

## A GLASS ACT FOR CHRISTMAS

Liquid news

WHETHER you're shopping for a present to lift the spirits, would like to say "Merry Christmas" with a bottle, or simply want to make a good impression, there's an array of attractively packaged offerings to please the nearest and dearest.

**Last action heroes:** Oozing old-style charm, these two handsome labels from award-winning winery Nederburg have been created to honour some of the major figures in South African winemaking. The Heritage Heroes range includes The Young Airhawk (£14.99, Morrisons), a zesty sauvignon blanc with good minerality; and The Motorcycle Marvel (£14.99, Morrisons), a Rhone-style blend jam-packed with spicy flavour and sweet red berries.

**A berry good cause:** Soft and sweet, smooth and silky, the clean taste of Belvedere Vodka has earned it an A-list following, and Belvedere (RED) Special Edition (£34.50, Waitrose) celebrates the second year of its partnership with (RED). The charity founded by Bono partners with the world's most iconic brands to raise proceeds for the Global Fund, with Belvedere contributing 50% of profits to help the fight against HIV/Aids.

**Gin palaces are in season:** Adored by serious gin drinkers and mixologists, Tanqueray's slick gift box has been designed with cocktail lovers in mind. The interior features a vintage-themed illustrated guide on how to throw the perfect cocktail party and comes complete with a 70cl bottle of ultra premium Tanqueray No Ten and two bespoke martini glasses. Tanqueray No Ten Gift Set (£55, Selfridges nationwide)

**Put a shine on:** Shoe designer Tim Little has linked up with Speyside star Chivas Regal to create a luxury gift tin showcasing the elements of the classic brogue shoe. One of the best-selling Scotches in the world, Chivas Regal 'Made for Gentleman' Luxury Gift Tin (£25.39, 70cl, Sainsbury's) offers whisky noses the chance to enjoy the rich honeyed taste and lingering butterscotch notes of its 12-year-old whisky while mulling over the craftsmanship of a quality pair of brogues.

**On the US trail:** Named after the crossing where herds of buffalo passed over the Kentucky River, Buffalo Trace Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, Kentucky (£32.99, www.thewhiskyexchange.com or 020 7403 8688) is aged for a minimum of nine years. Made from corn grain, wheat, rye and barley, it's sweet and fruity with a long spicy finish and vanilla notes. Packaged in a wooden box portraying its 220-year history and eight-step crafting process, the traditional Julep cup holds plenty of promise for bourbon fans.

**Forever blowing bubbles:** One of the few remaining family-owned champagne houses on the global stage, Taittinger's chalk cellars in Reims are home to some of the finest collections of champagne. Beautifully dressed for the party season, the entry-level Taittinger Brut Reserve NV (£37.99, Waitrose) comes in a 3D sparkling bubble-effect box which has been awarded Carton of the Year at the annual Pro Carton/ECMA Awards for its instant appeal.



## EATING OUT

The tarka dhal (lentils) was up to its usual excellent standard, the smoky taste coming through. We never fail to order – or enjoy – this dish.

# Looking forward to the Monsoon season



LINDA WHITWAM



The Monsoon is something people look forward to in Slaithwaite. I'm referring not to the torrential rain which has battered the place for much of this year, but to the Indian restaurant which lies at the heart of the village.

Since the Monsoon Tandoori Restaurant opened almost 13 years ago, it has established itself at a focal point for the community – and not just for diners.

The Bengali-owned eatery is decorated with framed sports shirts from the teams they have sponsored over the years and letters from grateful pupils who have eaten there on organised trips from local schools.

Other recipients of the owners' generosity include the Slaithwaite Philharmonic Orchestra and the Moonraker Festival.

A while ago some of the staff trekked up the road to Scapagoat Hill Junior and Infant School to show the youngsters how to make a chicken bhuna.

You're assured of a warm welcome and friendly service, and on a cold wet night in Slawit, the Monsoon is like a bright beacon. I and many fellow Colne Valley residents are drawn to it like moths to a light bulb.

