

FIRST TASTE

FOXHOLE

DIGGING INTO DOWNTOWN BENTONVILLE'S
NEWEST COCKTAILS-AND-COFFEE SPOT

BY BONNIE BAUMAN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARSHIA KHAN



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FOXHOLE PUBLIC HOUSE

401 SW A St., Suite 120
Bentonville | (479) 715-6351
facebook.com/foxholebentonville

BEST COCKTAILS

Arkansas Black Apple Smoked Toddy,
Rabbit's Tea, Chartreuse Swizzle,
Lavender Paloma

BEST COFFEE DRINKS

Cloudy Morning, cardamom cappuccino,
sarsaparilla espresso soda

BEST BITES

Breakfast steamed buns, Korean
barbecue shiitake steamed buns, potato
au gratin bomb bread, hot cereal with
bananas and pecans

KID FRIENDLY?

Definitely! But in the later hours, it turns
into a cocktail crowd

PRICE RANGE

\$6 to \$16 for cocktails, \$2 to \$5.50 for
coffee drinks, \$4 to \$9 for food-menu items

HOURS

7 a.m. to 1 a.m. Monday through Saturday

It's after 10 p.m. on a mind-blowingly warm Saturday in January, and even though we're damn near comatose after scarfing down pimiento cheeseburgers at The Hive, the thought of a nightcap propels us forward. But when we sidle up to our destination in the section of downtown Bentonville dubbed "The Arts District," it's quiet.

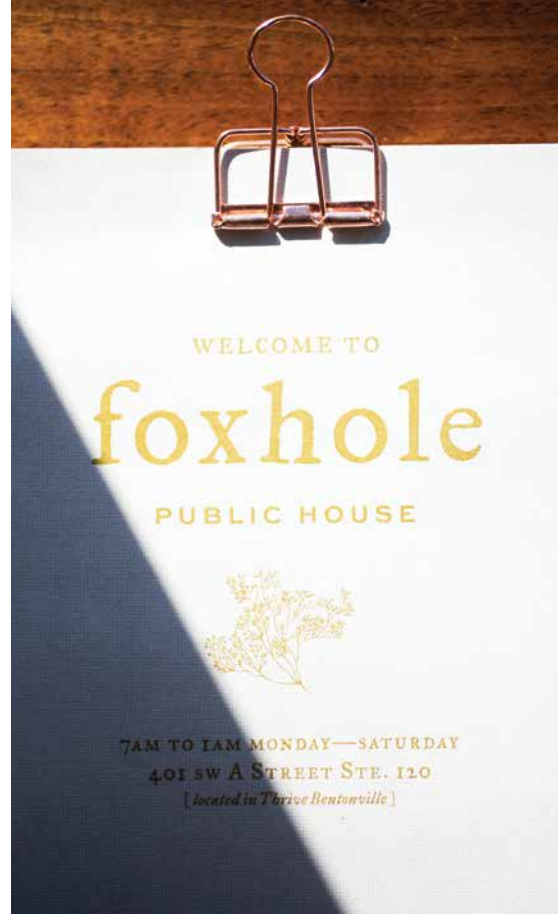
I'm worried. For the year that I've been in town, "local watering hole" seems to be the universally accepted answer to Bentonvillians' favorite hypothetical "What downtown needs next is [insert here]" game—a place to go grab a drink after work, to take a date night to the next level, or pregame before dining out at a hot new downtown eatery. And the bar we're standing in front of—Foxhole Public House—would seem to be all we've been wishing and waiting for, but I'm not sure it'll make it in a place that for so long has been lights out after dark. And I'm definitely not convinced after-hours revelry is something that can be planned and developed. Maybe it's something that just has to, like, be.

