

RESTAURANT REVIEW: DELHI

# WINE & DINE, INDIAN STYLE

Masala House at the upscale Sunder Nagar Market offers a novel take on Indian fine dining paired with wine

I have never been a huge fan of Indian food when combined with wine. To my mind the strong aromas of our typical *desi khana* often overwhelm the delicate flavours of the wine. However, there are times when the pairing (or shall we say *jugalbandhi*) of the two can come off quite well. One such occasion was a Delhi Wine Club wine dinner that I attended recently at the new fine dining Indian restaurant, Masala House.

Masala House is quite an uninspired name but the location, right on the corner of Sunder Nagar market, could not be better in terms of accessibility and the kind of upmarket clientele the restaurant is targeting. I spent some time chatting with the affable founder Saurabh Anand, who has launched three Indian restaurants in New York City. Masala House is his first foray into the Indian market and opened in October 2015.

We climbed the stairs to the terrace where the event was being kicked off. Passing through the restaurant I was struck by the fact that while the décor was quite plush and luxurious, there was no hint of the kind of cuisine that it was showcasing. Muted yellows and browns don't really match the vibrancy and



Clockwise from top: A choice selection – Anarkali Tikki, Kadhi Patta Jheenga, Silbatte ki Shami



Left: Table for eight at Masala House. Above: Patra Kabuli, pan-seared vine leaves with mushrooms and chickpeas

aromas of Indian food. Still, the proof of the pudding is in the eating and I was in no hurry to pass judgement.

White-liveried waiters milled around in the cool Delhi night, bearing trays of elegantly presented appetizers. I bit into the signature Anarkali Tikki – an innovative mix of beetroot, quinoa seed and peanut butter crunch – and was immediately delighted. It was quite amazing what the chef had done with the humble beetroot and the same goes for the jackfruit at the heart of the Kathal Varqui. However, my personal favourite was the Kadhi Patta Jheenga – succulent prawns that just melted in my mouth. Washing these morsels down with the accompanying smooth and buttery Sula Brut Limited Holi Edition was an exquisite experience.

But the best was yet to come. Downstairs, in the main restaurant, I started with the *murgh makai*, a chicken and corn broth infused with buttered popcorn, an odd combination but one which worked beautifully. That was followed by light and fluffy *appams* accompanied by a coconut-based

vegetable stew and more of the delightful prawns in a peppercorn sauce. These were perfectly paired with a typically fruity Mud House Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand, with a herbal nose, and Hardy's Gewürztraminer Riesling from Australia, off-dry with just a touch of residual sweetness.

For the main course I chose the Lamb Korma along with the amazingly rich *kali dal* and *dum aloo* served over a delicious pulao delicately mixed with saffron and morels. Our table was unanimous in its conclusion that the food had been cooked to perfection. Switching to reds at this stage, we were served Hardy's Cabernet Shiraz and Kumala Pinotage from South Africa, both medium-bodied wines with rich fruit flavours to complement the aromatic

spices of the food.

The only disappointments for me were the desserts – the *gajar halwa* cake was too stolid for a finale; the chocolate *rasagulla* mousse was a somewhat better bet. Overall, it was a great experience, not forgetting the very efficient and friendly serving staff. One can expect Masala House to provide serious competition to the older players in the genre of Indian fine dining, like Indian Accent and Kainoosh. ♦

— Ranjan Pal

### Personal Recommendation

#### What to know

A fine-dining restaurant with an innovative take on traditional Indian flavours

#### What to eat

Silbatte Ki Shami, Anarkali Tikki, Dora Kebab, Malabar Fish Curry, Guchhi Pulao, Gulkand Phirni

#### What to drink

■ The Nawab – tequila, triple sec and lime juice, served on the rocks

■ An Indian Summer – white rum and mango purée, lime, mint, fresh green chillies with club soda

#### How much

Meal for two with wine, ₹2,500

### GETTING THERE

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