

MARK DELLAGROTTE BRINGS A GENUINE SLICE OF THAILAND TO SNOWY SOMERVILLE, MASS.

Story and photos by Kelly Crigger



SITYODTONG MUAY THAI ACADEMY
SOMERVILLE, MA



Having failed his audition for a Captain Morgan rum commercial, DellaGrotte concentrates on his Muay Thai moves.

Boston Thai Party

“Who turned the basement into a fight gym?” is the first question that occurs to visitors when descending the stairs from Cutter Street into Sityodtong Muay Thai Academy just outside of Boston. The answer is Mark DellaGrotte. He first converted the former apartment that sits below his father’s law office into a gym in 1996, calling it “Multi-Culture Martial Arts Academy.” But after years of flirting with other martial arts, including Jeet Kune Do and Indonesian Pencak Silat, DellaGrotte settled down with Muay Thai.

SON OF YODTONG

Sityodtong is small and crowded but immaculate, and boasts top-tier MMA instruction once you get past the guard. DellaGrotte’s dog, Ducati, is a menacing black Cane Corso that hangs out by the front stairs and prowls the gym looking to snack on students who can’t handle the

training. Aside from the risk of being mauled, the gym offers world-class training by instructors who are professional, supportive and fully certified in the art of Muay Thai under DellaGrotte’s *mong kol* ranking system, which is similar to belts in other martial arts.

“Most of my instructors are at least a purple *mong kol*,” says DellaGrotte, whose mug and signature black, flat cap have been seen standing in the Octagon behind Kenny Florian, Marcus Davis, Stephan Bonnar and Patrick Cote. “They know the advanced movements, both offensive and defensive of Muay Thai, they know the mastery techniques, the supplementary techniques, the Wai Kru. They know how to wrap hands, hold pads. Anybody who’s a certified instructor under me has been to Thailand. They know what they’re doing.”

The goal of Sityodtong instructors is to develop a long-term program for each

student instead of simply teaching the move of the day. Johnny McDonough oversees the sparring sessions that are meant to showcase what the students have learned. “It’s going to give you an idea of where you are,” McDonough says. “It’s going to give me an idea as their instructor of where they are so I can sort of guide them further in their development.”

DellaGrotte was first introduced to Muay Thai in 1997, when a friend took him to the famed Yodtong boxing camp in Pattaya, Thailand. After eight years of proving his worth as a student and fighter (he has a record of 13-1 in Muay Thai bouts), DellaGrotte was designated by Kru Yodtong as his representative in the United States to teach and preserve the art. In honor of his mentor, DellaGrotte named his gym Sityodtong, which means “son of Yodtong.”

To say Sityodtong is influenced by Thailand is like saying anorexics are influenced by mirrors. Everything is done in the style of a traditional Muay Thai camp, from the way they address each other with a *wai* (a bow with hands clasped near the forehead) and an aloha-ish “*Sawatdee*

Kap” to the workout shorts hanging over a rope to dry. Twice a year, DellaGrotte takes his students to Thailand to get the true Muay Thai experience and to gain an appreciation for how good they have it.

“I like training here because Mark doesn’t just tell you how to do things, but he shows you as well,” says Neil LeGallo, a longtime student of DellaGrotte’s. “If you want to know about the art and style of Muay Thai, then there’s no better place to train.”

BEDROOM TRAINING

Touring Sityodtong is accomplished by standing in one place and looking around 360 degrees, like a virtual online tour. The place is anything but palatial, as it takes a mere 20 paces by an average-sized man to get from one side to the other. It’s not what you would expect in a world-class MMA training facility, which Murillo “Ninja” Rua found out when he came for a visit.

“Ninja was checking out the place to see if he wanted to train here and spent a couple of days working with me on the pads,” DellaGrotte laughs, recalling the visit. “Coming from Chute Boxe, he was like, ‘This place is...not so big.’” It’s not so tall, either.



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Sityodtong may be small, but it houses some big names. Top: Kenny Florian (seated) teaches Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu class. Right: Marcus Davis travels down from Bangor, Maine, to work on his ground-and-pound technique.





gym class

Right: DellaGrotte trains his students in traditional Muay Thai, the bread and butter of his school.

Below: In the mixed martial arts class students combine their kickboxing with other elements taught at Sityodtong.

Bottom: DellaGrotte's Cane Corso does not follow the unified rules.



The average ceiling height is 7 feet, and a steel crossbeam runs the length of the gym at around 5-foot-8, though it's thankfully padded. Six-foot-8 Tim Sylvia would have a hard time training at Sityodtong.

"This used to be our bedroom here," DellaGrotte says through a thick Boston accent while giving a tour. "We remodeled it into a grappling area after the ring and other areas were finished off." A bedroom, kitchenette and TV room are just off the grappling area and can accommodate two fighters in the style of spartan Muay Thai camps, where athletes live and train in the same vicinity.

Muay Thai is the dominant martial art of Sityodtong, but DellaGrotte also offers classes in MMA, Indonesian Pencak Silat, Kali and Jeet Kune Do. He learned his JKD skills from Guro Guy Chase, who spent seven years with the world's foremost authority on the art, Dan Inosanto. Twin brothers Kenny and Keith Florian offer Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu three times a week, and kids classes were recently added to the schedule. The price for being so qualified

and popular is mat space. Sityodtong is barely larger than a double-wide trailer, so finding a spot to roll and box with other students can be challenging.

A CLEAN, WELL-LIGHTED PLACE

Mop Kune Do and Lysol-Jitsu are the unofficial yet often-practiced art forms of Sityodtong. In traditional Thai style, the floor, walls, mats, pads and even the ring ropes are wiped down and disinfected nightly by the newer and younger students. (Spotting UFC welterweight contender Kenny Florian with a Swiffer is on par with a Loch Ness Monster sighting.) The dedication to cleanliness is a by-product of DellaGrotte's samurai lifestyle, as well as a mix of germaphobia and obsessive-compulsive disorder that dictates everything has to be in order.

The phrase, "the team that disinfects together, avoids staph together," describes

Sityodtong USA

OWNER: Mark DellaGrotte

LOCATION: 100 Broadway, Somerville, Mass., 02145

OPENED: 1997

FLOOR SPACE: 1,500 sq ft

HEAVY BAGS: 8

RING OR CAGE: Ring

ATMOSPHERE: Small and clean, but crowded

CLASSES OFFERED: Muay Thai boxing, Kali, Silat, Brazilian Jiu-jitsu, MMA

CONTACT: (617) 627-9678; www.sityodtong.com

Sityodtong. Daily sanitization, along with quality instruction, more than compensate for training in a basement cast aside by a lawyer and prowled by an attack dog. 🐕