The name "Foxhole Public House" conjures up

visions of fish 'n' chips, dart boards and \$3 draft beer. But this is downtown Bentonville—a place where a 60-foot utility pole has been transformed into a sculpture of a gigantoid red-feathered arrow, where the new Walmart Neighborhood Market out-swanks any Whole Foods anywhere, and where coffee shops are "labs"—so we're not exactly expecting bangers and mash. When we swing open the door, the place is packed wall to wall with patrons. The white walls and the line of sleek light fixtures over the bar lean "urban chic," but mixed in is a cozy, homey vibe accented by the warm Arkansas walnut lining the bar, the shelves, the tabletops. Not to mention the folksy mural spanning an entire wall depicting—what else?—a foxhole (and not the battlefield variety, mind you, but the kind of foxhole where an actual fox would actually stash a pile of apples amid a tangle of brambly roots). I instantly feel comfortable and at home—a sensation I'm not used to experiencing at a hip cocktail bar. And it's at that moment that I'm reminded why we're here—why we're all here.

Which is cocktails.

It just so happens that this "pub," this "neighborhood watering hole," this whatever-you-want-



KAT WILSON, EMILY LAWSON AND PUP, DOUG

to-call-it is, at its core, a showcase for the concoctions dreamed up by the area's most lauded farm-to-glass mixologist, Emily Lawson. Known as the genius behind Pink House (pH) Alchemy—a purveyor of handcrafted simple syrups, bitters and shrubs—Emily first got a hankering to dive into the craft cocktail (and craft coffee) game while working as a chef at Fayetteville's Arsaga's some five years ago. But it was before that, back when she was in her early 20s and falling in love with wine, that she realized there was something different about her palate—a difference that just might come in handy one day when it came time to make her mark.

"When I started drinking wine and started realizing, *Oh my gosh, I can taste mushrooms and dirt and gasoline and all these notes*, it just blew my mind," Emily had told me over coffee at Foxhole a couple of days prior to my foray into downtown Bentonville after-hours spots. Midwest pretty, she sports a fun bob. Her laugh is easy, and her face is kind and compassionate—all that coupled with the fact that she mixes a mean cocktail, and I'd say it's pretty safe to assume that this is a gal who's been privy to many a boozy late-night confessional.

As I'd swooned over my cardamom-flavored cappuccino and Lawson downed her second Americano of the day, I'd pressed for more details—

"I TASTE WITH MY MIND," SHE'D EXPLAINED, "SO I'M ABLE TO PUT TOGETHER MULTIPLE FLAVORS WITH MY MIND, AND I KNOW THAT THEY'RE GOING TO MELD TOGETHER AND WORK."

like, how does she just *know* that peppercorns, plums and Bailey's Irish Whisky will be delicious when mixed together?

"I taste with my mind," she'd explained, "so I'm able to put together multiple flavors with my mind, and I know that they're going to meld together and work."

This sixth sense served Emily well in crafting the concept for Foxhole. With just a bit of mental alchemy, she dreamed up a bar that combined an interesting mélange of offerings: coffee, cocktails and a food menu that includes such novelties as steamed buns, "bomb" breads and hot cereals. It shouldn't work—dim sum? porridge? Sazeracs?—but it does. And one reason it works is that it draws on that "public house" idea: Though it's a cocktail bar at heart, it keeps long hours—from 7 a.m. to 1 a.m. Monday

through Saturday (Saturday's tend to run a little later than 1 a.m.)—and kiddos are welcome. "We aim for this place to be an extension of your home," says Emily. "So you can get your coffee here, you can get your lunch here, grab a cocktail or beer. And your children can be in here, so it's meant to be an extension of your life."

Another reason Foxhole works is the all-star team Emily has assembled to help her run the place, one that includes manager Jacqueline Shin. Jacqueline—who, like Emily, is a total gastronome—



spent the past few years behind the bar at Maxine's Tap Room in Fayetteville doing her bit to teach Northwest Arkansas the difference between a flip, a restorative and a swizzle. And Brandon Davidson aka "The Retrotender," is also on board. Brandon has made a name for himself in these parts as a master mixologist, so it made sense when he recently hopped on as the events coordinator and beverage director of Pink House. (You can catch him doing his thing behind the bar at the Foxhole on Thursday nights.) Not to mention that famed Fayetteville photographer Kat Wilson is the marketing director for Pink House and Foxhole, and with her artist's eye, she's worked over the past year or so to tell the story of Foxhole from its inception with a trail of gallery-ready photos. (If you're lucky enough, Kat might even snap your picture to add to the series.) Also on the scene is R.J. Geiss (he's the guy behind the counter with the magnificent beard), the resident "coffee wizard".

