



NEW KEBAB ON THE BLOCK

High-end Origin India joins the embarrassment of dining riches on Paradise Road

BY AL MANCINI

With all the time I spend drinking at the numerous bars between the Double Down and the Hard Rock, I've always been thankful for the incredible selection of good restaurants on the two-block stretch of Paradise Road between Harmon and Sands avenues. With everything from tapas to Moroccan to Brazilian available (and that's just in one strip mall), I never have a hard time finding some great food to break up my binges. In fact, if someone had asked me a month ago whether I could think of any type of cuisine the area was lacking, I would have been hard-pressed to come up with an answer. Fortunately, British restaurateur Raja Abdul Majid is more of a visionary than I am. And thanks to him, there's now one more incredible dining choice available just a stumble from my favorite watering holes: high-end Indian food.

Majid's first U.S. venture is Origin India, which recently opened just across the parking lot from the Rainbow Bar & Grill. It's a beautifully decorated dining room that serves what the owners describe as Indian fusion, although modern upscale Indian is probably a better description. In truth, many of the Indian restaurant classics most of us are familiar with are more of a "fusion" than the things you'll find here. Vindaloo, for example, incorporates Portuguese influences into Indian cuisine, while chicken tikka masala was invented for Brits who wanted to enjoy the traditional Indian chicken tikka with gravy. Neither is offered at Origin India.

What you will find is a large selection of both vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes that are delicious and beautifully presented (another rarity in stateside Indian restaurants). Vegetarian appetizers include bhuna baigan (grilled eggplant topped with spiced chickpeas and sour cream, \$5.95) and anarkali papri chaat (whole wheat wafers topped with potatoes, chickpeas, beaten yogurt, mint and tamarind sauce, also \$5.95). Meat eaters can start their meal with anything from lahsooni jhinga (stir-fired shrimp in garlic sauce with saffron rice and cucumber noodles, \$10.95) to chicken bhajia (crispy shredded chicken flavored with curry leaves, \$8.95). There are seven vegetarian entrees (\$12.95 to \$13.95), a dozen non-vegetarian choices (\$16.95 to \$22.95) and a dozen tandoori options (\$8.95 to \$11.95), a quarter of which are vegetarian.

Our party of four split two vegetarian appetizers: a pair of deep-fried yogurt patties known as dahi ke kebab (\$5.95) and aloo tikki, which are crispy potato patties stuffed with lentils and grilled on a skillet (\$5.95). For entrees, two of us had the lamb and spinach dish saag gosht (\$17.95), one had a delicious tandoori shrimp recipe known as tandoori jingha (\$11.95) and another had a vegetarian tandoori choice called subz-e-bahar (\$8.95). Everything I sampled was excellent, and as I mentioned earlier, presented with a level of sophistication almost unheard of in Indian restaurants here in the valley. And while I didn't taste the

vegetarian entree, my friend Scott had nothing but good things to say about it. If we had one minor complaint, it was simply that while we all requested a medium level of spiciness, a few of the dishes were hotter than we'd expected.

As great as the food and the presentation were, our service was just as good, which is rare for a brand new restaurant that's barely had time to iron out all the kinks. Our waiter was friendly and attentive, and always on hand when we wanted him. Even more surprisingly, the chef left the kitchen at one point in the evening to visit every table in the house -- something I almost never encounter at a restaurant this affordable.

In one of the city's hottest dining corridors, Origin India somehow manages to offer a choice that can compete with the best. More importantly, it raises the entire city's expectations for an Indian restaurant, while only minimally raising the price. And with the kitchen open until 11:30 seven nights a week, it will definitely be giving Mr. Lucky's and the Rainbow a run for their money when I need to grab a bite between an early set at the Joint and a late show at the Double Down.

Origin India
4480 Paradise Road
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