

# TOM PARKER BOWLES & CHARLOTTE KRISTENSEN



YOU MAGAZINE'S BRILLIANT RESTAURANT CRITIC AND WINE EXPERT

## EATING OUT

Authentic South Indian specialities in Oxford have Tom in a transport of delight

It's not so much love at first sight as lust at first sip, a mouthful of lentil soup that teeters between elegant and robust. Delicate yet substantial, the earthiness of the legume is tempered by a soft nudge of garlic. But it's not all mellow fruitfulness, thanks to a judicious whack of lemon, a joyous honk of black pepper and a gentle, dried chilli heat that slowly builds to a quiet crescendo. Throw in a few verdant flecks of shredded curry leaf and you have not so much mere soup as mighty Keralan symphony, Ayurveda in action, medicinal in the best possible way.

Because here at Bhoomi Kitchen, in Headington, East Oxford, you'll find some very serious South Indian cooking; bold, confident but unshowy, the kitchen possessing an absolute mastery of both ingredient and technique. Like the uttapam, a ground rice and lentil pancake, which is blessedly light and spongy, shot

through with fresh green chillies, onion and peppers. A blob of bright, bracingly sharp coconut chutney is splodged on top.

Dosas (thin, fermented rice pancakes) are an artform here: two foot long, rolled and golden, where the exterior is crisp and burnished but the inside still soft

**No one flavour dominates. The balance is sublime**

and chewy. Each comes with a sambar (vegetable stew), sharp with tamarind, and another variation of coconut chutney, cool and clean. A feast in its own right, but even better when dunked into the beef curry, a Bhoomi Kitchen special, 'made in the same way we do at home in one pot, so once it's gone, it's gone for the day.'

There's no question of this one



'Dosas are an artform here, rolled and golden. Each comes with a sambar, sharp with tamarind, and a coconut chutney'

hanging about. The beef (proof of the dish's Catholic rather than Hindu roots) is tender, but still has a satisfying chew, bathed in a gravy of such rich complexity that each mouthful brings more nuance, more expertly spiced delight. First, the sharpness of tomatoes, then the idiosyncratic, mildly pungent allure of the ubiquitous frazzled curry leaf. Next, warmth, from cinnamon, mustard seed, ginger and dried chilli. No one flavour dominates,

but each plays its role. The balance is sublime.

And so I sit, alone but happy, dipping, dousing and chewing, a fresh mango lassi at my right hand. With service as warm as a Kochi breeze, Bhoomi Kitchen is not so much restaurant as an escape to another land. Close your eyes and dream of Kerala.

About £35 per head. Bhoomi Kitchen, 70 London Road, Oxford; [bhoomikitchen.co.uk](http://bhoomikitchen.co.uk)

## DRINKS: Charlotte's organic wines

In celebration of World Earth Day on 22 April, I've picked five delicious organic wines from across Europe. Organic wines may have seemed an expensive fad when they first hit the shelves, but there are now many reasonably priced options. Winemaking this way avoids the use of potentially harmful chemicals in the vineyards and encourages natural ecosystems and healthy soils for the benefit of future generations.

**ROCK & ROOTS ORGANIC VERDEJO SAUVIGNON BLANC 2021 (12.5%), £6.15, Co-op.**

Hello verdejo – fresh, zesty and bursting with citrus fruit and a hint of fennel at a cracking price.



**CASA ROSCOLI ORGANIC PRIMITIVO 2021 (13.5%), £8, Tesco.**

Hand-harvested grapes from sunny vineyards in Italy's heel make this a full-bodied and rich red packed with berry fruit.



**AGRICOLA FUSTER 'DARDELL' ORGANIC WHITE, TERRA ALTA 2022 (13.5%), £10.99, Majestic.**

From the hills of Catalonia, this textured peachy blend of Garnacha Blanca and Viognier is divine with creamy chicken or grilled fish.



**FIANO SICILIA, MANDRAROSSA 2022 (12.5%), £11.50, the winesociety.com.**

A floral Sicilian white with a mineral finish, made from the prestigious Fiano grape that thrives in this sun-drenched island (a bit like me!).



**SOULEIL 'LE ROSÉ' 2021 (13%), £15, good pairdays.com.**

This stylish, thirst-quenching rosé from France's Mediterranean coast begs for sunshine, snacks and a good old tête-à-tête.

