

# The View review

**Rosemary Staal**  
*savours the flavours of Indian cuisine*

Café Mumbai • 21 Lower Bannister Street • off Carlton Place • Bedford Place • Southampton • 023 8063 0006 • café-mumbai.co.uk

**N**avigation has never been one of my strong points. I usually rely on a combination of instinct and intelligence – the passenger's not mine – to get me to my destination. On this occasion I am the passenger, juggling two pairs of glasses, a torch, a computer printout of our route and a map. None of these is of any help, but fortunately a passing taxi driver is. He sets us on the right trail and soon we've tracked down this most elusive of restaurants which, as you can see from the address, is not exactly slap in the middle of the High Street.

Once parked – mercifully easy with on-street spaces and a free multi-storey to choose from – we dodge the raindrops and finally enter this enormous building that was a wine merchant's warehouse in a previous life.

There is nothing warehousey about it now. It's still big, of course, but the immense space has been cleverly transformed into three areas: one for drinking (you can enjoy tapas, Indian-style, with your Cobra) and two for eating (downstairs for the buffet and upstairs for unhurried, luxurious dining à la carte – although you can choose to sit in either).

There are all sorts of interesting design features that catch the eye among the spicy oranges and reds of the décor, among them an undulating wall of coloured water and another wall faced with chunky Portland stone blocks. Elsewhere, glass and steel predominate, and it is fascinating to watch the chefs and staff in the kitchen area.

Café Mumbai opened only last September, an ambitious project given the nature of the cavernous building and the fact Southampton has so many great places to eat, but it's going a bomb apparently. We learn that the previous night they served more than 200 covers (of whom 160 had booked), and had to disappoint 26 for whom not a spare seat could be found. That's success, in anyone's book.

So let's see what those unlucky 26 missed. D and I are great aficionados of Indian food, so much so that a curry-from-scratch is invariably our default meal at home, so we are looking forward

immensely to some new tastes and experiences here. A glance at the menu confirms our hopes, but also leaves us bewildered: how can we choose when we want it all?

We ask Shipu, the young manager, to advise us. He guides us kindly to a decision that has us beginning with the charmingly named Indian Pearls – a selection of different starters for us to share. Good choice; no, a great choice, because the variety, all of it moreish and gently spicy, serves to ignite our taste buds and makes us eager for more, which is the purpose, after all.

Among our 'pearls' are some little rolls of red snapper, a fish I have not met before. To my pleasure, we become reacquainted over my main course, a medium-hot curry of red snapper. It is wonderful, quite memorably so. I have it with plain rice and, at Shipu's suggestion, a side-dish of the most divine mix of creamed spinach and mushroom.

While I am determinedly trying to clear my plate D is tucking in to his Dhaba Murg, a Punjabi dish of chicken cooked with tomatoes, red onions, herbs and spices. He shares my plain rice and has a side serving of Bombay Aloo, a dish on which he is a world authority, having consumed at least 58 million over the years. He pronounces it one of the very best, so that's OK.

Also on Shipu's recommendation we have ordered a naan bread stuffed with spiced potatoes. Overwhelmed, we leave half of it, and sadly desserts are out of the question too, which is a shame as there is a great choice. Perhaps it's just as well we don't indulge ourselves any more. We have enjoyed our meal so much, everything about it – the

atmosphere, the surroundings, the excellent waiting staff, the food, the whole experience – that it would be a shame to spoil the evening by having to be winched out of our seats. I mean, the humiliation of it. No, we stop in time for decorum to be maintained and head off home, replete, happy – and lost, again.

**Our two-course dinner for two, without wine: £48**

