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FOOD

## Techamuanvivit says her new SF restaurant, Nari, is tribute to Thai women



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Owner Pim Techamuanvivit of Kin Khao in San Francisco, Calif., is seen on Monday, April 28th, 2014.

Photo: John Storey, Special to the Chronicle

WHEN PIM TECHAMUANVIVIT opened Kin Khao four years ago, she had an idea that San Francisco was ready for a different type of Thai food.

Although she was fairly certain that diners would take to her style of cuisine, which she calls “heritage Thai cooking,” she wanted to keep things small for the first few years.

But 2018 seems to be the year that the Bangkok-born chef decided to go big.

Word broke this year that Techamuanvivit would be part of a major food hall project going into San Francisco Airport’s International Terminal, along with Gabriela Camara of Cala and Elisabeth Prueitt and the Tartine crew. In the spring, Techamuanvivit announced that she would take over Nahm, the globally celebrated Bangkok restaurant, which under Australian chef David Thompson had been named one of the top 50 restaurants in the world.

In June, a New York Times profile of Techamuanvivit revealed that the chef wasn’t stopping there; plans were also in the works for a second San Francisco restaurant.

The project, called Nari, which means women in Thai, has been on the slow-burner for a few years, but now, she’s ready to share more details.

Nari will be located in Japantown’s Hotel Kabuki, 1625 Post St., and if all goes well will open in spring 2019.

“Nari is my tribute to all (the) women in my life who taught me how to cook,” says Techamuanvivit; she sought out the women — aunts and family friends — to teach her how to make the dishes from her childhood that she missed while living here in the U.S.

While Bangkok’s Nahm may be considered high-end, Techamuanvivit hesitates at how to label Nari.

“I don’t really like the word fine dining,” she says. “I like to think of Nari as a little more grown-up than Kin Khao.”

She adds that it will be just as much fun.

So what does being more grown-up entail?

Techamuanvivit describes her modest Union Square space at Kin Khao as “tight, loud and crowded,” but says Nari will offer a larger footprint for both the kitchen and

dining room, which will seat about 95 people. There will also be a large separate bar area and private dining room.

The larger kitchen space will give Techamuanvivit and her team a chance to expand the menu offerings, which will be more seafood-focused: “I don’t want to just open another Kin Khao. What fun is that?”

Though the tiny kitchen at Kin Khao, which Techamuanvivit describes as both a blessing and a curse, has forced her and her team to be disciplined and focused, it’s also been limiting in terms of menu development.

“There are so many more dishes I want to cook,” she says

The expansion is also a chance for Techamuanvivit to help the members of her Kin Khao team grow. As such, Kin Khao chef de cuisine Meghan Clark will take the reins at Nari, while Cecile Macasero, who has been at Kin Khao since 2015, will be promoted to chef de cuisine there.

Other items of note: Caroline Nassif of Lundberg Design, the team behind some of the most beautiful restaurants in San Francisco, will design the space. Techamuanvivit also is working with local Thai ceramicist Nathiya Prathnadi to create special dishware for Nari.

In keeping with her female-focused vision for the restaurant, one reason the space in the Hotel Kabuki appealed so much to her was that in the early 1990s, it was home to Elka Gilmore’s eponymous restaurant. The restaurant also happened to be a training ground for chef Traci Des Jardins and pastry chef Elizabeth Falkner — all three of whom Techamuanvivit considers “powerhouse women chefs.”

Techamuanvivit definitely will be busy with her multiple projects, but the chef, who currently divides her time evenly between Bangkok and San Francisco, says that Nahm and her time in Thailand have energized her.

“Thai cooking is Thai women. It’s the women who teach the next generation about food and cooking,” she says. “I see myself as a link on this chain. Passing on this knowledge, I don’t want it to end with me.”

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