The menu that the crew is working from is organized in a way that makes it navigable for the craft-cocktail uninitiated. To that end, the drinks are grouped not by type of alcohol, but by flavor profile, including "smoked," "coffee," "savory," "bitter," "floral," "sour" and "spicy." So if you're feeling "smoked," you might opt for a Tobacco Smoked Manhattan, a concoction of tobacco-smoked bourbon, vermouth, pH sarsaparilla syrup and bitters topped with a housemade

sour cherry. Or maybe you're in a bitter place, and a Chartreuse Swizzle—a combo of pH falernum syrup, green chartreuse and fresh pineapple juice served with a lime and topped with nutmeg specks—might do the trick.

When it's my turn to decide, as I stand at the crowded bar while my date holds down the table we managed to snag, I make a hasty decision and go for a "floral" drink inspired by the nip of spring in the air: the Lavender Paloma. The blend of mezcal, pH lavender syrup and grapefruit juice is set in front of me in a Collins glass rimmed with lavender salt. The cocktail is delicious—smooth and light, and the subtle lavender notes combined with the mezcal, citrus and salt give me the feeling of drinking an uber-ladylike margarita. It's the perfect palate cleanser to the not-so-ladylike burger I put away earlier.

As I sit across from my date-slash-husband, lingering over the last few sips of my cocktail, it suddenly occurs to me that for the first time since moving to Northwest Arkansas a year ago, it truly feels like we're having a proper night out on the town in Bentonville. Suddenly, I get a little frisson of anticipation (or maybe it's just the mezcal kicking in) thinking about what might be next on the horizon for downtown after dark. A karaoke bar? An ice bar? Maybe a martini lounge? Definitely a rooftop bar. The possibilities seem endless—but if you ask me, a 24-hour fancy doughnut shop is exactly what this place really needs. **AL**

GOOD TASTING WHAT WE'RE EATING THIS MONTH



TRI-TIP STEAK

Trio's Restaurant, Little Rock

For 30 years, this august establishment has consistently been turning out some of the best food in the city. But with a perpetually rotating list of specials—we're currently loving this tri-tip steak topped with classic Argentinian chimichurri, served with roasted potatoes and maple-glazed Brussels sprouts—Trio's certainly isn't resting on its laurels. (8201 Cantrell Road; triosrestaurant.com)



CUBAN-REUBEN HASH

Southern Salt Food Co., Little Rock

This concoction of peach-and-chipotle-braised pork shoulder, garlic-bacon sauerkraut and roasted fingerling potatoes (with onions, red jalapenos and carrots, natch), topped with an over-easy egg and rye toast, is just the thing to bring us back to life the morning after a long Saturday night. (Mobile; facebook.com/southernsaltfood)



DOSA WITH CHUTNEYS AND SAMBAR

Flavor of India, Little Rock

Perfectly crispy, yet scrumptiously chewy, dosa—that south Indian crepe made of fermented lentil batter—might as well be magic in edible form. Keep the dosa extra simple by ordering them with traditional dips—in this case, peanut and tomato chutneys and sambar, a lentil-based vegetable stew. (11121 N. Rodney Parham Road; facebook.com/flavorindia)

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GOOD TASTE



FIRST TASTE

TABLE 28

FRESH OFF A TOTAL RENOVATION, THIS 3-YEAR-OLD WEST LITTLE ROCK EATERY HAS FOUND ITS PLACE IN ARKANSAS' FINE DINING

BY KATIE BRIDGES | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARSHIA KHAN

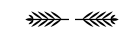


TABLE 28

1501 Merrill Drive
Little Rock | (501) 224-2828
table28lr.com

BEST DISHES

Quail “lollipops”; blackened Chilean sea bass with chipotle-blue-cheese butter and succotash; calamari “schnitzel”; shrimp cake with fennel-apple slaw; meatloaf; cioppino with squid-ink pasta; strawberry crisp

BEST BAR FARE

Fried Brussels sprouts with bacon and pecans; spicy shrimp and bacon grits; street tacos; gin-thyme cocktail

KID FRIENDLY?

