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Baked venison samosa comes as a pastry cone as thin and crisp as a dosa

DRINKING & DINING

Classics Revisited: Chutney Mary

First launched in Chelsea in 1990, London's original modern Indian has celebrated its quarter century with a move to swanky new premises in St James's



BY BEN MCCORMACK
JUNE 15, 2015 13:33

Last year a friend who works for the Home Office invited me to a garden party at 10 Downing Street. Apart from the fact that the Prime Minister was the only man not wearing a suit (a tellingly patrician instance of sartorial *droit du seigneur*), the most memorable thing about the evening was the excellence of the catering, which was an Indian buffet laid on by Masala Zone, the diffusion brand from the MW Eat collection of restaurants.

The group's flagship, [Chutney Mary](#), has just relocated to the bottom of St James's Street – not just handy for the Camerons' weekly date night now that they're staying put in SW1, but for anyone for whom a trip to the restaurant's old home on King's Road seemed like a bit of a schlep.

You will find dishes familiar from other restaurants done

MW Eat restaurants – which also include Michelin-starred Amaya and London's oldest Indian, Veeraswamy – have always

very well here... but the very best are those that you won't have seen before

stood out for the intelligence and acumen of their owners, Ranjit Mathrani, his wife Namita Panjabi and her sister Camellia Panjabi. Namita and Camellia are both

Cambridge economics graduates; Camellia was head of marketing for Taj Hotels in India and Namita worked as a merchant banker, as did Ranjit.

When Chutney Mary opened in 1990, it was the first restaurant to focus on the seven main cuisines of India: Lucknow and Punjab in the north, Chettinad in the south, Gujrat and Parsi in the west, Goa and Kerala in the south-west, and Hyderabad in the middle. Ranjit recruited chefs from each of the regions and Camellia and Namita sourced recipes that ran the gamut from the grandest maharajahs' palaces to food stalls by the side of the street. It has always been labour-intensive cooking, involving techniques such as making sauces from scratch and grinding spices to order, and has more in common with the time lavished on Indian home cooking than the quick-fix solutions of high-street curry houses.



Tandoori Lobster

You will find dishes familiar from other restaurants done very well here – sweet-fleshed tiger prawns around which a skein of golden batter has been woven, say – but the very best are those that you won't have seen before. Baked venison samosa comes as

a pastry cone as thin and crisp as a dosa, with a couple of blobs of deeply flavoured date and tamarind chutney to smear onto the richly minced meat piled within. Duck jardaloo has slices of pink-cooked Creedy Carver duck layered over a sticky, sweet-and-sharp jam of apricot, chilli, jaggery and vinegar.

This is food that is as enjoyable as it is eye-opening. A side order of Mewari dal (mustard leaves, sorrel, butter and jaggery) tastes like fiery creamed spinach and, though simple, is so perfectly balanced in flavour it is one of the finest things you will eat here. The challenge of making Indian puddings appealing to western palates is addressed with salted caramel kulfi impressed with a dimple of orange toffee sauce. And the hard sell of eating Indian food for lunch is solved by offering small plates (Goan crab cakes, crispy chicken wings) and light bites (masala steak sandwich, duck salad with tamarind glaze) to eat in the bar.

The bar in fact is more like a large lounge, where daytime business can segue into off-duty evenings, while the dining room behind is a sophisticated space of low-lit comfort and polished service. If restaurants reflect how their clientele see themselves, this smartly dressed arrival has St James's down to a tee.

Who to take: someone who needs persuading that you can eat Indian for lunch

What to order: go for the dishes you've never seen anywhere else

CHUTNEY MARY

73 St James's Street

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www.chutneymary.com

[Map](#)