

# INDIA, SPAIN MEET ON A PLATE



**H**OW DOES a new Indian restaurant avoid being seen as “just another Indian restaurant?” The owner of Thava, recently opened at that favourite Norwood space long occupied by Toty’s, resolved this conundrum by combining the traditional cuisine of his native Kerala with the global appeal ... of tapas.

Zany as this may sound, it jars a lot less than combining elements of two different cuisines in the same saucepan (the meaning of the name, Thava) which, as years have shown, sometimes creates not so much fusion as confusion.

Tapas centres on the palate-rousing principle of sampling a variety of small dishes rather than wolfing down a large main course.

It’s no accident that tapas developed in Spain, whose cuisine was historically enriched by influences from many countries. Likewise the food of India’s southern Kerala province reflects a broad diversity – native Hindu (and mostly vegetarian), Muslim and even Christian traders – dating back to biblical times.

And for a country like South



WORK IN PROGRESS: A chef prepares aloo (potato) paratha.

PICTURES: VICTOR STRUGO

Africa which has been rooted in Durban-style curries since the 19th century and has latterly seen a burgeoning of Moghulai (rich, northern Indian) restaurant clones, the countless flavours of Kerala have

fresh appeal – provided they are well executed.

And they are. When the food bowled me over at my first visit, I decided I’d better re-check. My second visit confirmed it had been no flash in the pan. Everything I have eaten there has been consistently delicious.

Among the tapas highlights: the sesame-crumbed prawns served on a small poori and the aloo (potato) croquettes served with curried chickpeas. Both come with tamarind sauce. Vegetable patties filled with coriander, coconut, sesame seeds and peanut chutney have warm spice tempered with slightly sweetened yoghurt. Masala dosa (fermented rice and lentil crêpe) is literally finger-lickin’ good.

An original take on ordering these at table is to start on high stools at the tapas bar, watching the chefs prepare what you’re about to eat. This area has a tandoor and it’s appetising to watch the chicken or lamb seekh kebabs developing before your eyes. The warmth is welcome on a winter’s night, but not excessive as there’s a glass partition twixt chefs and guests.

Among classic Keralan dishes, I loved the lamb vindaloo, which is not shy on spice but not too hot. I’ve never liked the idea of offering “mild, medium or hot” options for curries – any more than the choice of penne, linguine or spaghetti with any Italian sauce. The harmony between certain pasta shapes and sauce textures was worked out over time.

Likewise I respect the classic interpretation of a curry – as well as knowledgeable staff. If a customer wants a hot dish toned down, waiters instead suggest accompanying sambals or sauces (coconut or mint chutneys, cucumber raita, etc) to achieve the desired cooling effect. And if you think you know rogan josh, try a tapas portion for an invigorating new experience.

Downright superb is how I’d describe their kasturi chicken. Breast cubes are marinated for 24 hours in tandoori spices and yoghurt, to which is added a cashew-based sauce, braised tomato, ginger, garlic



TASTE BITES: An Indian tapas selection and mango lassi (smoothie).

## ANGELA DAY’S SATURDAY RECIPE

### Apple and walnut salad with pomegranate dressing

Serves 6

3-4 green apples, cored and thinly sliced  
30ml lemon juice  
125g baby spinach leaves  
125g wild rocket leaves  
50g walnuts, lightly toasted  
100g goat’s cheese, crumbled

**Dressing:**  
60ml pomegranate molasses\*  
30ml red wine vinegar  
10ml Dijon mustard  
15ml honey  
125ml olive oil  
salt and pepper

Place sliced apples in a bowl and toss with lemon juice to coat.

Place the spinach and rocket leaves in a serving dish. Add the apples, scatter over the walnuts and goat’s cheese and drizzle generously with dressing.

**Dressing:** Combine all the ingredients in a screw-top jar and shake well. The dressing will keep in



PICTURE: STEVE LAWRENCE

the fridge for up to a week.

\* Pomegranate molasses is a thick, fragrant, tangy reduction of pomegranate juice, made by boiling the juice until it becomes syrupy. The flavour is slightly tart and sweet and is a key ingredient in Middle Eastern dishes. It is perfect for brushing over duck breasts, or chicken. Great for using in salad dressings. It can be diluted for cordial or just poured over ice cream.

It is available at Woolworths as pomegranate concentrate or at some speciality food shops.

For more delicious recipes from Angela Day, look in the Verve section of The Star on Mondays and Thursdays.

**ANGELADAY  
HELPLINE**

For household queries, recipes, hints and tips, call The Angela Day Helpline at 011 836 7181 from 8.30am-12.30pm on weekdays.

## THAVA

### WHERE?

48 The Avenue  
Gardens (Norwood)  
Tel: 011 728 2826

### WHEN?

Lunch and dinner daily  
Buffet lunch on Saturdays

### HOW MANY?

110 seats  
Non-smoking

### HOW MUCH?

Tapas	R17-R25
Dishes	R35-R105
Bread and rice	R9-R17
Desserts	R23-R35
Saturday buffet	R99
Corkage	R30 (R60 if stocked)

### GASTRONOMETER READINGS:

Food  
Wine  
Service  
Ambience  
Value