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Creative Cooking

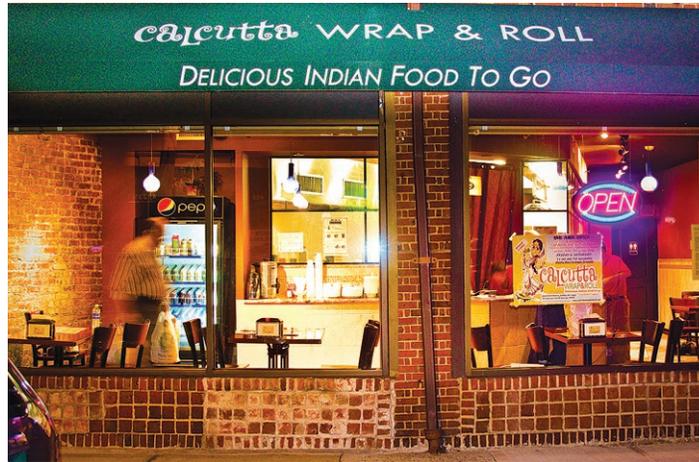
Judie Dweck

Calcutta Wrap & Roll for good food on the run

Two and a half years ago, a new concept in Indian dining that fits in with our “eat on the run” lifestyle opened in Ardsley in the form of Calcutta Wrap & Roll. It was started by three couples, Dr. Shishir Bhattacharya and his wife Sumita, Chitta Saha and his wife Sohini, and Dr. Hugo Cocucci and his wife Maria. I had the pleasure of chatting with Dr. Bhattacharya, known to his friends as Dr. B., and his charming wife Sumita, as I sampled their beautifully seasoned dishes. Bhattacharya said, “The art of cooking has always been my passion. Growing up in Calcutta, I helped my mother in the kitchen and learned a great deal. She was an excellent cook and was my mentor. She was very critical and always challenging herself to improve.”

Bhattacharya’s goal is to duplicate the home cooking he enjoyed at his family home in Calcutta. He noted that in Westchester it is easy to find take-out and delivery of pizza and Chinese food, but more difficult to take out quality Indian food. He opened Calcutta Wrap & Roll as a take-out restaurant with low overhead and moderate prices, where every dish is prepared to order. If you wish to eat in the restaurant, there is room for 12 guests. The chefs were discovered locally and were trained by Bhattacharya to prepare his own carefully thought-out recipes, leading to that important consistency in the kitchen. He does all of his own shopping for ingredients so he can control the quality of his dishes.

Bhattacharya explained that his dishes are traditional. India is



Calcutta offers take-out for Indian food lovers

a country that has been enriched and influenced by many cuisines through the centuries. The Indian cuisine differs from region to region depending upon climate, geography and staple foods of the area and Bhattacharya said, “The spiced, subtle varied and exciting food of India is based upon the layering of spices and the marinating of ingredients.” He explained that the heart of all Indian cooking is masala, the combination of spices and herbs which give each dish its individuality. The most important person in the kitchen hierarchy is the “masalchi,” who prepares these masalas that range from mild and delicate to strong and sharp. Bhattacharya has that role at Calcutta Wrap & Roll. He tries to educate the diner about the difference between hot and properly spiced.

In Indian cooking the spices are cooked before they are used in a dish. Depending upon how they are “cooked,” they take on a special taste. Sumita explained,

“Raw cumin seed is bitter. If you dry roast it, it becomes salty. If you fry it, it becomes sweet.” Cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cumin, fennel, fenugreek, ginger, mustard, saffron, tamarind and turmeric are some ingredients in Indian masalas that lend their aromatic quality to a dish.

Our tasting orgy started with an assortment from the 27 appetizers, both vegetarian and non, some vegan and many gluten free. From this tiny unassuming place, it is amazing to see the huge variety of dishes that appear from the kitchen, each prepared to order for maximum enjoyment. Vegetable samosas arrived in their traditional triangular shape, the crisp dough plump with its filling of peas and potato. The freshly prepared mint and cilantro chutney was a lovely mix of tastes and the tamarind chutney included the addition of dates which lent a sweet and savory taste. Unfamiliar was our next dish, a vegetable chop.

In my many visits to Indian restaurants, I’ve never had the pleasure of tasting this. It appeared to be a potato croquette, but one bite revealed an unusual and delicious filling of carrots and beets. Enhanced with a bit of chutney, it is a dish that enjoys repeat tastings. Next came the house special appetizers, the Calcutta vegetarian and chicken rolls. Each started with a pan-fried paratha filled with house made sauteed paneer, herbs and spices, and optional onion and egg, or the one I enjoyed with sauteed cubes of chicken and herbs and spices. These savory fillings are rolled up like a wrap and encased in foil, for easy eating on the go. There is also a vegetarian skinny roll or chicken roll prepared on whole wheat roti. Chicken reshmi kebab were chunks of boneless chicken marinated in a creamy mix and cooked in the tandoor for moist well-flavored results. Served with fresh lime it was a nice starter. Yet to be tried are several varieties of dosa, the simple very thin rice crepe, plain or filled.

