產品，人們開始重新認識本地豐富的藝術傳統。Siam@Siam酒店總經理Sanya Saengboon解釋道：「泰國人開始脫離日常工作及生活的軌道，換句話說他們開始敢於做夢。」

Siam@Siam酒店大堂擺放著一輛敞篷車，門口更有天使迎接來賓，活脫脫是Sanya口中所謂「大膽」及「極端」的設計。以原色混凝土、再造木材及金屬片修建而成的這幢酒店，予人工廠之感，卻不失泰國特色，加上殷勤的服務及由Mae Fah Luang（非牟利組織，專門推廣泰國山區部落紡織工藝）提供的地毯和泰絲，效果一如客人Charles Thomas所言：「的確很古怪，我習慣入住五星酒店，但這裡有趣得多了。」

古怪似乎已成為曼谷新興酒店的共同主題。紐約名流兼企業大亨Vikram Chatwal剛於Sukhumvit 15號開設其第二所Dream Hotel。酒店內有三座鑲滿馬賽克的佛塔，矗立於大堂的水池中。Flava Bar的條紋及星星圖案或令人眼花撩亂，而閃亮帷幕後探頭而出的粉紅獵豹和藍色老虎確實趣怪。

兼具風格與實用的Dream Hotel客房內有夢幻般的藍色燈光自床下透出，雷藤木家具配合闊大玻璃面書桌、iPod連接埠和防敏感羽絨寢具，照顧周到。

位於附近的Le Fenix則以型格壓倒實用性。破舊的家具、磨損的地毯充滿個性，酒店刻意遮擋窗外景致與日光，營造神秘氣氛。

但是當W Hotels集團旗下的Aloft宣佈與David Rockwell合作，擁有308間客房的酒店即將於Sukhumvit Road開幕時，我們知道新一波設計浪潮又將在曼谷市內湧起了。