

INDIAN RESTAURANT SPICES UP DOWNTOWN

By Valentina Zic / Staff Writer
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MASALA ART (FINALLY) OPENS ITS DOORS

Vinod and Shikha Kapoor have brought a little bit of spice to Needham Center.

After months of unanticipated delays, the couple finally opened the doors this week to Masala Art, their new restaurant at 990 Great Plain Ave., the location of the former Hit or Miss.

Sunday evening, the Kapoors held a festive grand-opening party, complete with hors d'oeuvres and an open bar, for staff, neighbors and many prospective customers who had come knocking on their door in the past few days, wondering when they would open. They hired temporary wait staff for the evening and let their newly hired staff just enjoy the party.

"We didn't let them work, but invited them as guests," Vinod Kapoor said.

Monday was the first official day for the restaurant, the fifth that the Kapoors, who also own restaurants in Rhode Island, have opened in the Boston area. The first was Kebab-N-Kurry in Boston's Back Bay. The best known is The Bombay Club in Harvard Square, which opened in 1991.

"I feel very excited," said Kapoor Monday.

The restaurant was originally slated to open in early March, but, like many business owners in Needham, the Kapoors found the permitting process slower than they anticipated and postponed their opening to April

and then to August. The last bit of work that held up opening day was bringing the building up to current fire codes. While the Fire Department was very helpful, Kapoor said, the upgrades cost the owners approximately \$150,000.

But, he said, "I'm so happy that I did it, because the building is so much safer now."

Masala Art serves many traditional Indian dishes, but it's also different from other Indian restaurants. The idea behind it is "the art of blending spices," and it features a small, nine-seat bar, where customers who have made special advance reservations will be able to watch a chef prepare spices from scratch and use them to create a pre-set menu.

The chef will roast the spices and grind them and explain their health and nutritional benefits. Customers will learn about turmeric, which improves blood circulation, and fenugreek, which is good for the heart, along with myriad other spices.

A vegetarian menu at the Masala bar costs \$30, a meat menu featuring chicken and lamb runs \$35 and a seafood menu costs \$40, but the prices on the rest of the menu are much lower.

"We kept it very reasonable," Kapoor said.

Masala Art is also different from some of the family's other restaurants in its decor. Kapoor called it much "classier" than The Bombay

Club, for example, whose audience is mostly students. The Kapoors, however, expect Masala Art to draw a different population, mostly from Needham and the surrounding suburbs of Newton, Wellesley, Dover and others.

The entryway of Masala Art has a small bench lined with bright, colorful cushions, in red, fuschia, green and yellow. Artist Julia Purinton of Medusa Studios in Ipswich painted designs on some of the walls, and their deep peach color contrasts with the green of the chairs around the tables.

The entire place seems to glow with colorful light. Blue lights add atmosphere to the bar area above, which are sculptures of the Indian god Ganesh, sculpted by Medford artist Larry Sampson.

"When we start anything from the beginning, we start from Ganesh," Kapoor said, explaining the significance of the sculptures.

The Kapoors, along with their son, Sorabh, who will play a key role in managing the restaurant, started off Monday with approximately 40 customers at lunchtime and had many more lined up for dinner time, Vinod Kapoor said.

He said he and Shikha haven't done much advertising but were confident things would take off on their own.

"We just wanted to go by word of mouth ... to settle in," he said.