Definitely more of a date-night spot—better book a babysitter

PRICE RANGE

\$14 to \$35 for entrees; \$3 to \$8 for happy-hour bites

HOURS

4-9 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 4-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Happy hour runs 4-7 p.m. Monday through Friday

RESERVATIONS

Recommended, especially on weekends

I can’t find a place to park. Which is quite surprising, at least at first, especially considering this is west Little Rock, land of big boxes and bigger asphalt lots. And then I remember that the restaurant I’m heading to—the 3-year-old Table 28, housed in Vesuvio’s former location—is in a hotel (the recently renovated Burgundy Hotel), and that it’s set to be a big weekend for Little Rock (the marathon and all). I wedge myself in between a black Mercedes and a mud-splattered SUV and shrug it off. I’ve got a reservation to keep.

But although the parking lot’s full, there’s no one in the lobby. There are no bellhops ushering weary travelers to the rooms, no guests peering down into the atrium. And there’s no one at the hotel restaurant’s easy-to-miss host stand, located just outside its doors—just to the right of a simple neon sign touting “Table 28.” Until there is.

“Ohmygoodness, I’m so sorry!” the hostess says, hurrying out to greet me. “Please, right this way.”

I follow her the few steps down into the restaurant’s newly revamped dining room—so new that an aroma best described as “new carpet” mixes and mingles with the scents wafting out of the kitchen—and I get it. *This* is where everyone is. *This* is why the hostess was out of breath. This is ... unexpected for a weeknight in Little Rock?

It’s not a huge space, but it’s packed. The lights are low, and ambient music’s on, and there’s a cacophony of muffled laughter and stemware clinks and the tinny rustling of forks and knives and spoons. I settle into a long gray-leather banquette and start to peruse the menu. And as I look up to glance around the room, taking in the freshened-up space—the sleek modern sconces, the warm walnut walls, the sculptural, bare-wire chandeliers, the minimalist art—my mouth must be ajar because my waiter says, “I know, right? That’s a lot of people’s reaction. They just stop and stare, especially if they knew what it was like before.”

I try to hide my surprise, not only at the transfor-



mation of the space, but also at the hard-to-miss *busyness* of the place. (Fine-dining establishments, especially places with things like pork jowls and bone marrow on the menu, are typically a hard sell in Little Rock, after all.) Playing it cool, I busy myself with the menu. And editor that I am, the first thing that jumps out at me are the quotation marks—because they’re everywhere. Calamari “schnitzel.” Scallops “surf and turf” with beef cheeks. Pork shank “redemption” with candied-apple gremolata. Tongue and cheek “oh yea.” *Clearly*, I’m thinking, *this is a chef who doesn’t take himself too seriously*. But then I look closer. There’s oxtail with butternut-squash ravioli, but there’s also meatloaf. There’s scallop-studded cioppino, but there’s also sweet-tea-brined fried chicken. There’s beef carpaccio with a goat-cheese crème fraîche, but there’s also shrimp and grits. And there’s something called “quail bird lollipops,” and yes, I’d like

to have those, please.

As I devour them—they’re tender nuggets of ground quail, flash-fried and tossed in a Tabasco-tinged sauce; a playful take on Buffalo wings, in case you’re curious—I start to wonder about the chef and co-owner, Scott Rains. It takes some serious culinary *cajones* to put together a menu like the one I have in front of me. So why did he do it? *How* did he do it? Was it trial and error? Does he have a screw loose? Did he knock back one too many of those cucumber martinis I’ve seen floating around the dining room (and yes, I’ll have one of those, too, please) before he put pen to paper? I’ve got questions. But by the time my “blackened” Chilean sea bass arrives on its bed of gussied-up succotash and chipotle-blue-cheese butter, I think I’m starting to put my finger on it.

Maybe he just *gets* it.

Little Rock’s not New York City. It’s not

Chicago. It’s not even Dallas. It’s casual and comfortable. Southern and straight-forward. And sure, we’ve got some progressive folks here. And of course, we’ve got a burgeoning “food scene.” But that doesn’t make us a city brimming with palates eager to shell out \$65 for a three-course tasting menu—particularly if that menu includes things like crispy chicken skin and calamari filets and confit of cabbage, like Scott’s. But his dinner menu also offers a killer burger and a shrimp po’boy. It’s high-end, it’s low-end, but to me, it seems like it’s all got something in common: creativity, tempered by a healthy dose of accessibility.

