



Written by
Nick Lander
5 Jul 2018

The City gets a posh Indian



Perhaps the biggest difference in the two aspects of my career – writing this column and acting as hospitality consultant in a resurgent London, most notably at the Southbank Centre, St Pancras International, King's Cross and at the Bloomberg Arcade – has been that my role in the latter has introduced me to the pleasure of being part of a team. And to being able to give credit where credit is due.

So in the case of what has become Brigadiers restaurant in Units 1-5 of the Bloomberg Arcade in London's financial district, it is only right for me to credit my counterpart Richard Vines of Bloomberg for initiating what was to prove an ultimately successful conversation with JKS restaurants. (I should point out that my work on the Bloomberg Arcade ceased last September.)

I remember the communal enthusiasm at our first meeting. While the landlords were excited by the possibility of bringing the culinary range of this company to the City, a range that

incorporates Indian food at Trishna and Gymkhana, Sri Lankan food at Hoppers and the Asian food of Bao and Xu, the JKS team was equally excited by the space and the prospect of a favourable lease in the increasingly vibrant food scene in London's financial district.

But which options would most appeal remained of primary concern. A combination of a Hoppers and a Bao seemed, at least at the outset, the most attractive option. But this was put to one side for one very good reason – that while each had an enormous following, neither was considered strong enough to be of interest when the City is at its quietest, at the weekends.

It was then that Karim Sethi, the oldest of the three Indian siblings who have given their initials to the company, remembered the attraction that their current Indian restaurants in the West End have for many customers who spend their working day in the City. Why not, he thought, bring Indian food to them but wrapped up in a more striking interior than normal in this part of town?

Once this decision had been taken, everything else began to fall into place. The name of this restaurant came easily – it is named after the three siblings' grandfather, who was a Brigadier in the Indian Army and whose cold-eyed portrait looks down on anyone having a good time in the Dining Room.

The food, less spicy than that of Gymkhana, took on a barbecue theme, which means that it is predominantly meat, with quite a lot of vegetarian options but relatively little fish or seafood. Having said that, their dish of crab seekh kebab (under the sizzler heading) was an excellent rendition of this ingredient with the long, thin tubes of shellfish proving sweet and succulent on my first dinner here.

Brigadiers is a particularly confident move to give those who work in the City, and those who its owners believe will be drawn to it, precisely what they are looking for. These desires are summed up by a line at the bottom of the bill that reads, 'Indian Barbecue – Beer – Whisky – Live Sport'.

The menu, which comes on a large, plastic-coated sheet of white paper, is broken down into seven main sections: snacks; chhota chatpata (fiery small snacks); rolls and bun kebabs; sizzlers, plates of steaming hot food that have been known to set off the fire alarm; steaks and chops; rotisserie; and biryani, the Muslim rice dish from southern India.

Lunch in the outside seating area of goat tiki bun kebabs (£10) and smoked aubergine rotis (£6, pictured above right), washed down with ample water, provided me with an appreciation of the spice level on offer, which is on the high side but eminently bearable.

A return trip for dinner in what is called the Dining Room (as opposed to Blighters, the lighter, rather quieter and brighter room) allowed us to enjoy the restaurant as its owners would wish.

We began with a glass of Eva Fricke's 2016 Riesling and a glass of their hand-pulled Old Fashioned cocktail together with a particularly satisfying version of that curry house favourite, cheese and onion bhajias. These ones had obviously come right out of the fryer.

Subsequent drinks were 125-cl glasses of a Chianti Classico 2013 (£11) and a 2015 Pinot Noir from Cave de St-Verny (£6) from an unusually well chosen list (JKS are more interested in wine than most Asian restaurateurs) as well as a half pint of a lager infused with alphonso mango brewed in Cornwall that was too sweet for me.

The food was notably robust. Lobster rolls, chicken chops (thick pieces of meat, well spiced), and a wood-roasted half of an aubergine topped with channa dal, a deliciously textured accompaniment made from split brown chickpeas, together with a basket of improvable breads, brought me a bill of £124.31 for two.

The live sport is delivered via a selection of television screens, with the volume turned off, and a room in between the two dining rooms comes complete with a pool table. Quite how accurate this latest manifestation of what those who work in the City are looking for was apparently proved by the fact that on its second day, 120 people on the Brigadiers terrace drank all the lager that the restaurant had on tap in its basement store.

This apart, Brigadiers has got off to a fine start. It's competent. It's noisy. It's very male. It's probably just what the locals are looking for.