

THE LOCAL UPDATE

# REMASTERED ORIGINALS

FROM THAILAND TO TRIBECA, UNEXPECTED AREAS ARE BEING TRANSFORMED WITH DYNAMIC IDEAS AND ONE-OF-A-KIND COMMUNITY PROJECTS



PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS SCHALKX



## BANGKOK

The Thai capital's faded Old Town gets a foodie overhaul as neglected spaces are converted into quirky cafés

Just a few years ago, Rattanakosin was the city's tired historical quarter. Tucked into a bend in the Chao Phraya river and fortified by surrounding canals, King Rama I's 1782 capital had become a place to trudge past derelict buildings on the way to the Grand Palace, Wat Pho Buddhist temple or towards the cacophonous streets of Chinatown. Today, though, the area is on the up, its crumbling façades filling with fresh places that nod to a rich past. Take **Sarnies**, a brunch bolthole in a 19th-century former boat-repair workshop offering house-roasted coffee and fry-ups with Northern Thai *sai oua* sausage beneath original wooden beams and peeling posters. Or **Homu**, in a higgledy-piggledy three-storey building a few doors down, whose Thai owners went to Yokohama to perfect their matcha *daifuku* and toasted-mochi desserts. Further north, **Alex & Beth**, with its mismatched vintage furniture and antique porcelain, feels as homely as the curry rice and apple pies it serves. Meanwhile, the couple behind **1905 Heritage Corner**, a charming three-room shophouse boutique on Phraeng Phuthon, lead guests on morning market walks to gather breakfast snacks such as *khanom khrok* coconut-rice pancakes. Market finds are also in the spotlight at **Ku Bar**, a minimalist spot off a narrow alley where ingredients including pandan leaf, santol fruit and ginkgo end up in ambitious but smooth cocktails. Gleaming high-rises may be sneaking up on the horizon; Rattanakosin is keeping the spirit of Old Bangkok alive. CHRIS SCHALKX

Clockwise from top left: street-food cart; temple roof; 1905 Heritage Corner; pillows at Heng Seng; floral tea at Homu; good-luck charm, and street art; exterior; and swing seats, both at Homu; Alex & Beth brunch; Sarnies; soap at 1905 Heritage Corner; centella-herb latte at Ba Hao Tian Mi dessert bar; sakura mochi at Homu. Previous page, Ba Hao Tian Mi





## THE STREET SMARTS

Saran Yen Panya is a designer at creative agency 56thstudio and an Old Bangkok aficionado. These are his favourite alley finds

### HOMEWARE

'**Heng Seng**, in Talat Noi, has been around for more than a century, producing pillows for worship in Chinese shrines that also make great home accessories. The three elderly ladies running the store still craft them by hand, and are happy to take custom requests.'

### COFFEE WITH A TWIST

'I keep going back to Chinese-inspired **TaiGuan Café**, in a beautifully renovated warehouse, and order sweet-and-sour plum juice espresso with a *char siu* pork pastry.'

### WOVEN FURNITURE

'**Nai Muen** has been selling wicker side tables and rattan bags at bargain prices since 1896. It often stocks interesting vintage items – chairs, bamboo baskets and traditional woodwork – at the back of the shop.'

### DINING DESTINATION

'Tucked-away **Sonny's** is where I take friends for supper. The food is no-nonsense French and the menu ever-changing. I've never had a bad meal here. It's usually fully booked, so call ahead.'