A few days later, sitting down with Scott—who’s swapped his chef whites for loose-fitting jeans and a blue-camo Patagonia trucker hat—at his bar, I get confirmation that my observations weren’t far from the truth. It’s 1:30 in the afternoon on a Wednesday, and Scott’s restaurant is quiet. Empty. He leans



“I FEEL LIKE I’LL DO THINGS HERE THAT I REALLY DON’T SEE OTHER PEOPLE TRYING—LIKE, IF I WANT TO PUT A PIG FACE ON THE MENU, I’M NOT SCARED.”

back in his bar stool as he talks, and his words are slow and thick with the South. Within minutes of visiting with him—learning of his two decades as a chef in San Francisco; of his first Arkansas restaurant, the now defunct (but much-loved) Horseshoe Vineyard near Hot Springs; of his passion for fishing—I start to put together the pieces.

He’s got a big-city background, but as a Malvern native, he’s as small-town Southern as they come. He’s willing to push boundaries—“I feel like I’ll do things here that I really don’t see other people trying here,” he says, “like, if I want to put a pig face on the menu, I’m not scared”—but he’s also been in charge of enough establishments to know what sells. He’s innovative but doesn’t stray far from solid, time-tested technique—the tools and tricks his grandfather might have employed when he was executive chef of The Arlington Hotel in the ’40s. And he’s constantly evolving and evaluating, tweaking and toying, trying and trying again. And as we chat, and I think back over the menu, it’s all there. It’s him. And darn it if it doesn’t just *work*.

As I walk out of the lobby and back into the day, already making plans to pop by later for happy hour since I can’t get that cucumber martini or those quail lollipops off my mind, the parking lot’s empty—but I know it’ll be wedging-room only by the time the sun sets tonight. **AL**



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GOOD TASTE



FIRST TASTE
***KHANA
INDIAN GRILL***

AUTHENTIC INDIAN FOOD COMES TO NORTHWEST ARKANSAS—BY WAY OF TEXAS

BY BONNIE BAUMAN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARSHIA KHAN



On a bone-chilling February afternoon, I reluctantly tear myself from the toasty warmth of the car and make a mad dash for the door of Khana Indian Grill. I’ve faced down the icy wind one too many times today and am in desperate need of a pick-me-up in the form of light-me-on-fire Indian curry. I heard from a trusted Fayetteville foodie that Khana, which opened back in October, is now the go-to for Indian fare in Northwest Arkansas. Today seems the perfect day to give the place a go.

As I sidle up to the counter to place my order (Khana’s a fast-casual eatery) I’m encouraged not only by the variety of Indian dishes listed on the menu board, but also by the display of imported Indian doodads on offer near the register. There’s something about this mishmash of items—everything from rose musk incense to henna kits to chapati rolling pins—that just screams “authentic.” I get the feeling these folks know their way around a

KHANA INDIAN GRILL

2101 N. College Ave., Fayetteville
(479) 287-4736
khanaindiangrill.com

BEST DISHES

Papdi chaat; grilled paneer cheese *khati* roll; curried chickpea *khati* roll; chicken tikka; paneer tikka

KID FRIENDLY?

Yep—the kiddos even get their own menu

PRICE RANGE

\$2.50 (soup) to \$24.50 (“Super Indian” combo)

HOURS

Tuesday through Thursday, 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.

RESERVATIONS

Not necessary—it’s a “fast-casual” affair

plate of curry.

While I’m chatting up the cashier, marveling at the towering Japanese-style slow-drip coffee brewer on the counter, a blonde-haired, blue-eyed woman steps out of the kitchen and gives me a brief explanation of how the contraption works. Turns out she owns the place. I’m, um, worried. But after chowing down on a spot-on plate of chicken tikka masala, my concerns are assuaged. A question does nag at me a bit, however: Just who is this woman, and how the heck did she learn to cook a chicken tikka masala that tastes like this?

