



Marigold's kalonji chicken is marinated. -KEITH HALE/SUN-TIMES



Marigold's dessert choices include kheer, an Indian rice pudding with basmati rice, almonds, pistachios and raisins.

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SUN-TIMES PHOTOS

EXOTIC DELIGHTS

By PAT BRUNO

Marigold has an exotic, mysterious spiciness to it, an aura that is fueled by the candles that flicker in the niches of the wall leading up to the host stand.

The menu at Marigold is as brief as I have seen in an Indian restaurant -- anywhere. Five appetizers, two salads, two soups and seven entrees. This brevity, and the approach that the kitchen takes to Indian cuisine, stems from the subtext that scrawls across the bottom of the one-page menu. "Food. Indian. Authentic.

Modern." Those four words capture, quite nicely, the essence of Marigold.

Duck Leg Dum, another appetizer, offers an adaptation of what you might find in a French bistro, but the Marigold version reveals itself as duck leg cured in Indian spices and cooked confit-style (confit implies the cooking and preserving of the food in its own fat). In this instance it had to do with the "curing and spicing" (the "dum" part of the description). Doesn't matter one iota when the duck leg is meaty, marvelously flavored and enjoyable right down to the bone. A healthy rubble of green beans cooked

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"Kadhai style" (stir-fried) accompanied the duck, and they were, though barely cooked, quite delicious.

The one soup tried, daal tarka, is lentil soup with an Indian spin. The spin was that "tarka" has to do with yellow lentils. It could have been a very boring soup had the kitchen not given the soup two classy flavor dimensions -- roasted cumin and garlic naan croutons. I suspect that this soup would be right up there with chicken soup for curing a cold.

While on the subject of naan, that fabulous Indian bread, Marigold offers but one naan (there are no stuffed versions), and it was incredibly delicious. I broke off chunk after chunk, using this rustic yet classic bread to scoop up the sauce that floated below the lamb shank in my lamb vindaloo entree. The lamb shank was mighty and meaty and made for much enjoyment. I was warned ahead of time by our waiter that it was hot. Yes, my eyeballs were sweating, so the spicing was perfect, and the sauce, elegantly fired up with chiles, was good to the last scoop. A small portion of basmati rice was served in the shape of a pyramid, so that, along, with a small dish of yogurt sauce, helped cool things down a bit.

"Kalonji chicken" was out-and-out terrific. *Kalonji* (a k a *nigella sativa*) is best described as black cumin, and some of that distinctive flavor pervaded the dish, which was made up of a boneless chicken breast (topped with frisee) that rode on a bed of almond and raisin *pulao* (rice).

The menu notes that the chicken gets marinated in a turmeric yogurt sauce before hitting the grill.

Vegetarians will find solace and inspiring sustenance in "Vegetarian Thali." The dish was a wondrous arrangement of house-made paneer (cheese), chana masala (spicy chickpeas), eggplant (similar to ratatouille) and basmati rice. It's an elegant meal, beautifully presented, for just \$13.95.

Desserts are but three -- creme brulee, kulfi and kheer. The latter two got the nod. Kulfi (Indian ice cream), made in-house, was the perfect foil to cool my palate after the fiery vindaloo lamb. Shaved into "tongues" with cardamom and pistachio the prevailing flavors, it was quite enjoyable.

"Kheer" is Indian rice pudding. Looser than traditional rice pudding (soupy, actually) and a lot more interesting, kheer here was, along with basmati rice, laced with a horde of almonds, pistachios and raisins, which gave it a milky breakfast cereal aura, so call it a healthy way to finish.