

Good eating

Eat out Matthew Evans

Darbar, Glebe
13/20

Scoresheet

Some rewards 11
Likeable 12
Some respectable highlights 13
A solid experience 14
Reliably good 15
A bit of that WOW factor 16
Amazingly good 17
World class 18
Truly spectacular 19
Are we in heaven? 20

The score comprises 10 points for food, five for service and three for ambience, with an extra two points possible for a sprinkling of magic, whether it be the warmth of the welcome, the excitement on the plate, or a spectacular setting.



Well fortified in an Indian grotto

The deft cooking and fresh spices are almost fit for a maharaja.

I want lunch. Nothing fancy. Not expensive, not huge, not something I need to think long and hard about. Just food, hopefully good food at that.

The first two options don't work out. Despite what most people think, we don't just review the first restaurant we visit for Eat out. Mostly we want to give you options for where to spend your hard-earned rather than put the boot in arbitrarily. If you want bad food in Sydney, you can probably find it just as easily as we can.

So today it's a simple place with a bit of history and somewhere to chinwag over a curry, just as real people do. We're at Darbar, a friendly Indian with some pretty good dishes and an eager-to-please manner.

This space used to be Darling Mills. I've eaten here a few times, occasionally on nights off or when it's too late to cook. And I've hesitated to write about it because it's just too obvious. Or so I thought.

It's a curious space, all sandstone and old brick, with curved ceilings that give it the look of a grotto. There's a stone staircase and a private room that feels like a chapel – the stone, in fact, comes from an old church that burnt down in the 1970s.

For a long time the Adey family ran the

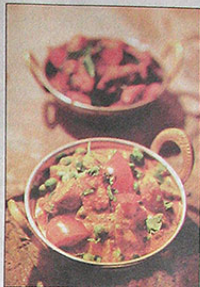
restaurant and grew their fabulous greens above. If I squint a bit, I could be in a fort, or an Indian palace. OK, if I squint a lot. The food isn't quite fit for a maharaja but it is fit for us, this sleepy midweek lunchtime.

The restaurant still has its rusty leather-backed chairs and glass-covered holes in the floor that give views of bottles of wine below. The low lighting that emphasises the texture of the walls and ceiling remains, though these days the wall lights have pictures of Indian freedom fighters on them.

Tables are topped with crisp white cloths that show every little bit of turmeric or chilli or browned onion. Every slop of rasam soup or splash of dahi. And there's a fair bit of that going on. The dishes arrive in classic copper balti dishes and it's easy to dribble the deep, thick sauces that cloak the meats, especially as we keenly soup up the curries with lacy naan.

As business is slow, a cook takes a turn at waiting, his English not as broad as his smile. He warns us that what we've ordered is far too much for two.

How fabulous to find idli, those wonderful fermented rice patties, on his menu. These steamed wonders are light, gently sour and dressed with onion and a little hint of



"gumpowder" chilli, though it doesn't smell like a cap gun or fireworks.

The chicken (andhra natu kodi kura, \$16.90) arrives as bite-sized chunks of deep-fried chicken, moist and cooked in masala. It's heady with ginger, onion and garlic; the spices are from the aromatic end of the scale, such as cinnamon, clove, cardamom and anise.

In the lamb-ibanshak (\$15.90), long-cooked meat almost falls apart in a thick yellow lentil and onion paste curry. Mustard seeds and curry leaves add a vibrant piquancy, a handful of fresh curry leaves added at the end lifting the aroma gently.

Palak paneer (\$15.90) is textbook, not too oily, the slightly squeaky cheese smothered in the usual deep-green spinach paste. Spicing is subtle, using just cumin and fenugreek, though crushed tomatoes add some sweetness.

Particularly delicious is the Kerala dish of black-eye bean and pumpkin kootu (\$16.90), where buttered pumpkin is cooked with the beans and coconut. The pumpkin has gone to mush, making it thick and rich, thanks also to flecks of coconut, while throughout there's a lovely hint of green chilli.

For about \$9 we've had enough food for three to four people. What's surprising is not the price but the disparate flavours of the dishes. It's all deftly cooked, freshly spiced and doesn't taste as if all the meats and sauces are just thrown together at the last moment.

The copious leftovers are packed for us to take away, so we can relive the experience at home. Bags not washing the tablecloth.

The Address

134 Glebe Point Road, Glebe, 9660 5666.

The Hours

Lunch Tue-Sun noon-2.30pm, dinner Sun-Thu 5-10.30pm; Fri-Sat 5-11pm.

The Food

Indian.

The Wine List

Bit pedestrian. BYO (corkage \$3 a head).

The Owner

Prakash Bobba.

The Chefs

Sekia Maharjan and Narayana Reddy.

The Service

Good, when they're in.

The Noise

Can get a little rollicking.

The Vegetarians

Plenty.

The Wheelchair Access

Yes, not toilet.

The Cards

Major.

The Bill

Entrees \$9.90-\$17.90; mains \$14.90-\$18.90; desserts \$5.90.

The Value

Pretty good.

The Summary

The former Darling Mills has a kind of old-fort feel, thanks to the sandstone and brick. It seems to suit a decent Indian eatery.

Broad church ...
Darbar's sandstone and brick interior, mushroom paneer korma and the fabulously named chicken chukka. Photos: Marco Del Grande