



COUNTER INTELLIGENCE: INDIA

Out of this tandoor comes the unexpected

Bombay Bite's menu draws on Chinese and European cuisines. Be prepared for bold, unusual seasonings and other surprises.

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Among the fast-food student-friendly cafes of Westwood, Bombay Bite aims at a higher level. Chef Preet Kamble has created an appealing fusion menu, with authentic Bombay-style Indian dishes, Indian-Chinese selections and European-influenced house specialties. The long list at this simple but smartly done place includes many tandoori dishes as well as curries, seafood, house-made breads and combination dinners.

Kamble, who's from Bombay, is often in the dining room and readily explains the dishes. He has demonstrated the preparation of some of them at Whole Foods across the street, where he buys the rosemary for the rack of lamb and organic French rolls for *pav bhaji* (a kind of sandwich).

The rack of lamb alone is worth a trip. Small chops are marinated for hours with spices, lemon juice and fresh rosemary, an herb not typical of Indian cooking, although it does grow in India. Roasted in the tandoor, the chops emerge tender and succulent, with a tantalizing herbal nuance.

It's a wonder that chicken can taste as good as the Bombay *malai kabab* does here. Unlike the usual bright-red tandoor meats, it's so white it looks unseasoned. But it isn't — the chunks of breast meat have been marinated with yogurt, saffron and — surprise — mozzarella. The cheese flavor isn't apparent, but it adds an almost imperceptible trace of browning in the high heat of the tandoor.

If you were in Bombay, you would inevitably eat Chinese food. It's so popular there that any luxury hotel has to have a Chinese restaurant. Even ordinary restaurants provide a three-part menu: Indian, continental and Chinese.

Bombay Bite follows this custom by offering a handful of Indian-Chinese dishes. They're different than you'd get in local Chinese restaurants, but familiar to Indian palates. Chicken Manchurian is a classic dish in this genre. Kamble's Manchurian sauce is as dark as chocolate, sweetened with hoisin and fired up with ginger and chiles. It also comes with little dumplings formed of cauliflower, peas and potatoes, which blend with the sauce better than the chicken.

Stir-fried *paneer* (tofu-like cheese) combined with bell peppers, onion and jalapeño slices is a drier

dish with the same sauce. The accompaniments are fried basmati rice and Hakka noodles — egg noodles with julienned vegetables.

The closest Bombay Bite gets to continental food is grilled pork chops and steak. I anticipated something as clever and delicious as the rack of lamb. But both were disappointing, the seasoning too light to make them interesting, and the meat not the best quality.

Other Indian dishes don't disappoint. If you like spices, ask for beef *bhuna*, which is boldly seasoned with big black cardamom seeds, green cardamom pods, cinnamon, bay leaf and other spices. The seasonings lighten up for fish *bhuna*, which incorporates thyme-like *ajowan* and fresh oregano.

Bhuna doesn't refer to a sauce but to a cooking method — to sauté, then simmer slowly with the spices. At Bombay Bite, each *bhuna* dish is seasoned differently, unlike at less-ambitious restaurants that get a lot of mileage from a single sauce.

Masala is a generic term for spice mixtures, so a masala dish could be almost anything. The shrimp masala ranks with the top dishes here, with an orange sauce that's rich, mellow, almost fluffy and slightly sweet from a large amount of sautéed onions. Bombay Bite's masala *bhindi* is just OK, the okra marred by tough bits when I had it.

A standout among the vegetables is eggplant *bharta*, as soft as a purée because the eggplant has been roasted for an hour in the tandoor before it is cooked with onion, tomato and spices.

Pav bhaji is a good choice for a snack or lunch. *Pav* means bread and *bhaji* vegetables. This is Bombay street food, a mash of highly seasoned vegetables (cauliflower, carrots, peas, potatoes, tomatoes) and cilantro to eat with rolls split in half and soaked in the juices.

Bombay Bite also serves frankies, wraps filled with chicken or a mixture of cauliflower, bell pepper, onion and *paneer* cheese, topped with chutneys and cilantro. The wrap flatbreads are made at the restaurant.

There are just three desserts, among them a creamy, pleasant *khir* (rice pudding). The wine list (\$20 to \$47 a bottle) is modest in scope but offers good choices to accompany this type of food.



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