

Subcontinental Divide

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RESTAURANT REVIEW

There are run-of-the-mill Indian dishes - and there are departures to trumpet about.

Abhi's Indian Restaurant

163 CONCORD ROAD, NORTH STRATHFIELD

TEL: 9743 3061

Open Lunch noon-3pm (Sun-Fri); dinner 6-10pm (seven nights)

Tried Crab puttlu (\$16.90), samundri mix (\$16.90), chicken 65 (\$10.80), masala dosa (\$9.80), chicken makhni (\$17.80), lamb shanks chetnad (\$18.80), beef ambotik (\$18.80), panir tamater (\$15.80)

Bottom line for four \$125.60



Illustration: Simon Letch

The thing with miracles is that they only work one, glamorous, way. Turn water into wine and they'll talk about you for millennia; turn gold into lead and nobody but your accountant will be interested.

This brings us to Abhi's, which recently turned cottage cheese into little cubes that tasted of, er, nothing. This is a miracle - of sorts - isn't it?

Popsi Bubblehead and I go with our chums Polly and Nate Cucumber, who have moved into the area. Nate, in particular, needs cheering up because he no longer has a garden in which to artificially inseminate vegetables. "There is only so much insemination you can do in a window box," he says gloomily. He's right. I tried it and limped for days.

Abhi's is buzzing when we get there and find ourselves at a table in the very centre of the front area. The entrees arrive and suddenly the table is full of food. It's a strange truism about Indian restaurants: the tables never quite deal with the number of dishes that need to be placed upon them (it may be different in India but I haven't been there and so cannot possibly comment).

The crab puttlu - shelled crab mixed with mustard seeds, tomatoes and ginger - is the hit entree of the night. It has a fresh simplicity about it that can often get lost in the snarl of less-practised Indian cooking. What's more, you can taste the crab. Spooky.

The samundri mix of prawns, fish and baby squid - covered in semolina, ginger and fenugreek then shallow fried - is terrific, too. On the other hand, Nate and I are just so-so about the chicken 65 (perhaps it was the glow-in-the-dark red colour) but Popsi and Polly are impressed.

A tip about the masala dosa (aka masala dosai). It is hard to share among four people, given that it is a long rolling pin of a pancake in which resides spiced potato and onion and the like. Chop it up like the ignorant Westerners we are and you find that the two who get the end bits end up chomping on mostly air.

Were we to be authentic (as my old Mumbai-born chum Aruna leatere once showed me) we would rip a hole in the middle of the pancake, then use bits torn off the end to pick out the potato mixture and dip it into the accompanying sauces.

Of the main courses, I have to say two work and two don't. This is probably just as well because our four entrees and four mains could feed Bangladesh.

The beef ambotik, which the menu describes as "a variation on the famous vindaloo", is more of a shy cousin; of the panir tamater (the abovementioned cottage cheese dish), the less said the better.

Meanwhile, the chicken makhni (a sort of butter chicken thing) and the lamb shanks chetnad are terrific. The chetnad, chopped shanks with milled chillies, tomato, garam masala and curry leaves, is marvellous, a perfect example of the departure from the run-of-the-mill that Abhi's does so well.