

1. Chakra

The restaurant Chakra takes its name from the word "*chakra*," used in India to describe the human body's spinning vortices of energy that link the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual selves into one indivisible whole.

Can you put all that on a dinner plate? Actually, you can, as demonstrated so aptly at this exotic and intriguing restaurant located on busy Route 17 in Paramus. Step through the doors of an unremarkable building into a vibrant and seductive world of discovery and escape.

The cavernous single dining room is reminiscent of an ancient temple complete with Hindu bas-relief sculptures along the walls. Softly lit with hundreds of candles and a water wall of constantly changing colors, Chakra weaves a magical spell. Trees and ferns, velvet pillow-backed banquettes, Asian throw rugs and silk-tented bungalows immerse the diner in an extraordinary environment.

With such a theatrical approach to decorating, one might worry that the food is a mere afterthought, but one would be wrong. In the hands of chef Edward Lake, formerly executive chef in the delegates' dining room at the United Nations, the cuisine is resolutely focused on seasonal ingredients assembled in creative ways and plated to look wondrous under the restaurant's dramatic lighting. The dishes are designed for American sensibilities, but with enhanced international touches, ingredients and style.

Chopsticks may be found next to the knives, forks and spoons. The composed Chakra salad features crisply fried shallots, pear tomatoes and a dressing of miso white soy. Sashimi is a permanent menu category with the chef selecting the specific seafood on a daily basis.

Among the pasta selections are hand-made and especially luscious pappardelle, the long, ribbon-like strips of pasta, served with an ever-changing array of sauces and accompaniments made from seasonal ingredients. Several dishes like the pappardelle and the sashimi selections are menu mainstays, but offered in endless and various ways. Foie gras is another one, prepared this spring with a pleasantly tart gooseberry sauce, with intensely flavored dried gooseberries



Chakra in Paramus

on the side — a mélange that proved a perfect complement to the unctuous and velvety liver.

Although the kitchen does a fine job with red meats — the short ribs were especially good, arriving at table properly meaty and fatty — it excels with seafood.

Prince Edward Island Mussels napped in a delicate and well-balanced white wine sauce arrived with a nice counterintuitive touch: preserved Meyer lemon rind that made a cooling, tangy contrast to the creamy tan mollusks. Next to that dish, pan-seared diver scallops served atop a "fettuccine" of carrots and leeks, set upon a creamy risotto, was light and elegant.

Desserts do not disappoint. An apple tart, elegant and delicate, was made to elicit sighs — mine to be specific. But for those who prefer a lighter touch, there were sorbets and gelatos, filled with character and satisfying taste.

— by Patricia Mack

Chakra
144 Route 4 East, Paramus
(201) 556-1530
www.chakrarestaurant.com
Lunch: Monday to Friday, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Dinner: Monday to Wednesday, 5 to 10 p.m.; Thursday to Saturday, 5 to 11 p.m.
Brunch: Sunday, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Credit cards: American Express, Discover, MasterCard and Visa

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