

Kathmandu Kitchen

I love Indian food. When my son was growing up the food we could always count on him eating was Indian food. Especially at 8, and if you have children, you know what that can be like. Even on a trip to Italy we managed to find fabulous Indian food. So hubby Pete Nowlen and I were very excited to try out Kathmandu Kitchen with Cary Arnold (our lovely editor), John Sanchez (her handsome husband), and Ara Arbabzadeh our photographer, for this month's edition of Davis Life Magazine. Kathmandu Kitchen is actually Nepalese, which I'm sure is important, but truthfully I can barely tell the difference, I love both.

The most amazing thing about the evening to me was the fact that Cary and John had never tried Indian or Nepalese! Pete and I (and Ara) got the honor of teaching them the ways of the vindaloo.

We met for drinks beforehand to get everyone in a good mood (liquor *is* the social lubricant after all). By the time we hit Kathmandu Kitchen we were starving! When we arrived at a little after 7, on a Thursday, the place was packed. I noticed it was mostly college students, but that's not a bad thing. A busy restaurant is usually a sign of good food! The decor is a little odd. It used to be a pizza parlor, and that's kind of hard to hide. But the colors are bright, and it reminded me of most Indian restaurants I've been too.

We dove right in with two appetizer platters, the Himalayan platter, which includes vegetable pakora, samosa, momos, naan and achar (\$6.50), and the Kathmandu special jumbo platter, with 4 chicken pakora, 4 meat momos, 4 shrimp pakora, and 4 chicken tikka with naan and achar (\$9.95). What a great deal! Two platters were plenty for the 5 of us. The platters are served with four sauces. One is tamarind chutney, one is mint chutney, and two we didn't recognize (good, but one was VERY spicy).

One thing I learned doing research on the Davis Wiki was about the momos. Momos are steamed dumplings filled with a savory mixture of meat or vegetables and spices. I'd never had them before (they're not on a lot of menus). I started with a meat momo, and I can happily say it was **fantastic!** Great flavor, moist, and perfect size, they're similar to pot stickers, and I like them just as much. The pakoras and samosas were very good; a pakora is a fried fritter consisting of a batter with vegetables, or vegetables and meat. A samosa is a pastry stuffed with chickpeas, potatoes and sometimes chicken or paneer, the homemade Indian cheese. I would have said samosas were my favorite Indian appetizer before I tried the momos, but they're still a very strong second, maybe still first? We'll see.

The chicken tikka on the appetizer platter was somewhat dry. If you like chicken tikka, don't judge it by this. The chicken on the mixed grill platter that we had later was much better.

One thing about the platters that I really liked was the size of each appetizer. Pete and I

often have to cut the pakoras and samosas to share, but on the platter everything was single serving.

Cary and John fell in love with the naan, which I have to admit is my favorite part of Indian, or Nepalese food. There's something magical about dipping hot fresh naan in the various sauces and chutneys. Naan is a type of flat bread cooked in a clay pot in the Tandoori oven and served hot and fresh. They have 9 different types of bread, but we stuck with the plain naan. Pete and I usually order garlic naan as well, but we were doing well to cut down on the number of different dishes to choose from. The menu is very large, and tempting with plenty of choices for anyone, meat eater or vegetarian!

At the time the appetizers came we got the lassis we requested. Lassi is a yogurt drink that comes in a few different flavors. None of us had ever tried them, so we didn't really know what to expect. We got mango and salt, and yes, I mean salt flavor! The mango was not overly sweet and did go well with the chutneys and spices, but we didn't really appreciate them the way others might. I might be able to get used to them, however. The salt lassi was totally undrinkable to us. One of our company said if you froze it, it would make a good salt lick. Though I'm sure someone must like them, it wasn't us. Be warned.

We also ordered two of the soups. We all tasted the multani, and the dal soup (\$3.50 each). They were very flavorful and delicate. Multani is a type of chicken soup, and dal is a light, sometimes almost bland, lentil soup. Neither of these soups was bland, I didn't even feel the need to salt, which is often the case with bean or lentil soups. I could easily make a meal of a salad and bowl of one of these soups, especially with an order of naan.

Next up were the lamb vindaloo (\$10.95), and the baigan bharta (\$8.95). I don't normally like lamb, but the vindaloo was excellent. We got it medium (after this everything was ordered mild!), and though most at the table thought it was too spicy, I think it was perfect. The spice was just enough to get the endorphins pumping, but not so much that you were sorry you started. With a little raita, a type of flavored yogurt sauce which I love, and the very light basmati rice, the spice is easily managed. The lamb was very tender and flavorful.

The baigan bharta is eggplant roasted in a clay pot with green onion, garlic, bell pepper, herbs, and spices. I don't like eggplant, never have, but it was good. It was rich and flavorful. Everyone enjoyed it with the naan. We ordered this dish as a thali, a traditional Nepalese dinner that is served with rice, dal, naan, chutney, and several vegetable curry dishes. I always order the thali; it's the best deal other than the lunch buffet. The a la Carte comes with rice only.

Next we were served the chicken tikka masala (\$10.95), the palak paneer (\$8.95), and the mixed grill platter (\$14.95). The masala was good, but it was a little sour for my taste, not bad, but different than I expected. The fact that it's not as red as I've seen leads me to believe they use less food coloring in their recipe, which I for one am glad of. When I go back I'll probably order it again, I can be a terrible creature of habit.

The palak paneer was exactly as I like, house made cheese (paneer) in a creamy spinach and herb sauce. I like this dish because it's easy to eat along with the other spicy dishes. The creaminess of the sauce is very mild and soothing.

Cary especially enjoyed the rack of lamb on the mixed grill platter, which she thought was the best of the lamb. The mixed grill is a selection of marinated red snapper, prawns, chicken, lamb, and rack of lamb, which is roasted and served on a sizzling platter. Pete enjoyed the prawns (but he thought shrimp was a better description, they were on the small side), and I think John enjoyed most everything from what I remember.

We decided at this point we had had plenty to eat, and though some of the desserts seemed worth trying, none of us was hungry enough to be tempted. The kulfi, a creamy and rich ice cream made predominantly with saffron and pistachio (\$3.25) sounds like a possibility the next time.

Overall I have to say I enjoyed the evening. The service, while not overly friendly was good, but the lighting was kind of harsh. Not necessarily a date night sort of place. As a businessperson I feel compelled to complain about the bathrooms. Everyone agreed that they were some-what scary, think frat house. But it was a very busy evening. Maybe they're better most of the time. The prices were very reasonable for the amount of food we consumed. The beers were large (they say the Taj Mahal is the most popular) and food delicious enough that I'm sure Pete and I will be back. I think we even managed to snag the newbies.

Kathmandu Kitchen is located at 234 G St., in Davis, (530) 756-3507, www.kathmandukitchen.com. Business hours are