



HOT & SPICY GRILL

by Rich Belmont

Back in the day a hole-in-the-wall restaurant implied a hard to find place, devoid of all decoration, hit or miss service, but really good food. In today's electronic world, however, the statement means an eatery that doesn't come up in a Google search, does not have a website, and no Wi-Fi is available.

Well, Hot & Spicy Grill does have a website and it's located right on University Avenue in Dubuque so it's easy to find. It's in a 125 year old building in an entirely undecorated space. The restaurant is definitely a hole-in-the-wall with only 11 tables but it's totally honest, genuine, plain and unpretentious. Oh, and the food? It's totally awesome!



The owners, Khaliq Abdul (he prefers to be called Abdul) and his wife Shakila Zaman opened Hot & Spicy Grill in 2010. They are committed to preserving the culture, traditions and standards of authentic Indian cuisine. This is no easy achievement considering India is the 7th largest country in geographic size and the 2nd largest in population with 1 billion 242 million people speaking 415 languages. As a point of clarification India's constitution indicates there are 22 scheduled languages with Hindi being the most widespread and English the second most spoken language. This is why you might have noticed menus in Indian restaurants typically have different spellings for similar items.



So Abdul's mission is to expose us to the entire range of Indian food that reflects the enormous geo-ethno-cultural diversity of the land. Lucky for us, Abdul is up to the task. He is a graduate of Krishna Academy of Culinary Arts in the City of Hyderabad, State of Andhra Pradesh, India. He speaks 7 languages: Urdu, Hindi, Telugu, Punjabi, Bengali, English and Spanish. He has been in the USA for 19 years and has cooked in Indian restaurants in Baltimore, Victorian Gardens, New York City and Sultan Palace, Chicago.

Now it must be said Hot & Spicy Grill is a bit of a misnomer. Contrary to local opinion hot and spicy are not the same things. All Indian dishes are spicy but not all Indian food is hot. In fact, it is surprising how mild most Indian dishes can be and some are quite sweet. Abdul cooks all dishes made to order and you must specify if you prefer mild, medium or hot. I say all Indian food is spicy because spices are the common denominator and distinguishing features of Indian dishes when compared to other world cuisines. It is the specific combinations and portions of exotic spices that give each entrée its distinctive flavor. This is why it takes an experienced and talented chef to prepare the right combination of spices. There are over 65 spices used in Abdul's kitchen. He grinds and roasts most of them himself in order to



draw out their intense flavors. Common ones are bay leaf, cayenne, cinnamon, clove, coconut, fennel seed, garlic, ginger, mustard seed, parsley seed, poppy seed and rosewater. Others you might not be familiar with are black cumin seed, which is actually Nigella Sativa, sometimes called fennel flower or black caraway. Also, charoli nuts which are tiny almond flavored dried seeds; fenugreek (the seeds are used as a spice, the dried leaves are used as a herb and fresh leaves are served as vegetables); green cardamom made from seeds producing a pungent and aromatic spice; mace made from the waxy red covering that surrounds nutmeg seeds; and turmeric powder. This last one has an earthy, slightly bitter, slightly hot peppery flavor and a mustardy smell. It's a fun spice because it turns yellow in acidic food and red in alkaline food. Probably the most interesting spice Abdul uses is Saffron. It has a very unusual taste and hay-like fragrance. When it is used in your dish you know it. It is made from the stigmas of the purple saffron crocus and it takes about 70,000 flowers to make a pound of saffron. The stigmas are picked by hand which explains why saffron is the most expensive spice in the world. Abdul uses pure saffron and it costs him \$180 an ounce.

Hot & Spicy Grill

1099 University Avenue, Dubuque, IA 52001

563-582-3599 | www.HotandSpicyGrill.com

HOURS: Lunch Buffet: Tue – Sun, 11 am – 2:30 pm

Dinner: Tue, Wed, Thu, Sun, 4-9 pm, Fri - Sat, 4-10 pm,

Monday: Closed

DINING STYLE: Come as you are NOISE LEVEL: Conversational

RECOMMENDATIONS: Vegetable Samosa, Hyderabad Chicken Biryani, Butter Chicken, Chicken 65, Beef Tikka, Seekh Kabab Beef, Chicken Manchuria, Bagara Baigan, Lemon Rice, Naan, Mango Lassi

LIQUOR SERVICE: NO, Bring Your Own Beer Or Wine

PRICE RANGE: Lunch Buffet - \$9.99, Dinner, \$7.99 - \$16.99

PAYMENT OPTIONS: Cash, Visa, MasterCard, Discover, No Debit Cards, No Checks

ACCESSIBILITY: Front Door & Restrooms

KIDS POLICY: Menu, Highchairs and Boosters

RESERVATIONS: Yes

CATERING: Yes TAKE OUT: Yes DELIVERY: No

PARKING: On street; Private Lot in rear off Booth Street



The lunch buffet is all-you-can-eat and gives you an opportunity to try several of the authentic Indian styles of cooking. On a recent visit my guests and I sampled Chicken Boti, Lemon Rice, Matar Pulao, Saffron Rice, Tandori Chicken Boti, Dosa Masala and Palak Gobi. The assortment on the buffet changes daily and often has items not on the evening menu. This is why it's a good idea to visit often so you can try new things.

