


[HOME](#)

Spice! Menu

- Articles
- Ask Darika
- Global Gay News
- Recipes
- Features list
- Men's Health
- Interesting Person
- Horoscope
- Humor
- Classifieds
- This n' That
- Happenings

Spice! Reviews

- Spa Review
- Hotel Review
- Restaurant Reviews
- Entertainment Reviews
- Spice Travelogues
- BKK Value Restaurants

Other Stuff

- Back Issues
- Photo Gallery
- Spice! City Maps
- Subscription
- Accommodation
- Links
- Contact us Spice!

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Interesting Person...in our Community



Celebrity Interview with Douglas Thompson

We asked "our writer in Bangkok" if he would catch up with Douglas Thompson while he was in town and do an "Interesting Person" interview for Spice! Magazine. He caught up with Doug having lunch with Darika at the Four Seasons!

Darika was sucking on her third martini when a waiter delivered yet another plate of foie gras. Darika loves Sunday brunch at the Four Seasons. I suspect the unlimited foie gras and vodka martinis have something to do with it. She was blonde that day, and all eyes in the Madison Room are on her. Darika loves being a celebrity.

Meanwhile, Douglas Thompson, Darika's long-time friend, could barely get a word in edgewise. This has to be the oddest couple I have ever come across. While they both grew up in California, Darika was a privileged child who spent summers on tour with her opera star mother, studied in Italy, and served as president of the Teenage Republicans. Around the same time Douglas was a radical anti-war activist who toured with Joan Baez. "I did inhale," he confessed. "Today my drugs of choice are Viagra and red wine."

We were still working on our salads. I knew early on that this brunch might top My Dinner with Andre.

Darika and Douglas first met at Thep Phnom, a classy Thai restaurant in San Francisco in 1986. He was the only customer not paying attention to her. ("I thought the waiters were much more interesting.") A mutual friend introduced them and they shared their first Pad Thai together. The conversation eventually turned to orchids, and that, apparently, was what really brought them together.

Orchids are one of Douglas' passions. "I have been accused of being an authority," he told me. "I had two small greenhouses in my garden and a collection of about five thousand plants when I finally got rid of them."

By getting "rid of them", he meant donating them to OrchidMania, a non-profit organization he founded in 1979. OrchidMania must be one of the world's most unusual AIDS fundraising organizations. They solicit donations of orchid plants from people around the world and hold huge sales that raise as much as \$40,000 for various HIV programs that have trouble getting mainstream funding. It was OrchidMania that brought Douglas to Thailand ten years later on a trip to visit orchid nurseries and interview grant recipients. He stayed. OrchidMania is still around and now has a sister organization in South Florida.

He laughed when I asked him if he still grows orchids. "I have about fifteen plants on one of my balconies. If they dare bloom I throw them away."

"Remember my greenhouse, Dougie?" Darika is only one of two people in the world allowed to use that name.

"I had a big greenhouse in my house in Pacific Heights and my orchids were not doing well at all. Dougie came over Saturdays to help me with them. That's when I was married to what's his name. Bradley."

Bradley was the second of six husbands, all considerably older than Darika. "Number six lives on his boat in Nassau. He is afraid to fly, which is why I keep a place here. The old man ninety-two and still tries to get fresh with me every once in a while. Italians! Fortunately for me he's loaded and has no kids."

By this time we had moved on to the British Columbia oysters and then grilled lamb chops. The martinis kept coming. "My personal best is thirteen. Martinis, not husbands, silly. Do you think it's alright to eat seafood after red meat? Those little

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personal best is thirteen. Martinis, not husbands, silly. Do you think it's alright to eat seafood after red meat? Those little lobster thingies look fantastic."

Darika's passion is food. After she graduated from Stanford business school in "nineteen seventy-something" she started what became a very successful cookie business. Her very public war with Debbie Fields was legendary. She still bakes cookies at home at least once a month. "I'm going to have a cooking show, you know. Really. My agent is pitching it to BBC Channel Four. Julia Child was also a big girl, too. We're probably shooting the pilot here in June. I'm so excited. My girlfriend Perfidia is coming from New York to do my wigs. Nobody can back-comb like that girl can. Have you tried the Cosmos here? They're yummy."

Eventually the two saw less and less of each other. Douglas kept himself busy with a consulting business, writing a series of tourism management books and eventually writing The Men of Vietnam, the first gay guidebook to that country. In his spare time he got his pilot's license, went through chef school and painted enough for a couple of one-man shows. "People stopped having sex in San Francisco in about 1985. I had time on my hands."

It was not until Douglas served as founding co-chairman of Bangkok Pride that he and Darika met again at the first Soi four Pink Party. "He was wearing a very loose hot pink silk dress with spaghetti straps. It was adorable but his makeup was just wretched. I felt like he was mocking me."

"Darika Darling, I did not even know you were in the audience until you threw yourself upon the stage. And nobody on earth can achieve what you have achieved in the name of beauty." And then to me: "That was more than four years ago. Before the unpleasantness."

Douglas had been a partner in a well-known Bangkok gay tour business. His two former partners were jailed and eventually deported as the result of a scandalous incident of official homophobia at the hands of a foreign government. Even though he had already spent more than a year in a wheelchair following major orthopedic surgery, Douglas began to run the company single-handedly until starting Purple Dragon, his own business, last April.

Purple Dragon also owns Figo, Siem Reap's second gay bar and restaurant. He spends almost half of his time there. "The place is losing money like crazy," he admitted. Then Darika joked about starting an NGO to show village ladyboys how to apply their makeup correctly in order to get some UN funding.

"My boyfriend does not enjoy Cambodia so he stays home. Darika loves to go once and a while to tend bar. I get only eight or ten days home every month since my business has operations in seven countries. I've spent a lot of time in China and India this year. Unfortunately it's lousy for my relationship. I have a fantastic boyfriend who helps take care of the office when I'm away."

And what does Darika do with her time? She is not seen in public much these days because she is busy dispensing advice and writing her memoirs. (More likely, she does not get many invitations.)

"I have done sooo much in my life that everyone will want a copy. I'm even throwing in a few of my beauty secrets. Dessert anyone? I wish they would make some crème brulee in this place."

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