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YOUR LUSTFUL
SECRETS
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Zaffron Kitchen



Dum chicken biryani



Vibrant and approachable Indian cuisine

A glass-paned window box juts out at Zaffron's entrance, showcasing the chefs at work and the star of the show—a charcoal-fired tandoor oven. This is the best spot for viewing the kitchen mechanics, so be sure to take a peek before entering. The theatre-style kitchen opens out onto a spacious room over a brushed concrete floor, flushed in hues of saffron orange and gold, which emanate from the bright chairs, spice jars hanging from the ceiling, and expanses of brick and wood. A soundtrack of jazz and bossa nova completes the soothing vibe.

Couples linger at tables on the patterned, ceramic-tiled patio cooled by overhead ceiling fans, and there's a playhouse for fidgety kids in the back corner, complete with a vintage popcorn machine (though this was out of order at the time of our visit). There's a certain cheekiness about the place, spotlighted by the witty puns sported on the paper napkins and servers' aprons—'The Devil Wears Prata', anyone?

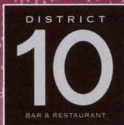
We ventured into the vast menu by starting with the papadum (\$4)—light, crisp and peppery water crackers served with a sweet mango chutney and spicy mint sauce. The *vadai* (\$4.50) were three lentil-fennel-flavoured doughnuts begging to be dipped into a duo of coconut sauces: hot red chili and fresh chutney. The buttery, pull-apart spirals of roti prata (\$3), meant to sop up an addictive, aromatic curry filled with chunks of moist sardines, were ravishing. Piquing our curiosity from the wine list, an Indian shiraz (\$89) elicited mixed reviews for its distinctly barnyard character.

Diners can easily over-order, so do come with a group and be ready to share multiple plates—eager wait-staff are there to help you decide the quantity you'll need. Fragrant garlic naan (\$3.50) was not as fluffy as expected, but crusty, buttery and delicious; from the tandoor oven rose flaming red, seasoned boneless nuggets of dory fish tikka (\$13), meaty and tender with crisp, charred edges. We dipped our bread into the fiery but palatable gravy of the chicken chettinad curry (\$13), but left the arid chicken behind.

A showstopper was the dum chicken biryani (\$11), a casserole of fluffy, mildly spiced basmati rice with succulent whole chicken leg, piquant *au jus* sauce, and perfectly cooked whole hard-boiled egg. Ask the server to break open the sealed naan top, or the egg may pop out onto your lap, as it almost did with us. The spicy spinach purée and cubes of dense Indian cheese in the palak paneer (\$10.50) satisfied, too. Meanwhile must-try desserts include a lightly sweetened and refreshing rasmalai of warm vermicelli *payasam*—a cardamom-infused milk with tender pieces of angel-hair noodles, saffron and cashew nuts, \$5—and *gulab jamun*, three dainty balls of golden-brown milk cakes drenched in a heady honey and rose-water syrup (\$5.50).

As a footnote, Zaffron's hours imply continuous service, but it pays to call ahead; as we found out, after lunch the kitchen was closed until the tandoor oven was fired up again at around 6.15pm. *Yoonie Rauperti*

135-137 East Coast Rd (6440 6786, www.zaffronkitchen.com). ■ *Eunos*; buses 10, 12, 13, 14, 32, 40, 55, 966. Tue-Thu 11.30am-10pm; Fri-Sun 11.30am-10.30pm. Main courses \$8-\$20.



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