Entree selections are many. For the vegetarian some suggestions are aloo gobi, aloo bhindi, vegetable korma and chana masala, to name but a few. I was happy to find my favorite, malai kofta, slightly sweet dumplings of paneer (homemade cheese) and vegetables resting in a creamy delicate sauce. This Punjabi treat was heavenly, as prepared at Calcutta Wrap & Roll. Matar paneer was another winner in which paneer cubes were combined with peas and onions in a creamy tomato gravy

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for silken results.

The many chicken, lamb, goat and seafood entrees include familiar and new delicacies. Our chicken curry was off the bone, in a sauce of onion, garlic and fresh ginger and just the right proportion of herbs and spices to result in a tantalizing taste. Lamb saag combined extremely tender cubes of boneless lamb with fresh spinach and Bhattacharya's mix of herbs and spices. These dishes were so tasty that I returned several days later to bring some home. The consistency was evident and they tasted every bit as good at home. Shrimp methi were large shrimp in a velvety sauce with the flavor of fenugreek enhancing rather than overpowering it. Other possibilities are shrimp jalfrezi, lamb, goat or chicken biryani, lamb korma, chicken tandoori and chicken tikka masala. We savored vegetable biryani, the aromatic long grain basmati rice layered with a perfect blend of spices, carrots, green beans, zucchini, cauliflower and onion. Jeera rice, the basmati rice flavored with cumin and studded with peas and carrots, was a fine accompaniment to our entrees. Add some plain, garlic, onion or whole wheat naan, layered paratha or puffy fried poori and your entrees are complete. Each dish at Calcutta Wrap & Roll reminds me of the children's story where nothing is too hot, too bland but just right.

For dessert, the gajar halwa was a nice rendition of the carrots cooked in milk and garnished with black and white raisins and almonds with a touch of clarified butter. The rosomalai, house made cheese wafers, were just sweet enough floating in a thickened milky sauce and garnished with pistachios. A glass of mango lassi or sweet lassi, the yogurt drinks added a nice touch to our meal. The sweet lassi, a favorite of

Sumita, had a bit of rosewater in it for an exotic taste.

At lunch, in addition to the regular menu, the traditional thali, a combined platter in several varieties, is offered.

Whether you wolf down a Calcutta roll in your car on your

way to your next appointment, casually enjoy a full meal on disposable plate at the restaurant, or as I like the most, set my dining room table in all its finery and savor this outstanding beautifully seasoned home style food in the elegance of my own

home, you will surely appreciate this lovingly prepared food.

Calcutta Wrap & Roll
465 Ashford Ave.
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Ardsley
591-2222

RECIPES

Chicken Curry (serves 4)

2 boneless chicken breasts, in 1/4-inch pieces
1 yellow onion, thinly sliced
1/2 inch peeled fresh ginger root
3 cloves fresh garlic
1 tsp. or less red chili powder (use paprika for a milder curry)
1/2 tsp. turmeric powder
1 1/2 tsp. cumin powder
1 tsp. coriander powder
3 Tbsp. oil, or more as needed
1 cinnamon stick
3 whole green cardamom, cracked open to prevent splatter
3 whole cloves
2 bay leaves
2 fresh tomatoes, coarsely chopped
salt to taste
1/2 tsp. sugar
about 1 cup water
4 fresh green chilies
fresh cilantro for garnish

Chop ginger and garlic and mix to a paste. Add the red chili powder and a few drops of

water, if needed, to mix it well. Add turmeric, cumin and coriander to the paste and add a bit more water to make a smooth paste. Set aside. Heat oil in a heavy bottomed pan and turn flame down to medium heat. Add cinnamon stick and stir for a few seconds until it browns. Add the cracked cardamom and then the bay leaves. When the whole spices release their full bouquet (15 to 20 seconds) add the onions and fry until golden brown.

Add the paste mix and keep stirring. Fry for about two minutes. If the mix seems very dry, add a few drops of oil. Fry on medium flame until oil starts to bubble through the mix and separates from the mix. Add the tomatoes and continue stirring so mix does not stick to the pan and burn. Add sugar and mix well. Add chicken and continue to fry on medium heat. Cover pan and stir from time to time for about 10 minutes. Add about one cup of water and stir again. When chicken is cooked, add green chilies and salt to taste. For more heat, cut the chilies in half. Garnish with fresh cilantro leaves.

Masoor Dal (serves 4-6)

3 cups water
1 cup masoor dal (split or whole)*
1/2 medium yellow onion, thinly sliced
2 whole dried red chilies
1/4 tsp. turmeric powder
salt to taste
2 tsp. oil

*masoor dal is the orange colored lentil. The split kind cooks faster and is available in all Indian groceries in 2 or 5 pound bags. It is vegan and gluten free.

Wash lentils in cold water and boil in 3 cups of water over a low flame. Once the dal has soft-

ened, use a whisk to mix the lentils with the water it has boiled in. It will be like a watery soup. Stir in a scant 1/4 teaspoon of the turmeric to the mix and stir with the whisk. Add salt to taste.

In a skillet, heat the oil and fry the onions until they are golden brown. Add the dried chilies and fry them until they turn dark brown. Turn the flame to low and add the fried mix to the dal soup. Be careful when you add this so it doesn't splatter. Stir to mix the dal with the onions and chilies.

Traditionally masoor dal is served over plain or jeera rice with a slice of lime and a vegetable.