

RESTAURANT REVIEW: Veeraswamy

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Venetia van Kuffeler dines at London's oldest Indian restaurant, Veeraswamy

MW Eat's Veeraswamy restaurant recently hit the headlines as it was awarded its first Michelin star. The UK's oldest Indian restaurant, Veeraswamy remains a legendary culinary landmark, often playing host to royalty and diplomatic patrons. Situated on Regent Street, the restaurant has been specialising in classical Indian cuisine at the same location since 1926. The restaurant's first owner, Edward Palmer, was the great-grandson of General William Palmer, Private Secretary to the first Governor-General of India and an Indian Moghul Princess. Veeraswamy soon became a fashionable rendezvous amongst the rich and famous, who were drawn to its

remarkable cuisine. Today, it still exudes the same glamour and essence of its legendary past. Opulent and sumptuous interiors play host to some of London's best Indian food.

Veeraswamy's menu consists of long-established classical dishes, along with delectable comfort food and contemporary creations, all cooked and prepared by skilled regional chefs. The menu swings between dishes that have been traditionally prepared in palaces and gourmet homes, along with a selection of street food favourites. In honour of Veeraswamy's 90th anniversary year and Her Majesty's 90th birthday, the restaurant has a selection of new rare royal dishes that include Asafjahi Lamb Pasanda from legendary kitchens of the Nizam of the Hyderabad where Palmer was born, and Shahjahani Badami Chicken, a sophisticated Moghul recipe to remember his great grandmother.

Choices were plentiful. My husband's starter of venison mutta kebab was essentially a venison and quail scotch egg with tamarind glaze. Rich and spicy, he declared it a triumph. My crab cake too was pretty perfect. Once through the crunchy coating, moist and meaty chunks of crab, ginger, chilli and fresh lime were revealed. Arvind, Veeraswamy's excellent Manager, was insistent that we tried one of the restaurant's signature dishes, Raj Kachor. Elevating humble street food into a dish fit for a king, this was a large wheat puri 'filled with goodies and splashed with chutneys.' A taste explosion on the tongue, it was decorated with fresh pomegranate, coriander and tamarind pastes.

His classic Kashmiri rogan josh was an intensely aromatic curry made with Welsh lamb knuckles, sun dried kashmiri spices, saffron and cockscomb flower. It was a firm favourite. From the district of Kottayam, my Kerala prawn curry with kokum flowers was warming and coconutty. Possibly the best curry I have ever tasted, the sauce was rich, thick and tasted of the ocean. Veeraswamy's mouthwatering seafood is certainly something to shout about.

Arvind was insistent that some side dishes would complete the meal. We ordered the Keoti Dal of four yellow lentils slow cooked together with green

mango, and the tantalising fresh pineapple curry with coconut, turmeric and curry leaves. So rich, I found one mouthful was enough, but I was pleased to have tried something so totally different. With so much on offer, we didn't order rice, but the doughy naan seemed to be a necessary decadence to mop up those tasty sauces.

It's no wonder that Veeraswamy has just been awarded its first Michelin star. I am just amazed that it's taken as long as 90 years.

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