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Culinary Corner: Copper Restaurant

by *Heidi Billotto*, Restaurant Critic for "The Charlotte Weekly"

Copper, one of Dilworth's places to dine, is the latest and perhaps one of the most successful incarnations of the historic Mayer House located at 311 East Blvd.

A modern mix

The cuisine at Copper is contemporary. Chef Naveen Sadana and restaurateur Pannu Singh have developed a menu that incorporates traditional flavors and culinary techniques of classic Indian cuisine and have given it all a nouveau twist.

Singh, who operates a successful classic Indian restaurant in Roanoke, Va., in addition to the new Charlotte restaurant, explains the Copper concept.

"We opened here because there are already several good Indian restaurants in Charlotte and we found the area to be very accepting of and interested in Indian cuisine. We saw the move as an opportunity to offer something new and more upscale – not fusion cuisine, just more modern. We still use all Indian ingredients, but our preparations and presentation are a bit more innovative than that of classic Indian cuisine."

Copper boasts innovative interiors as well. Rooms on the ground floor are configured to create four distinctive dining areas and a separate bar with adjacent patio. The kitchen is in the back of the building. Each room is painted with a different design, bolder than most would expect in an old Victorian. Music is newage Indian, occasionally louder at dinner than we would have liked. Soft classic tones would suit the softly candlelit evening atmosphere a bit better. Singh advises that plans for more appropriate dinner music are in the works.

From the tandoor and more

Copper's nouveau slant does not ignore traditional Indian techniques, most notably the tender, moist results from cooking in a tandoor, a cylindrical oven of brick and clay. Those who crave the warm, rich flavors of Indian favorites can sate their appetite with *murgh tikka masala* (classic tandoori chicken simmered in a creamy tomato sauce), *saag paneer* (spicy creamed spinach and homemade cheese), seafood vindaloo (tandoor-baked seafood served in a spicy, garlic-laced curry) and *matar paneer* (a rich curry of homemade cheese and green peas), all on Copper's dinner menu under the heading of traditional favorites.

For those with a less traditional palate, the modern and gourmand sections of the menu hold a trove of flavorful finds such as *palak makai kofta* and *paneer napoleon*. The creative *kofta* entrée, featuring spinach and corn dumplings baked in a crust of mashed potato and then simmered in a savory nutmeg and toasted red pepper sauce, is truly top notch. The outstanding *paneer napoleon*, an inventive offering, is constructed of thick slices of traditional, homemade cheese (*paneer*) stacked with layers of roasted bell peppers, carrots and onions in between. The napoleon is nestled in a bed of mashed black lentil *dal* and garnished with bite-sized chunks of roasted potatoes.

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Copper's dinner entrée, *safed kesari murgh*, offers tandoori-roasted chicken subtly seasoned with saffron in a creamy coconut sauce with mixed vegetables.

COPPER RESTAURANT



Location: 311 East Blvd.

Phone: 704-333-0063

Price range: Lunch, \$7-\$13; dinner entrees, \$13-\$23

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

Details: Reservations accepted, patio, separate bar area, smoking on patio only, private dining rooms, catering, takeout .

Meat and seafood lovers should not miss the tandoori seafood, the tandoori shrimp or the Copper mixed grill for two at dinner or served as a single serving at lunch. The mixed grill's chunks of salmon, shrimp, chicken and lamb, all tandoor-cooked to perfection, surround basmati rice studded with fennel seeds and saffron. A side of sliced and stacked roasted portabello mushrooms accompanies the grilled fare at lunch; a side of *palak makai kofta* accompanies the dinner entrée with a shallow bowl of *makhni*, or savory tomato sauce, provided for dipping.

The *khumbha gosht kebab*, a plate of tandoor-grilled lamb, comes perfectly seasoned and is served with a *methi* curry sauce and masala portabella. The unique combination of flavors works well.

All entrées at Copper are served with Jeera rice, a delicious preparation of steamed basmati laced with fennel seed. The aroma alone tempts your palate. For those with limited Indian cuisine experience, the knowledgeable wait staff is happy to make suggestions or explain sauces and preparation styles. Several who have relocated from the Roanoke restaurant have worked alongside Singh and Sadana for years and are familiar with the chef's style and the cuisine's nuances.



Brian Treffelsen/CW photos
Copper's owner, Pannu Singh (left), and chef Naveen Sadana, are happy to have opened their upscale ethnic restaurant in Charlotte.

Menu variations are available upon request. For children with skeptical or less adventurous palates, Sadana gladly prepares something to suit. A plate of tandoori chicken and roasted potatoes could be the Indian answer to chicken fingers and French fries and may broaden young diners' horizons.

Starters, sides and sips

A selection of appetizers to share can start your night off right at Copper; highly recommended are the *poti samosa*, a vegetable-stuffed pastry sack served with a sweet chili mint chutney and a savory masala sauce; the coconut-ginger scallops served with mango and cucumbers and a yogurt mint chutney; and the *hariyali masala* shrimp, roasted and served with a light coconut-spinach sauce. The soup of the day, homemade and delicious, is beautifully presented in an oversized bowl.

Copper also offers four salads: a tandoori shrimp salad; a tasty marinated cucumber, tomato and onion salad; a Copper house salad; and a chicken tikka salad with spinach, mushrooms and a delightful *methi* Ranch dressing. Side dishes come with each entrée, and combinations play off the blend of flavors on each plate. A traditional selection of tandoor-baked breads includes the classic naan and roti, baked flat with white and whole-wheat flours respectively. The *palak kulcha* captured our attention immediately. This spinach-stuffed naan – one we had not tried before – offered a wonderful combination of taste and texture. Particularly good when dipped in the homemade raita, a cucumber- and tomato-studded yogurt sauce with a touch of cumin and black pepper, or the full-flavored *makhini* sauce made with simmered onions, tomatoes and Indian spices.

The wine list at Copper is a nice blend of styles, grapes, vintages and price ranges. All selections were handpicked to complement the cuisine, so you can't go wrong by choosing what suits your palate and pocketbook.



Well-known Charlotte restaurant critic, food writer, cooking instructor and connoisseur of food and wine, [Heidi Edidin](#) writes "The Charlotte Weekly: Culinary Corner," a restaurant review or food feature that appears weekly. Contact Heidi with questions and restaurant, food or story ideas by email at heidi@thecharlotteweekly.com.

CW photos by Brian Treffeisen.

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