

FOSTERING
INNOVATION



TOURISM
EXCELLENCE

The Spirit House

Yandina, Qld

Helen and Peter Brierty

Tel. (07) 5446 8977

www.spirithouse.com.au



'Creativity' - when applied to restaurants - usually refers to what is on the menu, but at The Spirit House, in Queensland's Noosa hinterland, innovation permeates everything from the Thai cuisine, to the restaurant setting, and to other ancillary business activities.

The 13 year old restaurant and cooking school is a past winner of the American Express Hall of Fame for Tourism Restaurants and it recently picked-up its third Queensland Tourism Award. About 60% of patronage now comes from tourism and a program of tag-a-long food tours to Asian destinations involves the Spirit House in outbound tourism as well.

Owners Helen and Peter Brierty were no strangers to the hospitality industry when they first stumbled upon the cow paddock at Yandina during the mid 1990s. They had spent 30 years in the trade and as well as understanding what constituted good food, they also realised that their new business needed to become something quite different to succeed in the fiercely competitive restaurant industry of the Sunshine Coast.

A Spirit House is a shrine to Thai animist spirits and is designed to bring peace and prosperity to the homes or businesses they adorn. The Briertys converted their cow paddock into a series of stunning tropical Asian gardens, complete with tranquil ponds, a waterlily lake, private courtyards and massive statues.

The building comprises a series of indoor-outdoor rooms that connect the interior with the lush exterior. The furniture, artworks and carvings were brought in from Thailand to enhance its authenticity.

"We wanted to recreate tropical Asia. We created this land from nothing; it was just a very bare paddock when we moved here. We planted every tree, every flower and dug all the ponds," said Helen Brierty

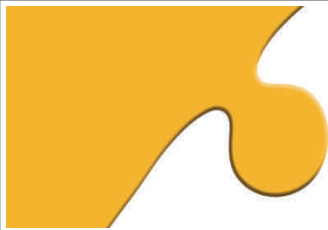
"Dining at Spirit House is an almost magical experience. The fabulous setting, wrapped around a lagoon and surrounded by lush tropical forest, gives the restaurant a rare tranquility and transports the diner to a location that seems a lot more exotic than the Queensland hinterland." Gourmet Traveller 2006 Australian Restaurant Guide

"Visitors approach the restaurant along a pathway winding through a forest of tropical plants. Streams, carved statues and little spirit houses line the route and at night hundreds of fairy lights and lanterns transform the landscape into something special. The restaurant is built across and around a lake which has become home to ducks, bearded dragons, kingfishers and other wildlife."

... Courier-Mail Goodlife Restaurant Guide O5

The acclaimed restaurant is open every day for lunch and from Wednesday to Saturday for dinner. Thai, Malaysian and Chinese influences are obvious from the menu, which is not surprising given that Helen and Peter spent many years living in Thailand.

For many years Spirit House has been equally well known for running its hands-on cooking classes, which teach people how to cook Asian food at home. Seventeen people work around one large bench and by the end of the session the group has prepared six dishes, which they share over lunch with a glass of wine.



FOSTERING INNOVATION



TOURISM EXCELLENCE

The program includes 18 different Asian classes, such as stirfry, wok cooking, curries, Asian barbecue, as well as Thai banquet classes. A very efficient website enables guests to book online for the classes months in advance.

Spirit House's reputation for fine, innovative Asian cuisine has found its way into print. The Spirit House Cook Book, first published in 2004, became an instant best seller and is now in its third reprint. The latest book 'Travels with Thai Food: A Journey with Spirit House', reflects the business's most recent venture, Tag-a-long street food tours to Asian destinations.

It was during a cooking class in 2005 that the idea for the tours emerged. Spirit House chef Annette Fear mentioned to participants that she was going to Thailand to explore street food and regional specialties. The next moment many of the class had decided to join her. It has now grown into a regular program of tours to Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and Bali. Tour participants stay in ethnic villages for part of the program, visit local markets and experience many lesser known cultural sights.



Spirit House has used innovation and creativity to highly differentiate itself from other players in a very crowded marketplace.

" We are in a fairly isolated rural area and our challenge was to attract people to make the effort to drive to us - we had to offer a unique dining and visiting experience. Each year we have added another layer to the core business.... cooking school, recipe books, music CD, tag-along tours, Asian pantry ingredients, frozen Asian meals, pastes & finger food. But we always remained true to the original focus of Asian food ", says Helen.



"The Spirit House experience is so unique and uplifting that diners continue to seek it out in droves. The cuisine is described as Modern Asian, but in essence it's Thai. And it's very, very good Thai powerful, heady and exotic, honed to a sharp, modern edge." Gourmet Traveller 2007 Australian Restaurant Guide

www.spirithouse.com.au

Key findings:

Use innovation to differentiate your product, especially in a crowded industry like the hospitality sector.

Keep innovating to retain profile, market edge and to give people a reason to come back to you.