

Palki Restaurant

By Fabian Dawson (Staff Reporter)

The art of Indian cooking lies in the science of using spices. A little too much can throw a dish off kilter and too little will pronounce a flavour that is not desired.

Contrary to popular theory that good food is hot Indian food, good Indian food comes from the use of a series of spices that are strategically added to the dish during the cooking process.

The Palki Restaurant in North Vancouver is one of those rare Indian eating establishments where the science of using spices is an art form. There you will find Shakti Chand, whose versatility in the kitchen has made him one of the most-sought-after Indian chefs in B.C.

Chand has teamed up again with veteran Vancouver restaurateur Bhupinder Mroke, who owned and operated the Da Tandoor and Dawat restaurants in B.C. before taking a recent hiatus.

The culinary expertise at Palki is enhanced by Mroke's decade-long experience in the service industry.

"Palki" means Indian carriage and Mroke guarantees you a journey into the world of Indian cuisine.

It is not an expensive journey. Our dinner for two adults and two children was \$59 before the tip.

The Service

Bhupinder Mroke has delved deep into his experience to make Palki a warm, friendly and clean restaurant.

Courteous staff do their best to get you seated but reservations are recommended, especially for dinners.

Crispy papadums precede drink orders and the staff are quick to explain some of the intricacies of their chef's creations.

Mroke, who makes frequent trips to India, has tastefully and elegantly provided a classical North Indian atmosphere to make Palki a comfortable evening out.

Unlike many Indian restaurants, the food at Palki is prepared once the menu is closed.

"We don't heat up pre-cooked food so you must wait a while," says Mroke.

That while can be anywhere from 20 to 30 minutes as chef Shakti Chand works his magic.

The Drinks

Palki offers limited but well-thought-out wine selection to accompany the items on the menu. From experience, my recommendation is a robust Shiraz, preferably Australian, that has a hint of pepper.

Indian beer is always a good bet but it should be reserved for those who can handle volume. Indian cuisine can be quite filling and beer can prevent one from trying more dishes.

Palki's lassi, which is whipped yoghurt with crushed ice and a tinge of spice, helps temper the heat that lies beneath some of the dishes.



Palki Owner Bhupinder Mroke, left, shows what a feast his chef Shakti Chand can serve up for customers at the North Vancouver restaurant.

Order Indian tea as you near the end of your meal. The 'chai' nicely rounds the lingering cornucopia of taste in your mouth.

The Food

Shakti Chand's Pulao dishes are par excellence. Pulao (in some Indian restaurants called Briyani) are Basmati rice dishes that are prepared with lamb, chicken or vegetables. The Lamb Pulao (\$10.95) at Palki is garnished with nuts, raisins and flavoured saffron. If you are dining alone, try one of the Pulao dishes as an appetizer.

Recommended from the appetizer list is the Fish Pakora (\$5.95) - fish marinated in yoghurt, ginger and garlic and batter-fried. It is not too heavy and a hit with the kids.

A great side dish is Palki's mango chutney (\$1.50). And the Onion and Cilantro Naan (\$2.25) is a good base dish.

Palki's tandoor dishes are good and meat lovers will have a great time with the Mixed Grill Platter (\$14.95).

The Afghani Murgh (\$8.85) - chicken cooked in cream sauce - is a great dish that goes well on a bed of fragrant Basmati rice. If you have kids, go for this dish with one of the lighter breads. Another kid favourite is the Murgh Makhani (\$9.45) - broiled tandoori chicken cooked in a butter and cream sauce.

Palki's vindaloo dishes are zesty brown curries with your choice of meats. This is one of the hotter dishes served at the restaurant. Have a cucumber salad on the side.

Palki also offers a lunch buffet and a Sunday brunch.

Ratings:

Food **** Service ****

* acceptable ** good *** very good **** exceptional