

## Rob Broadfield meets Mary's little sister says she's cute

Picture: Astrid Volzke

Little Chutney's, the hipper, groovier little sister of the Chutney Mary's family, is the latest offering from restaurateur Murray Kimber. Kimber was the first to put Indian food in contemporary surroundings, firstly at his flagship city operation and then at his Hay Street, Subiaco, store. The Little Chutney's business continues his mission to deliver food from the subcontinent rolled up in a hip package for the modern diner.

The first thing you notice is the room. It displays none of the ethnic clichés of most Indian restaurants — no faint sitar discords on the stereo, no lingering scent of patchouli and no dangly, bronze bell things hanging on the walls. It's been professionally styled. Great light fittings, a marvellously detailed ceiling designed to look as if it might have come from an old bank chamber and the clever juxtaposition of old and new with classic bentwood bistro chairs and modern designer chairs and tables. Floor-length sheers cover the windows and the detailed use of mirrors, chrome and rich, silvery wallpaper add a touch of bling without being trashy. The room is warm, chic and cleverly detailed. It's a bit sexy really.

What makes for good Indian cuisine? After a lifetime of indifferent butter chickens and vindaloos with nothing to declare but their heat, one begins to understand that, like any cuisine, the best Indian cooking uses terrific produce, delivers an intelligent application of flavours and textures and allows fresh herbs and spices to shine through.

There is no doubt Little Chutney's is a cut above. It's not haute and it's rarely hot but this well-anglicised food is safe, accessible and based on the broad canon of Indian favourites. Where it does depart, pleasingly, from the norm, the fusion thing is well calibrated.

For starters, the four of us shared the "Mixed tasting plate" \$28.50 and the "Tandoori tasting plate" \$28.50. For mains, we shared "Butter chicken" \$23, "Lemony Chicken Curry" \$22, "Pumpkin curry" \$14.50, "Red emperor in Malabar curry" \$25, "Aromatic Basmati rice" \$5 and "plain naan" \$4.50. We ordered too much.

The tasting plates were good. Nothing to blow your socks off but the tandoor morsels, chicken pieces and lamb chops were redolent with the aromatics

from house-made tandoor paste and the smoke from the charcoal-fired clay oven which gives the dish its name.

The house-made masala shone through the sauces. Indian curries in lesser kitchens often use a dusty, commercial old concoction which has lost its flavour.

The masala bases at Chutney's are the real deal. Masala is the spice powder which builds the foundation for most Indian curries. There are hundreds of masala recipes and they differ depending on the protein used or regional variables. All of them — of which garam masala is the most widely known — are a finely ground mixture of dry-fried herbs and seeds and might include coriander and mustard seed, cumin, cloves, cinnamon, cardamom, black pepper, red chilli powder and turmeric.

So, while the masala bases are good, none of the Little Chutney's curries we tried presented a challenge in terms of

**"chic and cleverly detailed. It's a bit sexy really."**

heat and spice. The sauces are rich — most of them are thickened with ground cashew or almond — and full of flavour. The pumpkin curry was particularly good, mainly because it was different from the more traditional Oz-Indian offerings. The meats in the remaining curries were good — no camouflaged gristle or rough cuts.

The rice wasn't gluggy or cold. Important point that, because you can tell a lot about these sorts of kitchens by the way they treat rice. "These sorts of kitchens" are those that have scores of dishes on offer, do up to 150 covers a night multiplied by three to four dishes per cover and bang out a plate every few seconds. It's sausage-machine cooking which can result in seemingly small things — the quality of steamed rice, the quality of a condiment or the heat of a dish — being overlooked in the mad scramble to serve hundreds of dishes in a couple of hours. In this regard, Little Chutney's quality control is spot on.

It's not a cheap restaurant by Indian restaurant standards. We spent \$260 for four which included wines by the glass and a few beers. By mainstream restaurant standards though, it's a modest tariff for (overpriced) Perth, where it's difficult to spend less than \$100 per head these days at a half-decent restaurant where mains are nudging \$40. The package is worth every cent as Little Chutney's.



### Little Chutney's 16/20

Address 71-75 Rokeby Road, Subiaco  
Phone 9381 7755

Open Dinner, seven nights from 5.30pm; lunch, Tuesday to Sunday from noon; breakfast, Saturday and Sunday from 7am.

Website [www.littlechutneys.com.au](http://www.littlechutneys.com.au)

Email bookings [restaurant@littlechutneys.com.au](mailto:restaurant@littlechutneys.com.au) or through the website.

Love it The whole grown-up, proper feel about the place.

Loathe it Nothing to loathe, but wobbly restaurant tables are a real pain.

Score: 1-9: Unacceptable. 10-11: Just OK, some shortcomings. 12: Fair. 13: Getting there. 14: Recommended. 15: Good. 16: Really Good. 17: Truly excellent. 18: Outstanding. 19-20: Approaching perfection, WA's best.

In fact the whole package does the business. The dining room is pure eye candy, the chairs are comfortable, the service is spot on and the food is tasty and properly cooked, although I'm sure purists would find the mild renditions of Indian favourites just a little too beige. The wine list too is surprisingly good. Typical of most Indian restaurants, desserts are an afterthought, although the Kulfi (Indian icecream) is brilliant.

I'll be back. ☺