THAT BLONDE-HAIRED, blue-eyed woman is Lisa Purkayastha, and a few months later, she’s sitting across from me, a pair of chicory-laced iced coffees on the table between us. By now, winter’s a distant memory, and the cold brew hits the spot on this balmy June afternoon. Lisa wears her thick blonde hair pulled back from her face and sports a long black chef’s apron. And though she’s quick to

smile and laugh, there’s a quiet earnestness about her as she tells her story, her voice tinged with an unmistakable Southern drawl.

In the middle of our chat, a woman in a cheerful blue dress drops by our table. Turns out she’s a regular customer who’s recently visited India and has a pressing question for Lisa. “What was the name of the wallahs that took the tiffins?” she asks.

“The tiffin wallahs,” Lisa replies without skipping a beat, explaining to me that this is a sort of food-delivery service in India. After a bit more chitchat about Indian culture and history, the customer takes her leave, at which point Lisa excuses herself for a moment and heads to the kitchen. When she returns, she’s holding a small, round metal tin with stacked compartments and a handle.

“This is a tiffin,” she says. “When my husband, Abhijeet, was a little boy growing up in India, every mother would store a prepared lunch for each of their kids in one of these, and a guy on a bicycle would come to all of the houses and pick them up and transport them to the school. Then when lunch was over, he’d bring each of them home.

“I bought a bunch because we’re thinking of doing something with them,” she adds. “We’re not sure what yet—maybe some kind of pickup service—the truth is we have lots of things like this that are still in the development phase.”

Lisa met Abhijeet Purkayastha in 1985 at McCann Erickson Advertising in Houston, where the two worked. Abhijeet had moved to Texas from Chennai, the fourth largest city in India, when he was 17 to attend college. The Purkayasthas were delighted by their son’s American girlfriend and welcomed her with open arms when the couple married, Abhijeet’s mother going so far as to teach Lisa the ins and outs of Indian cooking.

About two years after tying the knot, the couple decided to ditch the world of advertising to start their own business, ultimately settling on a business importing leather and other goods from India. About 10 years ago, with a thriving business that could be managed from anywhere and two young sons, the couple moved the family from Houston to Northwest Arkansas in pursuit of a better quality of life.

But ever since leaving Houston, they’d sorely missed the diversity of cuisines that had been available to them in the larger metropolitan area. “We’d come from a city where most of the restaurants we ate at were ethnic dives, and now we were in the land of chain restaurants,” says Lisa. This was a major impetus for opening Khana, which means “food” or “to eat” in Hindi, she explains. “I thought there was a hole for ethnic food done well here.”

But Khana’s no dive. From the get-go, Lisa was determined to create a space that was a true reflection of her passion for the culture she’d married into. “There are a lot of things I don’t know how to do,” she says, “But one of the things I *do* know how to do is create an environment. I come from a family of artists, and the space we surrounded ourselves with was always very important, so I knew I could create an environment here that would welcome people.”

To that end, she looked to the many relationships she’d struck up in India over the years, thanks to the family



import business. As a result, connections to India are everywhere at Khana, from those aforementioned doodads to the imported mango wood and rosewood tables that fill the modern and minimalist dining area to the powder-white metal lanterns that hang like giant cocoons from the exposed ceiling. There's even a *gen-u-ine* rickshaw parked out front.

"I have lots of clues throughout that if you're Indian, you'll recognize," Lisa says. "You might not know exactly what it is, but you'll recognize it, like see those patterns etched onto the lanterns and windows—they're from a vintage Indian textile print."

"What is it about Indian culture that elicits this level of reverence from a child of Texas?" I wonder aloud.

"There's so much to love about India," Lisa muses, pausing for a moment to

I NOTICE THAT THE DINING ROOM, WHICH I'D ONLY EVER SEEN DURING THE DAYLIGHT HOURS, HAS BECOME A KALEIDOSCOPE OF COLOR WITH THE DARKENED WINDOWS REFLECTING THE PINK, YELLOW AND VIOLET-BLUE GLOW OF THE HANGING METAL LANTERNS.

chew on my question. "But I especially love the culture of hospitality, not to mention that I've always been interested in the intersection of cultures. My dad was born on a Choctaw reservation in Southeast Oklahoma; so ironically, I'm a card-carrying member of the Choctaw tribe. Not that I look like anyone's idea of a Native American."

