

I read a Jilly Cooper novel once. Oh sod it, I've nearly read all of them. Her books are shameless easy reading. You can really get stuck into one. You know when you pick up a copy of Riders you are in for a treat. They are, to be precise, exactly what you expect of them. To me, reading a Jilly is comparable to eating Indian food. What you expect is a chicken bhuna and that's what you get. Curry is comforting, you can really get stuck into it, and you always want more. Or is that just me?

Moti Mahal is not the Jilly Cooper of the culinary world; Moti Mahal is the Salman Rushdie, the Roald Dahl, and the William Shakespeare. Moti Mahal is so different to the rest of the curry scene, in fact, that on my first visit I walked away completely stunned.

Firstly, it was a Monday evening. I don't like quiet restaurants; I want atmosphere and more noise than the scraping of my cutlery. I want to see what other people are ordering and I want to blend in while I lick my plate. Jackpot! The only table not occupied was the one my friend and I would be sitting at. Is it just me that hadn't heard of Moti Mahal before? Seems like everyone and their uncle had flocked to the curry house, surely everyone else can't be as atmosphere pedantic as me?

I'm one of those annoying people who is asked numerous times if they're ready to order, even before I've even looked at the menu. Drinks orders, however, they're easy. Mojito? Screwdriver? Mai Tai? Not here, Moti Mahal don't just do the classics, they put an Indian twist on everything, making them into modern amalgamations.

We welcome a Spiced Mango margarita - tequila, fresh mango, lime, cayenne, curry leaf, cinnamon and Cointreau infusion - and a Laurel leaf Smash - curry plant, bay leaf, fig, fig liqueur, blackberries, vodka, lemon and sugar. They were refreshing, unique, and most welcome. In fact, they can come again...and again.

Next up, the daunting task of ordering from the huge book-like menu. Think War and Peace but full of words such as Kararee, anardana and chemeen. I've got indecisive disorder so I was pleased to discover the set menu option and get back to chatting.

A glass of wine to start and then the magic began. Plump seared scallops with coriander and tamarind on a lime and cumin pea puree followed by a butterflied leg of lamb seasoned with cinnamon, bay leaf and green chillies with what can only be described as air-whipped heaven. Lastly, a vermicelli and masala chicken with pine nuts, baked with egg custard - so huge and so delicious it felt wrong to leave any, but I don't think Moti Mahal is the sort of place that does doggy bags.

For the main course, stir-fried prawns with coconut and curry leaf, a venison stew with chillies, cloves and garlic, black lentil daal, fried lotus stem tossed with peanuts and coriander, a cooling raita and baked breads. Wow! And wow again! We weren't sure if the waiter thought the people passing the window were joining us, but our dinner was huge enough for four. Four hippos.

Every morsel we managed to eat was delectable. It tasted unique on the taste buds. Just like the cocktails, Moti Mahal create every mouthful so that it reaches all five sections of the tongue.

After all that food we were stuffed, we couldn't eat another thing. If Moti Mahal offered a blanket instead of a warm flannel I would have happily snuggled up and gone in to hibernation.

And then... dessert arrived. I am a firm believer in the fact (ahem) that the stomach has a small section reserved only for sweet things. We happily made room for a medley of desserts; a unique-tasting cardamom ice-cream, a sticky and sugary griddled Indian flatbread and a very sweet banana and blueberry cake. It was all very flavoursome and filled the allocated space but not wholly necessary after the banquet.

For what could be described as an Indian feast with three wines to match, Moti Mahal is amazing value for money; the portions were huge even for those with pachyderm appetites.

When leaving we took it in turns to roll each other back to the bus stop. Between rolls we discussed how we had a new perspective on Indian cuisine. Moti Mahal made my choice when it comes to ordering a curry so much more refined. No longer will I settle for a chicken tikka and a naan, give me Thatee Ka Gosht any day. My reading choices, however, will never change. Now when's Cooper's latest novel due out?

[Rebecca Brett](#) (12 08 2010)

Monthly Unique Users:135,000