



Duck leg confit with tomato chutney draped over green beans



Silky and spicy dahi kabab—seared peppercorn-laced yogurt—with a salad of micro greens and an orange-coriander vinaigrette

FLAVORS TO BURN

By DENNIS RAY WHEATON

On that that long-ago trip, I learned that the marigold is an essential Indian festival flower. And since August, it is also the name of a contemporary Indian restaurant on the ground floor of a handsome Uptown limestone with newly rehabbed lofts for sale. Marigold is vibrantly festive but not decked out like your typical

knickknack-laden Devon Avenue joint. With its high ceiling, jammed bar, backless upholstered cube seats, and pulsating techno music, the place is more in line with, say, Blackbird, than with Udipi Palace—but there's one telling difference: an intoxicating potpourri of Eastern aromas

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wafts through the long, narrow dining room.

Nor does Marigold's menu resemble any at most Indian restaurants: instead of the usual dozens of items, there are just five starters, four midcourses, and seven entrées. Naan is the only bread served, but it is well made, puffy and with a sheen of ghee on one side. And the portions are generous enough that many diners will be satisfied with two courses.

The kitchen's talent for fusion surfaces in two terrific appetizers. Three bulky scallops, grilled and dusted with garam masala (a dry-roasted North Indian spice blend), arrive atop grilled spiced asparagus and whole shallots. Naturally, those yellow-to-reddish flecks on the dish are marigold petals, which garnish other dishes as well. Even more succulent is the duck leg confit, savory with Indian spices and cooked dum-style (Moghul pot roasting in fat) and served with tomato chutney and tangy green beans stir-fried in a kadhai (an Indian wok). This is almost a meal in itself—and one I would return for in a heartbeat.

For the midcourse, there's an excellent—and huge—potato- and pea-filled samosa served with thick mint and tamarind chutneys. The first time I tried the curry-coconut calamari and mussel soup made with sambhar (a South Indian spice blend), I found it too salty; the second time it was on the mark, leaving the curry and coconut free to enhance the melody of marine flavors. Even better, though,

was the dahi kabab, seared peppercorn-laced yogurt the texture of fresh goat cheese, served with a very French-looking salad of micro greens and an orange-coriander vinaigrette.

Riley can also light the fuse on dynamite lamb dishes. Take the entrée of lamb shank vindaloo—a spin on a deceptively simple-looking bistro-style dish. The waiter warned me about the heat, but I dove right in. Yes, it made me sweat, and I used every ounce of the sides of thick cucumber raita and fluffy basmati rice that balanced the vinegary pungency. Bottom line: I loved it. Clearly the chef is no wimp about Indian spices, but she also knows when to go for subtlety: the comparatively tame lamb chops were easily the best I've ever had in an Indian restaurant. Marinated in spiced yogurt and mustard seeds, the three medium-rare chops were juicy and smoky from their turn in the tandoor (clay oven), and the fine lamb flavor shone through the treatment. They were aptly paired with an upma cake, an interesting polenta-like treat made with ground legumes and cashews. Fish options include a memorable coriander-crust and pan-seared halibut beautifully served on a bed of dal (peas, beans, lentils) with tempura-like vegetable pakoras.