The fact that the space she's created has actually become its own intersection of cultures delights Lisa to no end. "We're extremely popular with other ethnicities—Iranians, Palestinians, Pakistanis, Saudis," she says. "After opening Khana, we were introduced to this whole cross section of diversity coming through our doors that we didn't even know existed here!"

No doubt, these folks are drawn in part to Lisa's hospitality. Even before you enter the restaurant, you're faced with an

"All are welcome" sign scrawled on the door in big bold letters in both English and Hindi. But, I suspect this isn't the only draw.

Lisa agrees. "I think they're also looking for flavors they're familiar with—spicier flavors, bolder flavors," she says. "I was confident that I could create an environment here that would welcome people, but that's only one part of it," she adds. "The other part of it is you have to have good food."

IT'S FRIDAY NIGHT, and I've wisely chosen Khana as our date-night destination. After our dinner is set down before us—each dish arranged artfully on sturdy compostable plates—I waste no time diving into the *papdi chaat* we've ordered, or as my husband christens the dish, the "Indian nachos." It's a whimsical plate of thin wafers of fried dough topped with potato, chickpeas, cucumber, radish, green chilies and mint yogurt. Cups of tamarind and cilantro chutneys are included for dipping. The cucumber and mint are the perfect foil for the dish's heat, while the crunchy chickpeas are ... well, they're just fun.

I take a giant gulp of my Bollywood Bride (vodka, orange juice and passion fruit) in an effort to put out the fire that's erupted in my mouth after a particularly greedy bite of the *papdi chaat*. I'm forced to take a break from the dish for a moment while a mouthful of ice breaks the heat wave. It's then that I notice that the dining room, which I'd only ever seen during the daylight hours, has become a kaleidoscope of color with the darkened windows reflecting the pink, yellow and violet-blue glow of the hanging metal lanterns. On the other side of the restaurant, a woman with a hijab sits at a four-top with her husband and two toddlers, one of whom she's pulling by the foot as he tries to make his way across the table to his sister. At the table next to ours, two young women in barely there sundresses and a bearded man in his 20s, his head covered with a red bandana, laugh as they polish off their dinner. At another table close by, a middle-aged hippie couple and their hipster offspring sit blankly staring at one another

as they wait for their order to arrive. Ambient music serenades us.

If the seemingly eclectic crowd is any indication, there seems little doubting that Lisa and Abhijeet were successful in what they set out to achieve: a menu that is as straightforward and accessible as possible, while at the same time offering what they consider to be the greatest hits of Indian cuisine.

What they've come up with is a menu that offers a couple of *chaats* (snacks), a selection of *khati* rolls (flatbread wrapped around a variety of fillings), and a selection of four different curries served with basmati and naan. Most recently, they've added a small handful of "combination" plates to the menu, each of which comes with naan and

a sizable samosa (a fried turnover filled with spiced potato and peas). The beverage menu, which was created with just as much care as the food menu, offers a handful of Indian-inspired cocktails, like the Monsoon (gin, mint, lime) and the Fireball Chai (Fireball whiskey with masala chai), as well as a variety of frozen, cold and hot nonalcoholic drinks.

After we've put away the plate of "nachos," I dig into my combination platter. For the two curries that come with the dish, I've chosen the paneer tikka and turmeric potato. As I knew they would, the curries bring the heat. The basmati rice is fragrant and toothsome, while the naan feels like an indulgence, thanks to a lathering of butter and a sprinkling of fresh garlic. I sneak a taste of my husband's chicken tikka masala. The creamy tomato-based sauce is rich and velvety, layered with the flavors of ginger, cumin, turmeric and coriander.

Full to capacity after finishing the curries, I pull my tiffin from my purse. When I'd met up with Lisa earlier in the week, she'd insisted that I take one home. I'd happily obliged and had taken to toting it around with me, not sure if it would come in handy or not. Tonight, I pick up my untouched samosa and tuck it securely into my shiny, new tiffin, tripping happily out of the cool restaurant and into the heat of the night. **AL**

