

# Michele Laudig says Bombay Spice is Indian cuisine for those looking for healthful instead of heavy

By Michele Laudig

published: February 21, 2008

- Jackie Mercandetti



Bombay Spice's updated take on Indian food: (from left) veggie tofu *tikka*, chickpea ceviche, and lamb chops.

## Where:

Bombay Spice, 7000 North 16th Street

## Details:

Two-item plate: \$8.95

Seared scallops: \$8.95

Chickpea ceviche: \$5.95

Rice pudding: \$3.95

602-371-0111

Hours: Sunday to Thursday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.

## Subject(s):

[Bombay Spice](#), [Indian food in Phoenix](#)

Indian cuisine equals food coma, right?  
Not anymore.

Until recently, I couldn't think of setting foot in an Indian restaurant and not gorging on overly rich, snooze-inducing dishes — that was entirely the point. I usually go for butter-slicked garlic naan, a plateful of creamy *saag paneer* (or a little bit of everything if it's a lunch buffet), a thick mango *lassi*, and some syrupy *gulab jamun* for dessert. Sure, it's dairy overload, and who knows how many calories. But when the craving strikes, that's

what satisfies. The only thing that might improve the experience would be getting carried to my car in a hammock.

Imagine my surprise, then, when I splurged at the new Bombay Spice Grill & Wine, and actually felt energized afterward. They call their fare "redefined Indian food," and indeed, it's a welcome change, especially if you go for healthful instead of heavy.

I admit it took some getting used to. Nothing's fried. Naan's not on the menu. Dishes are prepared with olive oil instead of butter and heavy cream. There's no cheese, either, but a few items contain non-fat yogurt. And while the name would suggest otherwise, Bombay Spice doesn't specialize in spicy flavors; seasonings are mostly mild, although diners can jazz things up with five different sauces.

The vibe is unexpected, too. Forget about the ornate décor you'd find in a stereotypical Indian joint — there's nary a paisley-draped thing in sight. Instead, it's colorful and streamlined, with an open kitchen in the back, and a sleek counter along one side of the room, backed by an illuminated chartreuse wall of suspended wine bottles. Meanwhile, the soundtrack is upbeat indie rock, from the Arcade Fire to the Pixies. By day, Bombay Spice feels like a hip neighborhood cafe; by night, it settles in a mellow wine bar groove.

And, no, wine is definitely not an afterthought here. There are 40 of 'em to choose from, and better yet, they're all inexpensive: six bucks for a glass, 20 for a bottle. I can't think of another restaurant with that kind of variety at those kinds of prices. Still, it's consistent with the rest of the menu — all the food items are under \$10.

Sometimes I can skip appetizers and be just fine with it, but at Indian restaurants, I look forward to the starters as much as the main dishes. I mean, who can just inhale a plate of curry and call it a day? Not me. Give me samosas, give me warm flatbreads, give me a variety of tastes. The first time I stopped by, at lunchtime, I was disappointed that Bombay Spice didn't offer any appetizers, but they've since changed their tune. Now the menu's the same at lunch and dinner, and includes a fine list of "Bombay tapas."

The lamb chops were one of the best choices — lightly spiced, expertly grilled, and juicy. The seared sea scallops were top-notch as well, marinated in seasoned yogurt and served with an addicting fresh mint sauce. On the other hand, I couldn't get into the chicken *tikka* skewers. Those were yogurt-marinated, too, and they sounded appealing, but when they came off the grill, the chunks of chicken breast were kind of dry.

I had no complaints about the vegetarian tapas, though. The chickpea ceviche was one of the tastiest salads I've had in a while, a cool jumble of chickpeas, tomatoes, cucumbers, and diced red onions in a tangy-sweet tamarind, mint, and yogurt sauce. Served on a big plate garnished with crisp pieces of *papadum*, it was enough to share among a few friends. There was also plenty of vegetable *biryani* to divvy up — we especially liked the plump raisins buried in the fluffy basmati rice.

Bombay Spice's vegetable samosas were about as guilt-free as they come. Baked instead of fried, they had a thin, crisp pastry shell, and were filled with potatoes and peas. *Paratha* (whole wheat chapatti stuffed with potatoes and lentils) was also lighter than the traditional pan-fried version, and served with a potent tamarind sauce.

Good thing it's easy to make a meal out of tapas, because the sautéed and slow-cooked entrees were more hit-or-miss.

The beef *seekh kebab*, made with seasoned ground beef, was lackluster, and the chicken curry was bland, with dry pieces of meat; at least the veggie version contained a broad variety of vegetables, which tasted good in combination. Chicken *tikka*, meanwhile, benefited from a light sauce that kept the meat moister than the skewered version.

In general, I preferred the meatless options, especially the kicky tofu *bhurji*, scrambled with onions, ginger, and garlic — it had a nice touch of spiciness. Spinach cooked with tofu, tomatoes, and onions was quite flavorful, and I also enjoyed the roasted eggplant sautéed with tomatoes and onions.

All these items came two to a plate, with basmati or brown rice, some whole-wheat chapatti, and a choice of sauce. Along with the tamarind and mint sauces, there was also *raita* (yogurt, cucumber, and mint), curry, and "Bombay hot," which was truly fiery. It's actually worth ordering the sauce sampler just to get a taste of them all.

As you'd expect, desserts are on the lighter side: fresh fruit with non-fat yogurt, or homemade rice pudding. I went for the pudding, in spite of all the food I'd just eaten, and didn't regret one bite. Topped with crushed pistachios and a squiggle of mango purée, it was lightly sweet, with a distinct cardamom flavor, while the texture was creamy but not cloyingly thick. In fact, it was downright refreshing.

After that, thankfully, nobody had to roll me out to the parking lot.