



## 21st Century Indian Cuisine at its Finest in the 34112

[21 Spices](#) (21) is a restaurant that features



*Exterior*

contemporary Indian cuisine. Contemporary Indian cuisine is in part due to chefs from India incorporating culinary training in Europe or other geographical areas into their food repertoire.

This may include Indian/French culinary hybrids that use French-style mother sauces in their preparation or Indian/Spanish type dishes that produce more tapas-like presentations of Indian fare. Contemporary Indian cuisine is also usually served in a more refined setting than traditional Indian cuisine more akin to fine dining.

The owner/Executive Chef of 21 is Asif Syed. Chef Asif has been in Southwest Florida for many years, opening up 21 in the winter of 2016. He has appeared nationally on Food Network shows with Guy Fieri and Bobby Flay. Recently, he has been invited to showcase his talents at The James Beard House in New York City for a special dinner featuring a multi-course meal as a visiting chef.

Having never dined at 21, My dining companion and I were anxious to try some of the offerings here. The

restaurant has a rather interesting Dinner Menu. They are not open for lunch but do offer a Happy Hour Menu featuring tapas-style items and drink specials in their bar area from 4-6 PM.



*Papadum with sauces*

An amuse-bouche was brought before our order. This was a very generous serving of papadum, those sort of “Indian potato chips” made from fried mung bean flour. The papadum was served with a variety of toppings. These were (counterclockwise) mint/yogurt, pineapple/mango and tamarind/date sauces. They certainly got our taste buds in the mood for more 21 fare.

The first item ordered was soup, the tomato dhania bisque. This was very good and a traditional Indian soup with a twist. Dhania is another word for cilantro; the soup being redolent with its flavor. Following contemporary Indian cuisine, the soup was a bisque, melding a traditional French preparation with those of India. It was very good and very hearty.



*Palakwala Chaat.*

We also ordered the palakwala chaat. Traditionally, chaat is based on fried dough with other ingredients. Loosely translated, the dish means the one (chaat) with spinach. The dish here is flash-fried spinach coated in chickpea/lentil dough and topped with yogurt, tamarind and dates. The chickpea/lentil dough pays homage to a traditional Indian chaat. This was a very unusual and very good starter.



*Progressive chicken 65*

We ended our sample of starters with a progressive chicken 65. Chicken 65 has much speculation as to what it really is. Some say it is from a 65-day old chicken (peak flavor), others 65 chilies in the dish while an alternate take is it takes 65 days to prepare the marinade. Whatever the true origin the important thing is the end product.

Typically, boneless chicken thighs are marinated in ginger/garlic paste with lemon juice and yogurt. The chicken is fried and can be spiced before with turmeric, cumin, fennel and cinnamon. At 21, they are also spiced with curry leaves, ginger and chili/garlic sauce. This was again, an excellent starter.

As an aside, curry leaves are interesting. They have nothing to do with curry powder or curries, though taste like it. They are the leaves of a sub-tropical tree used as a spice in South and Southeast Asia.

From the poultry entrees, we ordered the chicken tikka masala. This was very good. Traditionally chicken tikka is chicken marinated in yogurt and spice and is cooked in a tandoori (clay) oven at high temperature. Masala is just a mixture of spices. The sauce is pureed tomatoes, cream, coconut cream and at 21, perhaps Chef Asif’s famed 21 spice mixture. Highly recommended.



### *Dum pukht goat biryani*

We finished with one of the Hyderabadi biryanis, the Dum pukht goat biryani. Biryanis are rice dishes. In Hyderabad, a Southern Indian region, instead of cooking everything separately and putting it together, the meat and other ingredients are cooked in with the rice. Dum pukht is a Northern Indian cooking technique of cooking ingredients in a (preferably) clay pot and sealing it with a layer of dough. This helps preserve the nascent flavors of the dish.

At 21, the cooking pot is sealed with naan dough. This adds another level of flavor and texture to the dish. This is another example of contemporary Indian cuisine fusing differing cooking techniques from different Indian geographical regions. The biryani was served with a cucumber/coriander/tomato dressing and a saffron coconut curry sauce in addition to chopped peppers per your taste of condiments.

Again, another excellent and highly recommended dish.

Our dinner at 21 was very good. The interior of the restaurant is beautiful, the service great and the food intriguing and full of flavor. Although it has been open for almost three years, if you haven't been, go!

21 is a very welcome addition to the Naples culinary scene and I cannot wait to try more of their menu items.

It's a wrap for another post on Forks.

21 Spices

4270 Tamiami Tr. E.

Naples, FL 34112

21 Spices Facebook Page

Open Monday-Saturday, 4-9PM, Sunday, 5-9PM; Happy hour Monday-Friday, 4-6PM; All major credit cards accepted

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**Peter Horan, [Southwest Florida Forks](#), posted on [SouthFloridaReporter.com](#), Oct. 9, 2019**

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