

Hollywood comes to Auckland!

DAVID'S SPICY NEW VENTURE

You heard it here first! The gossip columnist's got a lot on his plate

Hollywood guru and Weekly quizmaster David Hartnell has been writing spicy gossip for print and TV for more than 50 years. Now, as a brand new co-owner of a Thai restaurant, he's serving more spice – not on the page but on the plate.

Appropriately named Thai Thai Authentic Restaurant, David and his partner of 30 years, Somboon Khansuk, bought the Auckland restaurant in July. Somboon was born and raised in Thailand, and grew up in a family who loved to cook.

"I've never owned a business before," says David. "People ask me why I'm getting involved in a new career and my reply is – 'Why not?'"

For many years, David has been our very own Mr Hollywood and was our only access to the latest gossip in Tinseltown, way before the popularity of social media and the internet.

As a make-up artist to the stars and a sought-after columnist, the Auckland-born personality lived in Los

Angeles and rubbed shoulders with Hollywood legends like Dame Elizabeth Taylor and Audrey Hepburn. He's the only gossip columnist in the world to receive a medal from Queen Elizabeth II when he was appointed as Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to entertainment in 2011.

Turning 80 in June next year, David says it's never too late for a career overhaul and a new adventure.

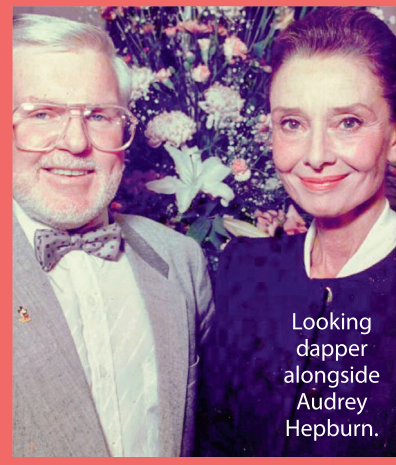
"There's nothing wrong with being in your eightieth year and starting something new. I think if God is good enough to give you all of those years, then you should make the most of it."

David says he bought the business to support Somboon, 56, in his career goals and aspirations. Working in retail all of his life, he's never owned his own business. He learned how to cook authentic Thai cuisine from his father while growing up in the Northern village of Lampang in Thailand.

"I come from a family of seven brothers and sisters, and my father taught us all how to cook," says Somboon. "He



He traded secrets with Elizabeth and Sylvester Stallone (below).



Looking dapper alongside Audrey Hepburn.

'The restaurant is Somboon's baby. I barely know how to boil an egg!'

grew all the vegetables and we had a rice farm, so I was brought up on organic meat, vegetables and rice. He would make all his own sauces and mixtures from scratch. I'm happy to say, I still have all his recipes and use many of them today.

"I feel lucky that David has supported me from day one. He has confidence in me and makes sure that I'm on the right track."

David says he is happy that Somboon can finally step out on his own.

"For the last 30 years, Somboon has always been in

my shadow – now it's time for him to step into his very own

spotlight and shine." Thai Thai Authentic Restaurant, which is situated in the Auckland suburb of Grey Lynn, was a favourite dining spot for the couple. When the previous owners decided to retire and sell, David and Somboon were the first to make an offer.

"We loved the location," tells David. "We loved the

restaurant. We loved the regular customers. So, we bought the business!"

David met Somboon soon after he moved to New Zealand from Thailand. He didn't know who David was and the only celebrity Somboon had ever heard of was Michael Jackson.

The besotted pair moved in together after a month and as Somboon spoke limited English at the time, he brushed up on the language by watching Fawlty Towers and Coronation

Street with David. They now live in a quaint Auckland villa, filled with hundreds of photos of David with stars, and a vast collection of memorabilia and books about Hollywood.

The couple travel to Thailand every two years to visit Somboon's family.

David says he's glad that Somboon is working in an environment that reminds him of his homeland and that he has some security in his life.

"I'm not going to be around forever," reflects David. "It

gives me peace of mind that Somboon will have his own business to continue on with."

Somboon will run the day-to-day operation of the business and will be the front of house. While David says he will make a cameo appearance from time to time.

"The restaurant is Somboon's baby as I know nothing about cooking. I barely know how to boil an egg!"

Although Somboon will be very busy at the restaurant, he'll still make time for the daily ritual that he and

David says, "It's time for Somboon to step into his spotlight and shine."



PHOTOS: ROBERT TRATHEN.