

EAT SHILPA

No place like home

REVIEW

Shilpa, 206 King Street
Hammersmith
020 8741 3127

JAY NAMBIAR was so determined to find the right chef for his Indian restaurant specialising in dishes from Kerala he went over there to conduct the search.

So where did he find his perfect choice?

Back in London!

"When I first bought this place, I went to Cochin in Kerala to look for someone who knew Kerala food, but I also wanted someone who knew the taste of English people," says Jay.

"I interviewed so many people but did not find the right one."

Instead, Jay ended up finding his perfect chef, Sunny Kuppen, back in England. Through friends he heard of a chef in south London who had a prize for Kerala cooking and might be willing to move to another part of town.

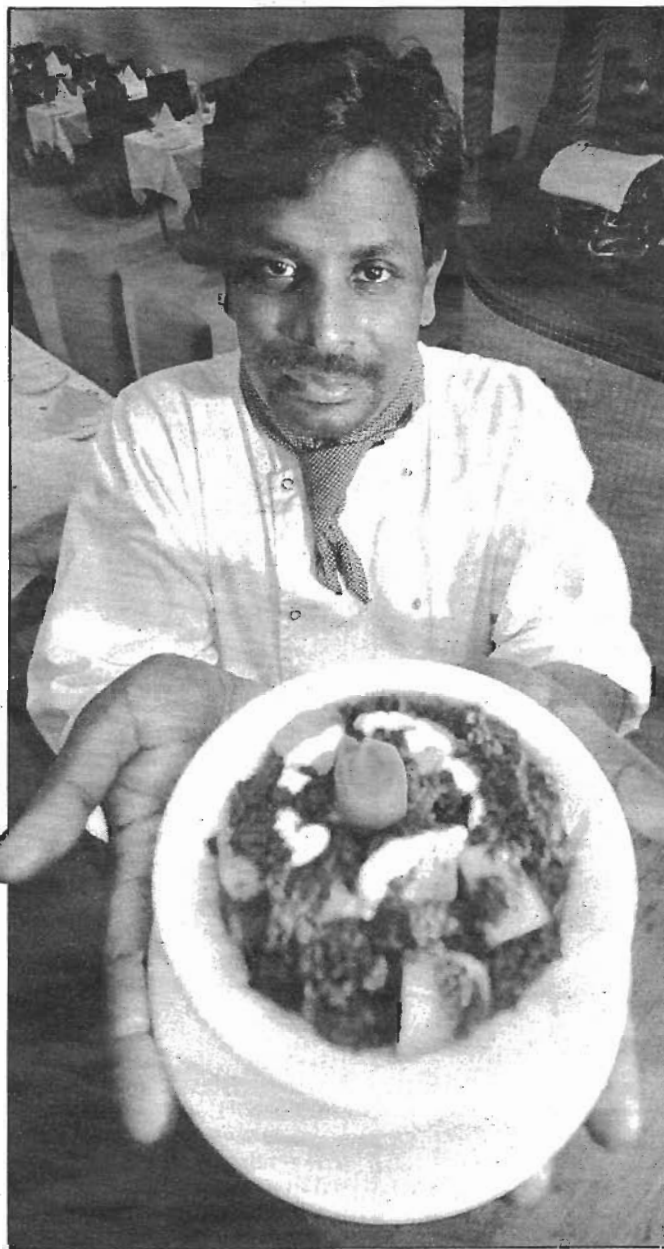
"Sunny had been cooking in England for one and a half years and he knew the taste of the English, so I knew he was the right person and convinced him to come with me," Jay says with a smile.

Shilpa now delivers the unique taste of spices and seafood from the area in the south west of India.

"Kerala food is the best of Indian food and we are the only one in Hammersmith specialising in it," says Jay.

Jay and Shilpa created a whole menu of Kerala specialities and things have been going pretty well for them, and fellow chef Biju Monbillai.

The first dish shows why. The seafood soup provides a good example of the excellent seafood cuisine that the Kerala area along the coastline has



DISH: Sunny Kuppen, one of the Shilpa chefs

PICTURE BY DAVID TETT

developed through many years. With its spicy taste of ginger, garlic and saffron the steaming soup is a must.

While Jay now just keeps an eye on things – chatting with the customers and staff – his

first job in England was as a waiter and he has many years of experience.

But that was not what made him open his own restaurant.

"A long time ago in India my father used to have his

own restaurant and I remember watching him and trying to learn from him. That is the memory that made me open Shilpa," he says.

The cooking Jay now leaves completely to Sunny, who for the main course presents another speciality, Kerala fish curry.

With its powerful explosion of spices this illustrates one of the most important Kerala traditions.

The food should always, Jay explains, contain six basic tastes and four different consistencies. It should entertain all the taste buds, and this curry with coconut and Kerala cocum (a fish tamarind) really does.

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Kerala food is the best of Indian food

All the dishes are served with a wide variety of rice and other equally tempting side dishes. Jay recommends us two – the Kerala Paratha bread and the Appam pancake.

Both are delicious but especially the special Appam pancake which, with its slightly sweet coconut crispness, accompanies the spicy curry well.

But Jay is reluctant to recommend anything in particular because as he says: "Everybody has different tastes and the Kerala tradition has equally many taste experiences."

Signe Hansen

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CHEERS:

Nick Kiley (left) and Rob Grimes, landlords