

July 30, 2015

## Etc: That little bit more



The ambience at ETC



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The food at ETC

## **Etc, the newly-opened casual-dining restaurant, serves up some pleasant surprises**

“Etc! Etc! Etc!” Like Yul Brynner playing the formidable Mongkut of Siam in the movie *King and I*, I holler the name of the restaurant where we are to dine to my friend. And the evening, with its share of grand props and drama, turns out to be as unforgettable as the musical.

Etc stands in a quiet corner of Rutland Gate and occupies three levels of a white building with fairy lights, each with a different décor. The parking lot with colourful paperboard gnats opens to a waiting lounge filled with green goli-soda bottles lining the walls, while inside, wingback chairs with kitschy upholstery offset the bright walls.

A little alcove outside has the markings of a Parisian sidewalk café on one side, while the other is filled with all things nautical — a boat, buoys and Breton stripes. But with the evening being so humid that you could slice the air with a knife, we choose the air-conditioned indoors.

The wooden stairs lead to a gallery with unadorned walls and further up is the café, with desserts and pastries lining one wall and books the other. It's a lovely place to browse and there's the game room across the landing, should you feel the need to be raucous. The music here is the swinging 60s; it is way better than the Bollywood songs downstairs, which is so loud that the tableware keeps the beat.

Etc is also full of eager waiters who repeatedly enquire about your choice of iced tea when you've already ordered from another; you're served the salad by one, refilled by another and end up telling a third how it tastes. I'm talking less to my friend and more to the endless succession of waiters, but I put it down to the enthusiasm that often accompanies opening week at restaurants.

Etc's first winning stroke is the complimentary lemon and orange drink — it reminds you of sunshine and languor. The chef's salad — mixed green lettuce, carrots, olives, eggs and chicken tossed in olive oil and nuts — has plenty of piquant flavours. The coloured, crisp lettuce is showered with fine juliennes of chicken and rings of boiled egg, with its blandness offset by the astringent olives.

Accompanied by the tall glass of iced peach tea, it makes for a lovely light meal. Next arrives the olive bundle, delicious baked bags stuffed with olives, cheese and freshly-chopped parsley, hidden under a curtain of foliage. Draw it aside and bite into one — it is sheer delight.

There's a waiter at our table again, this time drawing our attention to the huge portions they serve, suggesting we skip the quesadilla. So, after much deliberation we settle only for the stir fry chicken with glass noodles, a Japanese style mix.

It could've been presented better, though. The vegetables float in an oyster sauce so brown — mind your white shirt — while the noodles, as fine as mermaid's hair, are heaped all over the platter with little Zen in how they are laid out.

The ribbons of baby corn are soggy and the water chestnut registers a little too much. In the depths, the chicken floats contentedly.

Dessert is lemon soufflé. Mildly sweet and topped with a tart syrup and lemon rind — ingredients that have nothing to say to the other. But there is, much like the restaurant, etceteras in it that make it worth the while.

*(Etc is at 7/4, 5th Street, Rutland Gate. For reservations, call 2833 3353. A meal for two costs approximately Rs.1,300.)*