

Bill Buckley Is In The Restaurant – Mango Lounge Reviewed

by BILL BUCKLEY



Rating: 16/20

When I lived in London, one of my favourite restaurants was Nancy Lam's *Enak Enak* in Lavender Hill, Battersea.

You might recall Ms Lam from her brief burst of telly fame; she was one of Channel 5's launch acts in 1997. As it happens, I was one of the channel's announcers, and introduced every one of her cookery shows.

She is tiny, loud and opinionated. And eccentric, to say the least. The yang to her yin is her smiling, serene, Ghanaian husband, Ben. Their two unfeasibly beautiful daughters efficiently run front-of-house.

Nancy's Indonesian-inspired home cooking is delicious but what keeps the punters coming back for seconds is the atmosphere she creates. She cackles her way from table to table, teasing customers mercilessly in extremely colourful language. On your second visit, you will be greeted like a long lost friend and will probably enjoy a complimentary digestive in the presence of the diva.

But get there on time! When a member of a neighbouring table-of-four showed up substantially late, I saw him face the full force of her five-foot-nothing fury. "You ruin the night for them [his fellow diners], you ruin the night for me! Next time, DON'T BOTHER!!"

A few weeks later, a friend and I were on our way to Enak Enak when we realised we had got the time mixed up and were going to be horribly late. We were terrified! We ran in, 40 minutes adrift, puce of face and gasping for breath. "Don't worry," smiled one of the unfeasibly beautiful daughters who had clearly seen it all before, "she's off tonight."



No such terrors or tantrums at Windsor's Mango Lounge, I'm pleased to report, when I showed up at 8.35 for a 7.30 booking. What's more, my fiancé – who had arrived a quarter of an hour *early* and had therefore endured a very long wait indeed – had been mollified with wine, nibbles and smiles, so he didn't give me earache, either.

(Clarissa Dickson Wright was to blame. I was reading her autobiography on the train from Reading to Slough, where I was to change for Windsor. So engrossed was I in the Two Fat Ladies star's epic battle with the bottle and the amazing feasts she managed to turn out even when drunk as a whole *House of Lords*, I didn't look up until we were pulling into Paddington. Oh dear...)

The poppadoms – £1.50 a head, some plain, some spicy, impeccably crisp, grease-free, piping hot – would have been delicious even if I hadn't been hungry enough to chew my own arm. The chutneys were good too and included, unusually, grape.



The uber-punctual fiancé and I started with a shared platter of king prawns, chicken tikka, lamb chops and seekh kebabs (£16.95). All the meats were tender and juicy with distinct flavours but the prawns were the stars in their crunchy, subtly-spiced coat of crunchy rice flakes.

In addition to the hefty a la carte, Mango Lounge has introduced a quarterly-changing seasonal menu. Some of its dishes don't sound Indian at all, like rib eye steak with crushed potatoes, mushrooms, onions and red wine or summer pudding with clotted

cream but I gather their spicing anchors them to the sub-continent. From this list, pan-seared sea bass (£17.50) wasn't bad. The three little fillets were nicely cooked. The accompanying crab risotto had good crabby flavour. Its rice was more kedgeree-ish than risotto-esque which seems appropriate.

It was pretty and it was light. I'd call it a woman's dish if I had the courage.



Back on the main menu, fish curry (£10.75) featured flavoursome chunks of flesh and a fearlessly spicy mushroom, yoghurt and tomato sauce. Vegetable jhalfrazi (£8.50) can often seem like the last portion of a bag of mixed veg, long forgotten at the back of the freezer, chucked into a sauce. The Mango Lounge's version featured fresh-tasting, al dente vegetables, chunks of charred sweet pepper performing particularly well. The sauce was sweet, rounded and, again, boldly hot.

Warm dark chocolate mousse (£5.50) turned out to be chocolate fondant in a cup, and who doesn't like that? Passion fruit ice cream balanced it well and had the agreeable fudginess of kulfi.

Talking of which, a rose-flavoured kulfi (£4.50) made a welcome change from the usual pistachio or mango. The perfumed flavour was oddly delightful, the texture perfect, and a sprinkling of finely crushed nuts provided textural contrast.



Indian restaurants often fall down on their wines but here, the house white (Trebiano d'Abruzzo, Caldora 2006) is positively ambrosial (or so it seems when you arrive breathless after an accidental return train trip to London) and an absolute steal at 15 quid. The house red – Sangiovese/merlot, Ortonese 2006, same price – isn't far behind and – joy of joys! – comes in a proper red wine glass with space to swirl, a detail Indian establishments so often get wrong. Even the coffee, that other sub-continental Achilles' heel, was fine.

The modern room is cream and deep red with a shiny tiled floor and views of the Castle if you bag a window table. Service, as you've already gathered, is smilingly kind but also efficient and well-paced. Your fellow diners are mature and civilised.

Three courses plus half a bottle of fairly modest wine will set you back £40 to £50 which is no steal but perfectly fair for food and ambience of this quality.

**Even the volatile Ms Lam would purr contentedly after a meal here.
Whether she would turn a blind eye to latecomers, I couldn't say.**

End -



Bill Buckley has been a broadcaster since 1982, he is well known for presenting *That's Life!* on BBC1 with Esther Rantzen. Before that, he was a print journalist in the West Midlands and has done a dazelling array of things since: from writing witty, three-minute songs overnight to sing to a sleepy nation at 6.45 and 8.45am on BBC Breakfast Time to writing a hit song, *Starting Together*, which went to number two in the charts sung by Hi-de-Hi star, Su Pollard.

He has travelled the world on The Holiday Programme, presented on all kinds of subjects, sung David Essex's hit, *A Winter's Tale*, on Songs of Praise, and been a mould breaking continuity announcer for Channel 5 Television.

In Spring of 2005, he won the London week of C4's cookery and party-giving competition, Come Dine With Me, and writes regularly about food for several journals, including [View London](#). He also covered New York's fine dining scene in Yes, Chef! magazine.

His true vocation is radio presenting, which he is currently doing for [BBC Radio Berkshire](#)

Find [more about Bill Buckley](#) here



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