



cover story

April 28-May 4, 2005

food

Coriander : an Indian Bistro

by Elisa Ludwig

The decorators at Coriander, the Indian bistro at the Ritz Center in Voorhees, have done a great job transporting their diners far, far away from Hollywood Video and Applebee's. Coriander, which opened its storefront door last year, is a burst of turquoise and tangerine hues, accented by intricately carved wood-framed banquettes and sequined fabrics. Copper kettles line the back wall, presumably staged for the daily lunch buffet. It's hard to believe that this room could just as easily be a Payless.

Owner and executive chef Vipul Bhasin knows something about decor and atmosphere: He worked in top-rated Indian hotels and restaurants before coming to the U.S. That background is also evident in house specialties, which reflect Indian trends in fine dining, freshening up classic recipes while preserving the integrity of regional cooking. The vast menu has recognizable tandoor and vegetarian dishes as well as more unusual fare like Kashmiri walnut soup and fish in a coriander and mint curry.

We snacked on the complimentary miniature pappadums with homemade tamarind sauce and mint chutney before digging into a salad of cucumbers, tomatoes and carrots under a mild lemon cilantro dressing. We moved on to cashew and potato croquettes - subtly sweet beneath their crispy breaded coating.

Thalis, or large combination meals, are a reasonably priced way to sample many dishes without getting the full-on bloat effect of the buffet. At Coriander they are served not in the usual tin vessels but in bright modern earthenware. They come with chicken, lamb, seafood, or vegetarian dishes. The definitively "non-veg" thali is a combination of honey and ginger-tinged chicken makhani; tender, spicy lamb rogan josh; and vegetable korma in a coconut cream sauce tinged with saffron. The plate is balanced by a sizable mound of fragrant rice, a rich lentil daal and cool raita, as well as pillowy loaves of naan straight out of the oven. It's the best of all worlds, and the dishes are prepared with precision.

Desserts are also a mix of traditional items like gulab jamun and Bhasin's originals. Classic rice pudding with pistachios and almonds is hopped up with saffron. We were floored by the kesari ananas, pineapple scented with fennel and saffron then broiled in the tandoor. The glazed, warm fruit, arranged around slices of mango ice cream, alone justifies the bridge toll. Or a Hollywood Video membership.

Coriander Indian Bistro 910 Haddonfield- Berlin Rd., Voorhees, N.J. 856-566-4546

- Lunch: Mon.-Sun., 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.
- Dinner: Mon.-Thu., 5:30 p.m.-10 p.m.; Fri.-Sat., 5 p.m.-10:30 p.m.; Sun., 5 p.m.-9:30 p.m.
- Appetizers, \$3.95-\$7.25; entrees, \$8.95-\$15.95
- BYOB.
- Wheelchair accessible.
- Smoking not permitted.
- All major credit cards.
- Reservations accepted.