

RAMESH SHARMA

AI's summer menu has beaten its own exacting standards



ARTY FOOD FOR SUMMERTIME AI UNLEASHES A CHARM OFFENSIVE IN ITS NEW SUMMER MENU

THE TRAGEDY of AI, the rooftop Japanese restaurant at the MGF Metropolitan Mall, Saket, is that it gets consigned to oblivion as a result of the high-octane energy levels at the Love Hotel next door. But for food worshippers, AI is the Zen temple of culinary art. When I'm at AI, I just can't get myself off the rolls that arrive like little masterpieces on the table, and my hungry brood polishes off the pork belly yakitori as if pigs were on their way to extinction.

Even by its exacting standards, AI's summer menu is a classic. Chef Sabyasachi Goral, who has worked at Tetsuya, Sydney, and so should know the art of fine food, and the Japanese master chef, Keisuke Uno, have made even the mixed green salad (Rs 349) in a fashion statement with three kinds of tomatoes. My favourites were the tuna tataki (Rs 529) — a tribute to the power of simplicity — and the foie gras-topped chawan mushi (Rs 399): I was floored by the combination of seared foie gras and Japanese egg custard. It was daringly different without being an affront to our gastronomic sensibilities.

Go for the open-air seating at Ai. The area is gently cooled and the band is competent.

★★★★☆

CREATIVITY GETS A NEW MEANING AT INDIAN ACCENT IF ARBI CAN TASTE GOOD, YOU'RE ASSURED A TREAT



I HAVE had foie gras in every conceivable form, but the *tandoori* version at the Indian Accent in The Manor, the boutique hotel in Friends Colony (West), made me lapse into what can only be described as respectful silence. Chef Manish Mehrotra, the man behind the much-acclaimed menu at London's award-winning Tamarai restaurant, said he had to trash 4 kilos of prized goose liver before he got the recipe right for the *tandoori foie gras*, the star of the Indian Accent summer menu. That's a lot of money going down the tubes, but it was an investment I'm sure Mehrotra's employers aren't carping about.

The test of a great menu is something as deceptively simple as Tawa Arbi Satay — if the chef can make *arbi* look exciting and taste heavenly, you know you're on to a good thing. And for those who can't live without their daily share of creatures of the water, I would urge you go for the Patani Mekong Basa Infused with galangal and the Roast Scallop with Gobhi Musallam and Benaras Aloo Papad (I couldn't decide what I loved more — the scallop or the *gobhi*). In this cornucopia, if the organic Kegg egg fritters (they're named after the Kegg Farms) came as a surprise, the silken tofu *kofta* in five-spice squash curry and the pan-fried John Dory *mollee* lifted the ordinary to new peaks of creativity. This summer promises to be good for our gastronomic well-being.

Check out the tasting menu: Rs 1,875 or Rs 1,975 per person, minus VAT and service charge

★★★★★

A SUMMER OF GREAT TASTE

From tandoori foie gras to home-style food from a Mathur kitchen, SOURISH BHATTACHARYYA has a lot on his plate

KYLIN MEANS GOOD FOOD IN JAPANESE JUST KIDDING! IT'S AN EXPERIENCE NONETHELESS

IF AI'S summer menu is all about creative extravagance, the Japanese tasting menu at The Kylin Experience, Basant Lok Community Centre, Vasant Vihar, celebrates the power of simple taste. When you're at Kylin, you know at once why it's been around for five years in a competitive market — there's energy even on a Monday evening, the music is '80s and therefore just the kind of accompaniment you want, and the lighting is oh-so right for the cosy corners to let couples to have their special moments. Once you're in the restaurant, you'll find yourself tapping your feet and head banging in the air reflexively. It's great to build up appetite.

The sushi rolls kept disappearing with alarming alacrity, the prawn tempura left an extended aftertaste, and the sake cocktail with *umeshu* (plum) liqueur was what the doctor seemed to have ordered to uplift our mood. How can you go wrong when everything seems to be right? The best part of the meal, though, was yet to come. Teppa-



nyaki river sole without any of the cloying sweetness left behind by an excess of teriyaki sauce. It was just right for the Riesling we'd ordered. The finale was more dramatic. Ice-cream spring rolls can turn even sleepy children into bundles of renewed activity.

The four-course menu is for Rs 990 (vegetarian) and Rs 1,290 (non-vegetarian), minus VAT and service charge

★★★★★

WINE HOME TRUTHS GET THE TEMPERATURE RIGHT

AN EARLY evening wine tasting may not sound like a great idea, but Rohan Jerjelkie, a trainer with Sopexa, the French agency responsible for promoting the country's food and wine all around the world, made it worth our while. At a session dedicated to wine basics that was accompanied by a generous flow of canapés at the Taj Mahal Hotel, Rohan answered two questions that are as old as wine: Why do white wines have to be chilled? Well, have you attempted having *nimbu paani* at room temperature? Chilling white wine mutes its acidity.

Red wine also needs to be cooled to keep its alcohol attack under check. Red wine served at 'room temperature' at this time of the year tastes awful because its alcohol attack overpowers its flavours. Try drinking red wine at 'room temperature' and you'll wince after the first sip. Wine served at the right temperature scale transforms magically in the glass. The French figured this out centuries ago, but our restaurants don't seem to get the point.



TREATS FROM A MATHUR KITCHEN FOOD JOURNALIST MOVES TO THE OTHER SIDE



I HAVE often been on tastings with Anoothi Vishal, a fine writer who combines an understanding of good food with words that bring out the essence of the experience. And I've also maintained that bad cooks make good food critics — you eat at restaurants only if you don't get good food at home, I keep saying. But Anoothi, with some help from her father and aunt, has proved me wrong. You can write good food copy and make a splash in a five-star hotel kitchen as well.

I went to sample the Mathur food festival me-

nu put together by Anoothi for the Fire restaurant at The Park, Parliament Street, with a card-carrying Mathur whose mother, I maintain, is Delhi's best cook. When my dinner mate approved of the menu, I knew I was on to a good thing — the mutton chops were the only disappointment in a menu that had the classics: Kalmi Vade and Mangore, the scrumptious Hari Tall Machchli, Papad Aloo and Pakodi ki Subzi (these could've converted me to lifelong vegetarianism), and the incredible Badam Pasande and Bhuna Meat. You won't regret the outing.

The menu items are priced between Rs 395 and Rs 650, minus VAT and service charge

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