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Indian fare tickles tired taste buds

July 12, 2007

BY SYLVIA RECTOR
 FREE PRESS RESTAURANT CRITIC

I hadn't expected to find a cure for my summer dining doldrums in a Livonia strip shopping center.

But a few bites into our entrees at Haandi Cuisine of India, my friends and I fell silent with surprise and enjoyment -- for maybe 2 minutes -- before we all began commenting excitedly about how great the flavors were.

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The impressive thing was that all the dishes that night were very different, but all were delicious. The flavors were complex and distinctive, even ordered with mild spices.

From the tasty vegetable pakoras to the memorable biryani, my meals here were a welcome wake-up call for the palate.

A successful first year

Rakesh Sabharwal, who worked in hotel and restaurant management in New Delhi before moving to the United States in 2005, opened Haandi last year in June with an old friend from college, Rajiv Chopra.

Set back from 6 Mile Road in the Key Bank Commons center, the restaurant had only

44 seats, but its atmosphere was serene and upscale, and its refined northern Indian food began attracting attention.

Then in December, Sabharwal took over the space next door and expanded to 140 seats, including space for groups of up to 100. But the restaurant's personality remained the same. With its saffron-colored walls, black tablecloths, attractive artwork and servers in crisp white shirts and black vests, Haandi feels upscale and polished.

So does its food.

A world of flavor

The attractive menu is large but well organized, with 21 appetizers; 13 entrees cooked in the tandoor, or clay oven; and 53 other meat and vegetarian entrees, plus breads, sides and other offerings.

Indian food is designed for sharing, so ordering a variety of styles and flavors around the table makes the most successful meal. If you want suggestions, by all means ask your server for advice.

At Haandi, the staff overall was knowledgeable and direct when asked to describe dishes or help us choose among some we were considering.

You can choose spicing from mild to fiery; all our dishes came as ordered.

Some suggestions

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Bharwan simla mirch is a pepper stuffed with cottage cheese, potato, peas, cashews, cilantro and ginger.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Haandi Cuisine of India

out of four stars

37116 Six Mile, Livonia

734-432-2088

www.haandimichigan.com **Fare:** Upscale Indian, mostly from northern regions.

Scene: Attractively decorated dining room has a serene feel. Unassuming strip-mall location. Multicultural clientele.

Service: Helpful and efficient. Owner usually on premises.

Price: Most starters are \$2.50-\$7; entrees are \$10-\$15.

Hours: Lunch buffet: 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m. daily. Dinner: 5-9:30 p.m. Sun.-Thu. and 5-10:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat.

Note: Private dining room for groups of up to 100. Seeking wine and beer license. Child-friendly and smoke-free. Reservations suggested on weekends.

None of the numerous entrees and appetizers my friends and I tried was disappointing.

The appetizer assortments are always a great way to start; the bright green coriander chutney sauce served with them will thrill your taste buds.

A couple of can't-miss entrees here are chicken biryani -- a handsome and exotically flavored chicken-and-basmati rice dish laced with raisins and nuts with hints of cinnamon, cardamom, bay and ginger -- and wonderful navrattan korma, mixed vegetables in a mildly spiced cashew-and-poppy seed sauce.

Try Chicken Haandi, the house specialty, cooked in a reddish-brown onion and tomato sauce with yogurt, cumin and other spices.

Chicken tikka Hyderabadi with a ground coconut sauce came mild, as ordered, but it was almost too subtle.

I didn't think the breads equaled other parts of the menu. The three we had were basically alike. In the only real food glitch, we had virtually no filling in our potato-and-onion filled prantha.

More sophisticated fare than we ordered, including tandoori lobster, is available by prior arrangement.

Haandi's atmosphere and service are pleasant, and with most entrees at \$14-\$15, it's a culinary vacation I'm eager to book again.

Contact **SYLVIA RECTOR** at 313-222-5026 or srector@freepress.com.

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cheshboy

As a Brit I have been missing good Indian food. I live near Monroe and if anybody can post some suggestions of a good curry house out this way, I would appreciate it. If you have not had a curry you do not know what you are missing and it doesn't all have to be hot and fiery, a Korma is a delight if you do not like hot food. 😊
Thanks

Posted: Thu Jul 12, 2007 9:14 am

ipngirl

I also recommend the Shan-E-Punjab, on Ford Rd in Garden City. My husband and I will drive over an hour to have dinner there. The food is delicious and there is plenty to share.

Posted: Thu Jul 12, 2007 7:48 am

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