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Appams and Ishtews at Indique; [FINAL Edition]

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Abstract (Summary)

Vinod, who also owns Bombay Bistros in Fairfax and Rockville, comes from Kerala and has a fondness for the crispy-on-the-edges, soft-centered rice flour pancakes known as appam. He also likes the Kerala flavor combinations (coconut, ginger, garlic, shallots, curry leaves, chilies and mustard seeds) that go into ishtew, a mixed vegetable and potato stew. Indique has two versions (one vegetarian, one with chicken).

Full Text (314 words)

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If you like Indian food, you probably know your way around pilafs and parathas and tandoori and the rich meaty curries of North India. But what about appams and ishtews? These typical dishes from Kerala, on India's southwest coast, are much harder to find.

By giving appams and ishtews a section of their own on his new menu at Indique on Connecticut Avenue NW, chef and co-owner K.N. Vinod aims to change that.

Vinod, who also owns Bombay Bistros in Fairfax and Rockville, comes from Kerala and has a fondness for the crispy-on-the-edges, soft-centered rice flour pancakes known as appam. He also likes the Kerala flavor combinations (coconut, ginger, garlic, shallots, curry leaves, chilies and mustard seeds) that go into ishtew, a mixed vegetable and potato stew. Indique has two versions (one vegetarian, one with chicken).

Appams and ishtews are traditionally served together. But appams are also popular for breakfast in Kerala as well as in Sri Lanka, the nearby island country in the Indian Ocean.

"You put a little fresh coconut milk and sugar on top of them," says Vinod. "My mom lives with me here. She makes them, and I have them for breakfast."

A coastal state, Kerala has easy access to seafood. Vinod pays tribute to that in his approach to calamari and fresh fish. He cooks them the way they would be made back home, where many popular ingredients, such as coconut, bananas, mangos, curry leaves and tamarind can be plucked from trees in family back yards. "Even small huts have a little bit of ground in Kerala," says Vinod. "Every household has coconut trees."

He can find most of those ingredients around here without too much difficulty, except for curry leaves, which are particularly flavorful with coconut milk. "They're very important," says Vinod. "Here we get them from Florida."

-- Judith Weinraub

Indique, 3512-14 Connecticut Ave. NW;. call 202-244-6600.

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