

Going Out Food And Drink

Dishing up Indian delights

Restaurant Reviews

Dishoom ★★☆☆☆

There's a clot of new restaurants at the top of St Martin's Lane, two of which are chains – Cantina Laredo and Jamie's Italian (as a small

aside, watch while Big Swearly tries to copy St Jamie's super-successful diffusion line). And Dishoom. Dishoom isn't a chain. Yet. But I'll eat my fedora if it isn't on the cards to roll out this new concept. And I really can't call it anything else but that hideous, bean-country name.

It's a simple idea: taking the Indian restaurant, modernising it, but keeping it affordable and accessible. Most of the new-wave Indian restaurants in London come with bills as dazzling as their decor; here we eat until it's quite hard to prise ourselves from our booths and pay less than 40 quid.

The owners (two brothers and a cousin) have dressed Dishoom up in an appealing way, a recreation of Bombay's all-day cafés.

After eating chilli cheese toast (as basic as it sounds) and breakfast sausages zhuzhed up with a spicy ratatouille, I'm not sure the concept

Garlic naan bread, lighter and crisper than the usual stodge-fest, is properly blissful

is so much Bombay café as Scooby snack with some chilli on top.

Still, there isn't a dish that arrives that I dislike. OK, maybe that chilli cheese toast pointiness. Perhaps it isn't the finest Indian food in town but it's not setting out to be. However, the little lamb chops, almost furry from their yoghurt spicing, charred from fiery heat and splendidly tender, are as good as you'll get.

There's other good stuff, too.

A roomali (unleavened bread) wrap stuffed with judiciously spiced 'Dishoom' chicken, fresh herbs and good chutney is: 'Like



Attractive: Dishoom is based on traditional Bombay cafés

something you'd get in Pret,' says my washipal but is far fuller, fresher and punchier than its sandwich-store equivalent – a perfect lunchtime treat. Garlic naan bread, lighter and crisper than the usual stodge-fest, is properly blissful. Black daal, though a little on the wimpy side, is a pleasing, buttery sludge, perfect for dunking that naan in.

If this is going to be a chain, it's no bad thing. In design and food ethos, it's a bit like an Indian

version of Jamie's next door – yes, that's a compliment. Chains and diffusion lines are always going to be with us, we should celebrate if they're any good. No, it's not that authentic; no, it's not going to replace your beloved local favourite Taj Mahal nor stop you booking that special night out in Rasoi Vineet Bhatia.

Maybe the sausages are a little ill-judged and samosas a touch clenched and impenetrable but it's a great pit-stop: somewhere to loiter over a cup of chai or a roomali or a bacon naan before hitting the shops again. Bacon

naan? Ho yes. Dishoom is open all day and that baby is part of the breakfast menu.

Also, shallowly, it looks good. Tangles of old-fashioned twisted flex drape from above, there are ceiling fans, raw-filament bulbs, trompe l'oeil tiles, 'mismatched' furniture, vintage Indian posters and ads. Even the loos are things of beauty, furnished with lighted cabinets bursting with wonderful proprietary bathroom requisites from the subcontinent.

An enthusiastic chap who seems to be permanently stationed in a booth outside the lavs spies me still chortling at the loo's huge vintage mural of muscly chap with sash reading 'Best-built Parsi'. He's one of the owners, and tells me that in the 1940s and 50s, Parsis were hugely into bodybuilding. Who knew? Bacon naan and an education; what more do you want?

Marina O'Loughlin

A meal for two with water and service costs about £35.
12 Upper St Martin's Lane. Tel: 020 7420 9320. www.dishoom.com
Tube: Covent Garden

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