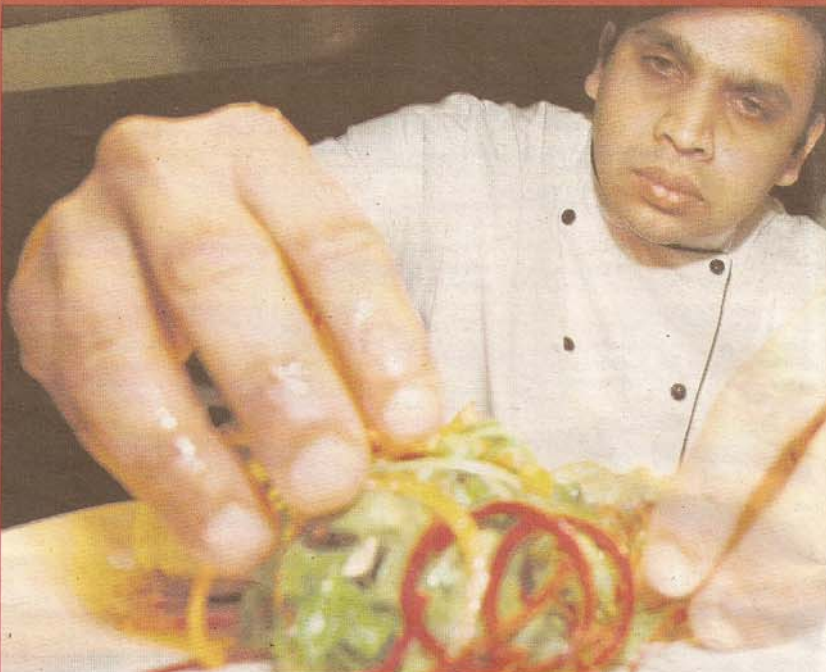


# mustard is cut



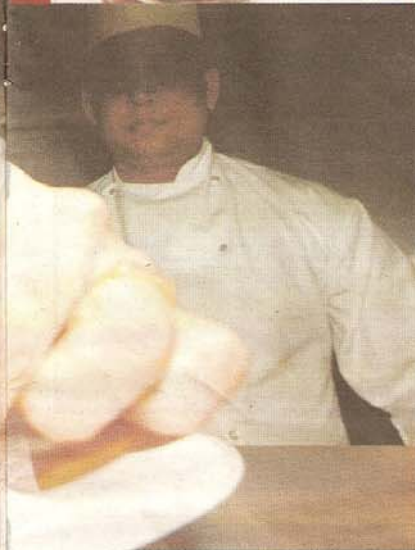
**W**HEN a six-month-old restaurant is full of bursting on a rainy Wednesday evening, you know you're on to a good thing, writes Lydia Whitfield. And the few people I know who have already dined at Mint and Mustard haven't fully co-operated with me in trying to write this review. You see, they're reluctant to go into detail about their delicious dinners, for fear of never being able to book a table there again.

When we arrived, rain-battered by one of the many May storms, the windows at Mint and Mustard were already steamy with condensation and the hustle and bustle of people who have hit on a great find.

Pale green decor and paintings of rural India

provide a pleasant, relaxing environment. We could tell as soon as we read through the menu that we might be a while trying to sample as much as manageable from the menu, so ordered large, 660ml bottles of icy Cobra beer each. Pickles and a basket of mini poppadums were served promptly and the pickles included a delicious lemon-curd type sauce with fresh lemon slices, as well as the usual yoghurt and mint variety.

At £3, you don't expect the vegetarian starters to be particularly generous, and assume they will tide you over until the mains arrive, but I ploughed through a portion of five Bombay Chaat, which were a revelation. Like pretty little currant buns topped with a pomegranate pip in



place of a glace cherry, and a crispy paper-thin pastry shell instead of a bread base, these little balls are served drizzled with a carrot orange and green puree and balsamic syrup. Cool yoghurt and spicy vegetables were intriguing on the menu and in the Bombay Chaat were a delight in the mouth, the sourness of the yoghurt cutting through the delicate, tasty vegetables. The three chicken samosas with sweetcorn were also almost too pretty to eat, the Masala Uthappam was a deliciously fluffy rice and lentil pancake, served pizza-style with chilli and tomatoes. And the Pearl starter – a medley of five different street snacks – is a great way to sample different dishes and spices and decide which one you prefer to focus on as a starter next time you visit – because, guaranteed, you will be back. The Bombay Chaat was also included in the Pearl as well as meaty snacks like the lamb pattice.

The nadan kozhi curry was creamy with coconut milk, but wasn't too sweet, and had plenty of tender strips of chicken. I had it with a masala dosa instead of rice, which took over-ordering to a new level. The dosas are huge – crispy rice and lentil pancakes, which have that wonderful thin crepe texture. Even though they're served rolled, dosas at Mint and Mustard are bigger in length than the dinner plate and stuffed with spiced potato and served with coconut chutney and sambhar – a dish of sweet and sour lentils, which complement the fluffy potato well. Though I surrendered, I came very close to finishing the whole thing.

The beef coconut fry was a firm favourite. To look at, it doesn't come in sauce, so might have been dry, but the beef was tender, flaky and delicious and had been braised with coconut chips, shallots and curry leaves.

The chicken chettinad was marinated with

## LASTING IMPRESSIONS

**CUISINE** A wide range of impressive and original dishes from Kerala in southern India fused with Moghul tikkas, grills and Kadai food of the north

**DRINKS** A good choice of wines, beers and soft drinks

**SERVICE** Excellent. Attentive staff tell you exactly what's what on your plate, which is particularly useful with the combination starters

**TASTE** Absolutely delicious. Unusual and innovative, but every combination works brilliantly

**VALUE** This isn't a cheap night out but deserves to be savoured anyhow, rather than treated as a cheap and cheerful stop-off curry house at the end of a big night out. We paid £100 for four, including eight large Cobra beers

**PARKING** Some on Whitchurch Road and the nearby side streets, although a lot is resident-only and it can get rather busy

**OPENING TIMES** 12 to 2.30pm all week, apart from Mondays and Saturdays. Open for dinner from 6pm to 11pm on Tuesday and Wednesday and until 11.30pm on Thursday to Saturday and until 10.30pm on Sundays. Closed on Mondays

**TO BOOK** Call 029 2062 0333

**WHERE** 134, Whitchurch Road, Cardiff, CF14 3LZ

**MARKS OUT OF 10** 9/10

roasted coconut, but the most detectable flavours were the kalpasi and marathomooku spices, which, apparently are unique to the restaurant, which specialises in dishes from Kerala in south India.

There are some lovely choices for vegetarians too, with a really imaginative selection including snow peas and water chestnut masala or paneer cheese stuffed with mint and mango. We split a chocomosa – a chocolate-filled samosa, which really isn't at all as grim as it sounds. Crispy pastry, again grease-free, cocooned a gorgeous chocolate fondant and was served with beautiful pistachio ice cream, banana and caramel. While settling the bill, spoonfuls of sugar-coated cumin and mixed spice from a communal dish made for delicious Liquorice Comfit-type breath fresheners and only served to confirm Mint and Mustard as somewhere really rather special.

