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Tuesday, April 24, 2007

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ABOUT THE RESTAURANT

Copper
 311 East Blvd.
 Charlotte, NC 28203
 (704) 333-0063

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SERVICES

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DETAILS

Rating

Cuisine type
 Intl misc.

Hours
 Lunch 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. weekdays; dinner 5 to 10 p.m. Monday-Thursday, to 10:30 Friday-Saturday; to 9:30 Sunday.

Meals Served
 Lunch
 Dinner

Prices
 Moderate - \$15-20

Payment methods
 MasterCard
 Visa
 American Express
 Discover

Seating Capacity
 84

Ancient, modern mingle at Copper

Helen Schwab

The Charlotte Observer
 Published: **Friday, January 13, 2006**

Modernize an ancient cuisine, as Copper sets out to do with Indian food, and you take a chance. Will you alienate those who like it just as it's been for millennia? Will you tarnish new possibilities by hewing too close to tradition?

Copper succeeds because it manages to alloy the new and old tastefully. Diplomatically. And with really cool plates.

Owner Pannu Singh (who also has a quite traditional place in Roanoke), chef Naveen Sadana and manager Krish Ghimire, with an occasional visit from consultant chef Mel Oza, offer a menu that's diverse and fresh, in a contemporary setting.

The menu divides entrées into traditional, modern and "for the gourmands," acknowledging that sometimes, even the adventurous among us occasionally just want a little saag paneer (creamed spinach with cubes of soft, mild cheese), tikka masala (chicken chunks in a creamy spiced tomato sauce) or kadhai gosht (hunks of lamb with onions and peppers in a tomato-based sauce).

Modern dishes range from tandoori seafood (named for the traditional clay oven) with a red-pepper-nutmeg sauce that's terrific to a biryani (a rice dish) with vegetables and a pear-dill raita (yogurt-based





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sauce).

The gourmand section includes salmon dusted with the classic Indian varied spice mix called garam masala (this version's relatively mild) and served with nariyal-narangi sauce. That's coconut and orange to you and me, which points up a minor irritation: Traditional dishes are plainly described while the other two pack in things like "methi curry" and "bhaji" that aren't explained anywhere. Servers sometimes know that methi uses fenugreek, while sometimes you get the "I think bhoona is a saut? ... I think that's right."

Nearly everything is presented in an interesting way - with space between elements on the plate, for example, or a sauce completely separate, or ingredients splayed in geometric arrangements. (A traditional dessert sampler brought four square plates on one larger square, each with two healthy bites of its freight: rice pudding, dense ice cream, honeyed donuts and halwa, the sweetened sort of carrot hash. Gorgeous, and enough for four.) And the plates themselves, interesting white forms of surprising depths and angles, are quite fun.

Among appetizers, the surf and turf - four big shrimp and three hunks of perfect lamb on our visit, with raspberry chutney and a sort of mango salsa - stood out, though a daily soup, seasoned tomato, was another winner. Sides include chana masala (a chickpea curry) and dal makhni (black lentils) and a handful of breads includes roti (whole wheat), garlic naan (with cilantro on the flatbread) and palak kulcha (spinach-stuffed).

Note to vegetarians: From paneer napoleon (the cheese layered with roasted vegetables) to palak makai kofta (spinach and corn dumplings), you'll find some out-of-the-ordinary options.

The restaurant is housed in what's been a fairly astonishing number of eateries over the years (and is where Carson McCullers wrote parts of "The Heart is a Lonely Hunter.") Its most recent incarnation is lovely, with vibrant color and named rooms. There's the Red Room; the Turban Room, named for the artwork, which depicts men in various turban styles; the Polo Room (striped); and the Yoga Room (in front, looking out onto East Boulevard, with a Sanskrit inscription above the window glass that Singh translates as "May God bless every human in the world."

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