The interior is painted with lightly coloured walls with deep red carpet and seats. At weekends the place is usually busy and when the downstairs gets packed, diners spill over into the upstairs section of the restaurant.

There's often quite a few families in early on as the natives of the Colne Valley introduce their offspring to the exotic delicacies of the Indian sub continent in a friendly environment. So what about the food? Well, to be honest, it is nothing fancy or clever, it's just honest dishes at reasonable prices.

I'm a regular here and personally I think that the monsoon's forté is its vegetarian dishes. But with the Examiner footing the bill, we decided to splash out and take a risk on some previously untried dishes – and were pleasantly surprised by a couple of them.

After poppadoms the three of us ordered the fish tikka (£3.95), tandoori chicken on the bone and



WARM HEART OF THE VILLAGE: Comfortable dining and great food is the simple strength of the Monsoon Tandoori Restaurant in Slaithwaite

chicken chat (both £3.50). The fish tikka was truly delicious. It was succulent,

nicely cooked with not too much ghee – which can be a fault in some Indian restaurants. The tarka dhal (lentils) was up to its usual excellent standard, the smoky taste coming through. We never fail to order – or enjoy – this dish.

And the vegetable curry was tasty with plenty of onions. All this was washed down with plenty draft Kingfisher and Cobra at prices which meant that we ended up just about within the meagre budget. Needless to say, we had ordered far too much. Just before we waddled off into the dark night, I glanced at the wall near our table. On it was a framed letter from a child in Class 2 at Helme School.

It said: "We had a great time in your beautiful restaurant and the food was the best food ever." I wouldn't quite go that far, but I like the place and the people who run it, and I'll definitely be back soon.

**VERDICT:** A decent local Indian with friendly staff. Every village should have one.

### The bill

### The Monsoon Tandoori Restaurant

2 Britannia Road, Slaithwaite, HD7 5HG  
Tel: 01484 845818

**Website:** www.monsoontandoori.co.uk

**Opening hours:** Monday to Thursday: 5.30pm to 11.30pm, Fri and Sat: 5.30 to midnight, Sun: 4.30pm to 11.30pm

**Children:** Welcome

**Disabled:** Yes

**The bill:** £16.50 a head including drinks

**Would you go back?** I do, regularly

# Stephen JACKSON

Stephen is co-owner and chef at T&Cake Café, Almondsbury



## Space In-Vada



This week, we're following our cricketers over to India. At the time of writing, we're doing very well in the second test, thanks to the mighty Monty Panesar, and I hope we keep it up.

India is very high up on my travel wishlist – it just looks so wonderfully vibrant, friendly and somehow magical. It always comes across as such a beguilingly colourful place; the deep greens of the trees and grasses, the warm orange glow of the sunlight, the purple of the distant Himalayas, the rich ochres of the fresh spices in the markets, and the bright neon pinks and greens of the silks. Not only that, but the food of India is one of my very favourite cuisines, from the fresh, coconut-based fish curries of Kerala to the dark, chili-laced stews of the north via the opulence of the rich cuisine of the Punjab.

We could do a recipe a week and not cover the whole repertoire of Indian food in literally decades of articles.

This week, though, we're concentrating on something a little more snack-y. Something, in fact, that will be on offer at the little stalls around the stadium in Mumbai.

We're having a go at the classic Indian street-food, the Vada Pav. Apparently invented by a snack vendor outside a railway station in Maharashtra in the early 70s, the vada pav is simply a potato fritter in a bun, but in reality it's a mouthwatering combination of hot, crunchy, spicy, smooth and chewy. Made for snacking on the hoof, it's the equivalent of our beefburger or cheese and pickle roll – something really tasty that takes little effort to eat, and which is cheap and readily available.

The potato is mashed and blended with spices and aromatic vegetables, then is chilled in shaped patties before being dipped in a rich turmeric-laced chickpea batter.

This fries to a stunning crisp pink coating (the curcumin in the turmeric reacts to the heat – it's quite alarming first time you see it! No wonder it's known as the Indian saffron) which lends a terrific crunch when bitten into.

