

# East of Eden

Can curry nirvana keep **Melissa Blease** warm this January?

**A** mention in the Michelin Guide, an AA rosette and a trophy from the British Curry Awards. Maureen Lipman called it "charming", Rolf Harris thinks it's "fantastic" and Johnny Depp appreciated both the excellent food and the air conditioning – and all this acclaim amounts to just a fraction of the awards and celebrity endorsements collected by the Eastern Eye since it first opened its doors in 1983. A quarter of a century on, and Jane Seymour's "favourite restaurant" continues to thrive – and rightly so; the Eastern Eye is indeed rather impressive.

In keeping with the general locale, the restaurant is situated in a gorgeous Georgian townhouse with a big history: beyond a rather modest exterior, the upstairs dining room boasts high, domed ceilings, big picture windows overlooking Quiet Street and full-on architectural flourish. Walls are painted with elaborate, cheerful Indian murals featuring enough subtle, twinkly bling details to cause havoc for paparazzi flashbulbs. On the evening we visited, I don't think there were any celebrity diners among the cheerful, wall-to-wall throngs who'd overtaken this elegant Palladian-style former ballroom. But for all I know, I'd hustled my way past Madge Bishop, Les Dennis or even Brooke Shields (yup, they all love it here too) on my way to our table.

But I wasn't on a star-spotting mission; I was in search of curry nirvana (I can think of no better way to unbind the fetters of a psyche already subjugated by plummeting temperatures and a frozen bank account). A good glug from an exceedingly well-mannered bottle of cabernet sauvignon and a nibble on a couple of poppadoms later, however, and I was seriously lightening up. By the time I was halfway through the tender, nicely spiced lamb in my butty kebab starter while simultaneously nibbling the end of his Dhaka chicken roll (marinated, shallow-fried chicken wrapped in a parata), the woes were fast receding – crikey, even the menu prices were defrosting my heart. Was I in the throes of an additive-laden, intolerance-induced rapture? Most definitely not. Following a full explanation of how Indian food 'works' (worth paying close attention to even if you already consider yourself to be a curry geek), every dish on the huge menu is flagged up with highlighters denoting heat, sugar, nut, wheat



and dairy content - how cool/hot/sugary/bloaty/nut-free is that?

And so it came to pass that, for mains, he ordered a delectable lamb mon pasand (medium-hot, in a creamy yoghurt sauce) and I had king prawn kunpo garlic - the EE version of 'Chinese food, Indian style', which translated into a dish of lightly battered prawns smothered in a sauce clearly related to sweet and sour but with a chilli kick adding a novel twist – highly recommended. To bolster our mains, we ordered a side of tarka dhal (which, having possibly suffered from too long a wait on the pass, was the only dish in our line-up that didn't quite hit the high standards dictated by the rest of our feast), a soft, yeasty pillow of very fresh peshwari and pilau rice for two.

After all that, we binged on a couple of ice-creams with our coffee (including a moreish chocolatey dome (whose name I failed to note) and a slightly over-frozen pistachio kulfi), eventually nudging our bill perilously close to £90 territory. We could easily have paid half the amount for a similarly robust feast, but as I pointed out at the start of this review, I needed cheering up. Should you find yourself in a similarly dreary state this January, head for the Eastern Eye - I'd wager that even Jack Frost would soften up around the edges a little bit here. And if the EE head honchos ask him nicely, I bet he'd even let them quote him on the menu, too.

## Contacts

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