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WINE & DINE

Want to try some smoked salmon *thayir saadham*? Here's Indian food like never before. Join Rashmi on her Indian Accent adventure.

A TWIST IN THE TALE



It happens to me again and again. I hang my head despondently. Be it in New York at the Asia Society's panel discussion a couple of years ago, at the Napa valley retreat and even at the World Gourmet summit in Singapore. Each time I'd been representing India and in response to the question, "Is Indian cuisine evolving?", I'd give a despondent no. Happily, since then, there's been some evolution taking place but only in few five-star hotel kitchens. Slowly, it has begun to change. Slowly. A few stand-alone restaurants have begun to push the envelope and to innovate. Done without a strong grasp of the science and art of cooking, the food can become a mish-mash created by the self-indulgent fantasies of a chef. But, when executed with supple and nimble mastery...magic happens. And it's happening here in Delhi's brand new restaurant...

INDIAN ACCENT

It's hard to believe that in this predictably comfortable no-nonsense dining room there is going to be such an unpredictable blitz of taste. It is in this small new restaurant "Indian Accent" that the dreamteam (which straddles Lon-

don and Delhi, having restaurants in both cities) delivers a seamlessly exciting Indian experience. The ever-smiling Chef Manish Mehrotra uses comforting and well-loved ingredients (*aam papad*, *chyavanprash*) and teases with surprises. Global favourites (*Foie Gras*, smoked salmon, truffle oil) are married with Indian regional dishes with panache. And there lies the magic. As I delight in the chef's tasting menu (Rs 1900), I find that course after course chef Mehrotra coaxes the most amazing flavours out of vegetables, cooks meats unerringly and pairs them with intuitive brilliance. And serves them with flair. The toothless nawabs for whom the galouti kabab was created would've done a double whoop of joy with the "Foie Gras stuffed galawat" (a la Joel Robuchon and his *Foie Gras* burger?). Thin crisp textures hold creamy explosions of goat cheese, the thin smoked salmon (a slightly meatier layer would've worked better) clasps my favourite curd rice dish, enlivened with a dot of *molagapodi* (our own version of sushi?). A cheeky *chatpatta* rendering of *pani puri*, silken fish moily, even a crisp dosa ...

Presiding over this marriage procession of food and wine is UK's wine expert Charles Metcalf. Mainly white wines from the New world (none from India) do a *jugalbandi* with the food. We wind up with the *chyavanprash* cheesecake, which is cute and clever but doesn't work the magic like the Old Monk rum balls oozing Valronha chocolate sauce. Just a smattering of black or red pepper or jalapeno on that would've made for a perfect ending. Applauded in London for their trail-blazing *Tamarai* and *Chor Bizarre*, Rohit Khattar and his team are all set to raise the bar here. Whether the Indian diner (or should we say punter?) will take to this is yet to be seen, but at least it is a delicious beginning. Indian food is beginning to innovate. *Jai ho!*



TASTY TALES

Rashmi Uday Singh