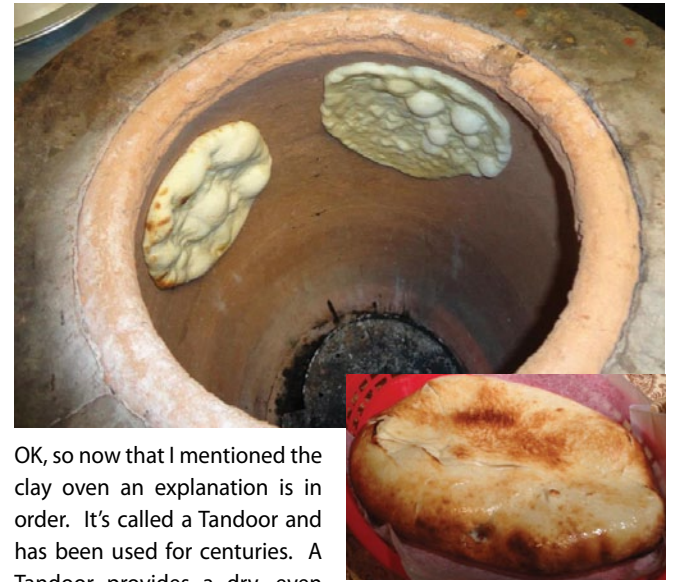


Likewise, many evening visits are required if you truly want to experience the taste of India. For example, one of the most satisfying meals is the signature dish Hyderabad Chicken Biryani. Rice and chicken are cooked together with saffron, green cardamom and black cumin seeds. By the way all the rice dishes are made from Basmati Rice. It is a long grain rice characterized by a light, nutty flavor popular not only for its crunchy taste but also for its fragrance. It is longer than other types of rice and becomes even longer when cooked. Basmati is lighter and fluffier than regular white rice and does not stick together and form clumps. Abdul uses Basmati in the



Biryani and other rice preparations including Saffron Rice, Lemon Rice, Tomato Rice and Tamarind Rice.

Chicken 65 is a boneless fried chicken breast marinated with 65 spices and cooked with homemade yogurt, fenugreek and other spices. Chicken Boti is cubes of chicken marinated with tomato, homemade yogurt, and fresh lemon juice and cooked in the clay oven.



OK, so now that I mentioned the clay oven an explanation is in order. It's called a Tandoor and has been used for centuries. A Tandoor provides a dry, even heat reaching a temperature of 1100°F. Food cooked in a Tandoor develops a crisp outer layer while moisture is locked inside. Abdul cooks Beef Tikka, Chicken Boti, Charga Chicken and that wonderful Naan bread in the Tandoor.

It's worth visiting Hot & Spicy Grill just to experience the taste of food coming from the Tandoor. On my first visit I couldn't wait to try the Beef Tikka, tender sirloin tips marinated in a spice blend and yogurt. And now I can't wait to go back again to try the Chicken Boti!

There are many other wonderful entrées you will need to try. The Hyderabad Mutton Biryani is a rice dish with tender lamb and Abdul's own mixture of spices including the exotic saffron. The Kadai Bhandi is unusual: fresh cut Okra is cooked with tomato and onion. The okra must be fresh with little water content to keep it from becoming sticky. The Bagara Baigan is interesting: fresh Indian eggplant is gently roasted, then marinated in a rich blend of maghali spies and cooked over low heat. I'll bet you didn't know eggplant is actually a fruit native to India where it is called Brinjal. It is closely related to the tomato, potato and surprisingly, it is even a relative of tobacco.

I must say I enjoyed tasting Bryce's dinner of Chicken Manchuria. This is a dish of pan fried chicken cooked with black pepper and thick corn sauce. I know I will have that again!

There are many entrées on the menu that are just right for vegetarians and vegans, too. There are five vegetable rice dishes like Mutter Pulao cooked with green peas and onions and Vegetable Biryani, a dish of Basmati and seasonal vegetables in yogurt and spices. There are also seven vegetable curries: okra, eggplant, potatoes and spinach, potatoes and cauliflower, four lentil blend, cheese in spinach purée and cheese in creamy tomato-onion-yogurt gravy. Remember, India is the land of sacred cows so for a great many Indian people eating beef is a no no!

So now you know all of the entrées depend on different blends of spices. You might have also picked up on the fact many of them require slow cooking over low heat. They are all made from fresh ingredients and some require a layering of a meat or vegetable base and then a final slow steaming until fully done allowing a blending of flavors. This means for a truly enjoyable experience one of the most important ingredients must come from us diners. It is the ingredient of PATIENCE. Indian food is not fast food, so relax, bring some beer or wine with you or have a Mango Shake or Lassi and enjoy the anticipation!