These crunchy patties are then served in a roll with two different chutneys or sauces. One is a rich, spicy coconut and peanut paste, and the other a cooling minty yoghurt.

Combine all this and you have a full-on flavour explosion across the palate. The roll is important here, as it's the combination of the crunchy with the soft that makes these sandwiches so enjoyable. Think of our own fish-finger butty; the

pleasure is often just as much in the textural contrast as in the flavour.

The Japanese have their tonkatsu pork (we covered this earlier this year), and the Americans have the Po'Boy, traditionally a roll filled with crispy deep-fried oysters but now just referring to anything deep-fried and shoved in a bun. For this recipe, any good bread roll will do.

I decided to go one further and make some soft caramelised onion rolls with a basic white bread recipe, laced with strands of deeply-coloured

onion, but you could use whatever you fancy, from an artisan roll to a plain old burger bun from the value shelf.

If anything, the cheaper rolls are probably the most authentic, given this is street grub from the subcontinent, but it's up to you.

You can always serve these terrific fritters without the bread as part of a fancier dinner, but it's nice to try the full snack experience for once. Pop the Third Test on, and get frying! Aprons on!

### Stephen Jackson's Vada Pav

#### For the potato vadai:

- 6 potatoes
- 1 green chili
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp ginger, minced or grated
- A handful fresh coriander
- ½ tsp vegetable oil
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- 3 curry leaves, finely chopped
- ½ tsp turmeric
- ½ tsp cumin
- ½ tsp ground coriander
- 75g chickpea (gram) flour
- Cayenne pepper
- A pinch of bicarbonate of soda
- A pinch of Maldon salt

#### For the green chutney:

- 120ml plain yoghurt
- A handful fresh coriander, chopped
- A handful fresh mint, chopped
- ½ a small onion, very finely diced
- 1 large garlic clove, minced
- 2 tsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp unrefined golden caster sugar
- A pinch of Maldon salt

#### For the garlic coconut

#### chutney:

- 130g desiccated coconut
- 6 cloves garlic
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 2 tsp chili flakes (or a little less if you're squeamish)
- 2 tbsps salted peanuts
- A little lemon juice
- Maldon salt

#### Extras:

- Soft bread rolls
- Peeled cucumber slices
- Oil for frying

#### Method:

For the green chutney, stir the ingredients together until combined, and check for seasoning. Chill until required.

To prepare the coconut chutney, toast the coconut under the grill or in a medium oven until golden and aromatic.

Toast the peanuts until deeply-coloured. Blend all the ingredients together to form a thick paste, adjusting consistency with a little oil or lemon juice if necessary.

To make the potato vadai, peel and dice the potatoes, then cook in plenty of salted boiling water until tender, and then mash or pass through a mouli and allow to cool.

Chop the chilis, garlic and ginger to a rough paste. Add the chili mixture to the mash, and add plenty of freshly-chopped coriander. In a small pan, heat the vegetable oil and add the mustard seeds.

When they start to pop, add the curry leaves, the dried spices and remove from the heat.

Mix straight into the potato mixture, and adjust the seasoning if necessary.

Divide the potato mixture into eight portions; shape into fat rounded burger shapes, roughly the same size as the rolls.

Chill unwrapped in the fridge for at least an hour.

In a separate bowl, combine the gram flour, a pinch each of turmeric and chili powder and a little salt. Add enough water, gradually, to

make a smooth, thick batter. Add a teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda and mix well. In a deep pan, heat a few inches of oil to a medium heat.

Dip the chilled vadai in the batter to coat well, shake the excess loose and deep-fry until they become golden and crispy.

The turmeric will become alarmingly red, but persevere! It helps form an amazing crispy coating. Keep the cooked vadai warm until you have used all the mixture.

To serve, halve the rolls, toast lightly, and spread a little of the coconut chutney on the bottom half.

Pop a vada on the roll, spoon a little green chutney on top, add a few slices of crisp cucumber, and top with the remaining half of the roll.

Eat immediately, preferably with a nice chilled Indian beer.