

The View review

Rosemary Staal *finds everything to her taste in a new restaurant*



Nashaa • 51 Leigh Road • Eastleigh • 023 8065 0819 or 023 8065 1861

No sooner had flock wallpaper started to fade on the walls of Indian restaurants up and down the land than interior designers moved in and, boy, have they had a ball. Lighten up, they said, and at a stroke there appeared white walls accented with bold splashes of colour, sharp halogen lighting, wood, steel, glass – all the hallmarks of the 21st century aspirational eating place.

Happily, into the same bin as the flock wallpaper went the inadequate lighting that meant small popadom burial mounds went unnoticed beneath that itchy velour bench seating reminiscent of railway carriages circa 1968.

Now that we're all accustomed to these brave-new-world surroundings, we are also conscious that no longer are we simply eating 'Indian food'. It is 'cuisine'. Therefore, we don't just shovel in a plateful of curry and wash it down with a beer or two. No, not in a place that has gone to the expense of installing a wood floor and, in the case of Nashaa, also pepped up its interior with mirrored pillars and acres of lush white naperly.

This is a restaurant where, if you really want to, you can down a lager while you enjoy the aforementioned curry, or even take it away in foil containers, but Nashaa has such an interesting, eclectic menu that it would be a shame not to explore it beyond the standards.

So this is what D and I soon find ourselves doing, with the expert help of Rafique, one of the smart and ultra-efficient staff. Once he discovers my weakness for a nicely turned lentil (a girl has to have her vices) he recommends dhal pakora as a starter. These little beauties prove to be as light and crisp and pleasingly lentil-ish as he promised, and with none of the deep-fried greasiness I had feared.

D chooses fish samosas for his starter, something he's never had before and it certainly intrigues him. 'They've a very strong sardine-y taste, very interesting,' he reports.

He goes on to enthuse about his Goan chicken, one of Nashaa's signature dishes and a speciality of the head chef, Abul Halam Azad. The chicken is marinated in a garlic and ginger sauce with coriander, red chillies, bay leaves and coconut. D reckons it could be the coconut that has momentarily confused his tastebuds into 'Thai' mode. To my alarm, I see that D has chosen egg rice as a side dish. 'You can't eat chicken and egg together,' I protest. 'They might be related.' Predictably, he has no problem, and no qualms, in dispatching both.

I am eager to see what Mr Azad has cooked up for me as I have ordered a Nepalese dish called Jomsom Anda. I'm not sure if either of those words refers to 'vegetables' or 'eggs' but

my meal contains plenty of both (hard-boiled, in the case of the eggs). It is a delicious, fairly hot, combination and I enjoy it immensely with a side dish of palak paneer (spinach and real, proper Indian 'cheese') and a chapatti for mopping purposes.

The name of this restaurant, we learn, has nothing to do with Dennis the Menace's toothy pet dog, Gnasher, but is in fact an Indian word for which the closest translation is the word 'addiction'. In this case, it's an addiction to spice, explains Mo Choudhury, one of the two young brothers who manage the place.

Mo and Rob were attracted by the position of the building – it used to be a Cash Converters shop, overlooking the park beside The Point – and, after a major refurb, Nashaa was launched at the end of November with seating for 146 and five full- and part-time chefs creating 'sub-continental Indian cuisine' in the open kitchen.

The brothers are keen to be involved in the local community and so they are happy that Nashaa is a sponsor of the Eastleigh Music Festival and Mela (June 28-July 1).

They have just launched a new initiative – an evening platter consisting of a curry with a side dish and rice – aimed at office workers or shoppers returning home. These platters are available between 5.30pm and 7pm on weekdays at £6.95 and between 5pm and 7pm at weekends at £7.95.

For a platter of Nashaa curry alone I can't help feeling it would be worth relocating the View office.

Our two-course meal for two, excluding wine: £32 **V**

