

# A Monument to Indian Cuisine

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY RICH HIGGINS

» **Dosa on Fillmore**

1700 Fillmore St. (at Post St.)  
San Francisco, CA 94115  
415-441-3672, dosasf.com  
Open for lunch Wed-Sun,  
11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Open for dinner daily, 5:30-midnight



**A**t Dosa on Fillmore, eating at an Indian restaurant has evolved into an unforgettable experience. It captures the vibrancy and vitality of South Indian cuisine and delivers in a contemporary setting that is sensual and flattering. Dosa burst on the San Francisco scene in 2006, fusing hipness and authenticity in its location on Valencia Street in the Mission. Its owners borrowed against its Mission Street cred to open a second location on Fillmore Street. The grandeur of this second evocation of the Dosa vision betrays the first as intimate and conservative. Dosa on Fillmore is a cavern-like, columned palace of gilded balustrades, stylish upholstery, and modern chandeliers, all swathed in the heady aroma of spices. Dosa on Fillmore delivers on its promises — its food and atmosphere succeed in transporting diners to the elegance of a spice route. It's an oasis of palatial pleasures, more Dubai than Vegas strip.

Unlike either Dubai or Las Vegas, however, Dosa on Fillmore was built with sustainability in mind. Among the environmentally conscious elements of the design are solar-powered water heaters, wood certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, specially tinted floor-to-ceiling windows to lower energy use, low-flow appliances to reduce water use, and a Vetrazzo bar top that sparkles with recycled glass and mother of pearl. Furthermore, the food is largely organic and mostly vegetarian. South Indian cuisine is known in the U.S. for its vegetarian focus, and while Dosa delivers on this, it also attempts to highlight a few traditional, regional dishes that include sustainably raised lamb and chicken and sustainably caught seafood.

My dining partner and I were greeted by a menu of gin-focused cocktails. Ever cutting edge, Dosa infuses multiple elixirs with Indian spices. My Batsman (\$10) combined Plymouth gin with a Darjeeling tea cordial and ginger beer for a refreshing aperitif that was spicy and earthy.

Later in the meal, when I typically order a beer to pair with my food, our server explained that Dosa features over 35 brands of gin, and it's a jungle of citrus, spice, and aromatic inflections with only a cursory nod to the juniper-heavy London Dry. These gins are used deftly as the basis for many of Dosa's cocktails, and they pair beautifully with the nuanced cuisine.

If Thai cuisine builds its complex flavors from fresh herbs and aromatics, Indian cuisine relies on an arsenal of dried seeds, barks, and roots to develop its nuanced, spicy flavors. This technique is embraced nowhere more succinctly than in the Rasam (\$4). The menu

nicknames it *Fire Broth*, and sipping it from the warm cup is like drinking a restorative poultice from a spice mortar, a showcase of spices in all their Ayurvedic glory. We tamed its fire with an order of cool Mung Sprouts Salad (\$9). The mung beans were toothsome, meaty little legumes surrounded by crunchy carrots, luscious tomatoes, and the soft acid of a mustard-oil vinaigrette.

Next we enjoyed the Chennai Chicken (\$9.50), a dish of tender chicken marinated in Straus yogurt and red from a spice rub, lightly breaded with chickpea flour, and fried. It was served with red onions and Dosa's take on raita — a non-neon-green interpretation whose cucumber and herbs speak softly in the background, refusing to steal the show from the cool, tart, creamy yogurt.

Next we feasted on a Chutney Masala Dosa (\$11). The dosa was an eggplant-chutney-infused crepe — nutty, chewy, fluffy, and slightly sour — swaddling a steamy filling of potato and onions. Each bite of dosa was to be dipped in any combination of lentil sambar, coconut chutney, and tomato-cashew chutney, enriching the experience as the sauces soak into the crepe's nooks and crannies. The masala's black mustard seeds accented each bite with a woody, smoky, spicy pop (not unlike the salty pop of tobiko). We enjoyed a Beet Box cocktail (\$12) with the dosa. The fuchsia-colored combination of Bols genever (the malty predecessor to modern-day gin), beet-anise puree, and ginger liqueur was a spicy and sweet complement to the clean flavors of the dosa and its potato filling.

We finished the meal with a frankie — a wrap sandwich that is common street food in Mumbai. We tried the Prawn Frankie (\$13), a dense roti wrapped around substantial bites of juicy, tender prawns; cucumber strips; onions; and a tart, tangy cilantro sauce. It was a satisfying end to the meal, a humble food prepared the Dosa way: high-quality ingredients cooked to perfection and enjoyed in a complex interplay of texture, color, and spice.

Dosa on Fillmore can be enjoyed in many ways — as an escape to a palate of spice and nuance, a fresh experience of a unique cuisine, a night of artistic and cutting-edge cocktails, or simply for an incredibly tasty meal. Dosa on Fillmore is vibrant and influential, and meals there are sensually appealing and not soon forgotten.

*Rich Higgins is a foodie, brewer, and cicerone, and he pairs great beer and great food wherever he goes. Contact him at richhiggins.com.*

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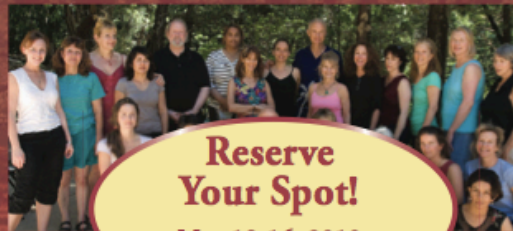
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