



Mayfair flair: Indian Accent brings innovative Asian cuisine to central London Daniel Hambury

Fay Maschler reviews Indian Accent: A dazzling new take on Indian food

Manish Mehrotra is an Indian chef whom I first encountered over a decade ago in charge of pan-Asian food in a nightclubby restaurant called Tamarai under the New London Theatre in Drury Lane. I remember thinking at the time that the meal, especially the Thai component, was much finer than anticipated in a setting that wasn't, how shall we say, my bag.

Cut to 2009, when Tamarai owner Rohit Khattar installs Mehrotra in his Manor Hotel in New Delhi to run a restaurant called Indian Accent. At first the food confounds the clientele — it tastes like Indian food, acknowledges the regions, but has shrugged off most other conventions. After a while it becomes increasingly sought-after and now inhabits those lists entitled World's Best 2017 and Asia's 50 Best 2017 — the restaurant has recently moved to New Delhi's The Lodhi Hotel.

In 2015 Indian Accent opens in New York, a city usually baffled by or indifferent to the cuisine but Pete Wells, restaurant critic of The New York Times, is eloquently impressed and it takes off. As of the end of last year the prodigal son, now aged 41, is back in London to open Indian Accent in what was previously Khattar's Chor Bizarre in Mayfair.

Gone is the uncontained clutter and colour of the name that was a play on the "thieves market" of Mumbai to be replaced by British racing green velvet upholstery and gilt trim on the silvery walls; tongue-in-chic and with well-spaced tables. Some front of house from New York are brought over to ease in the launch.

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My first visit is at lunchtime when there is an à la carte menu from which a two or three -course lunch at £25 and £30 can be chosen or a six-course tasting menu for £45. First arrives an amuse-bouche (or whatever the Hindi is for that) that magically forecasts the gastronomic pleasure and reward that will ensue.

A little ceramic mug of pumpkin and coconut chorba (soup) is served with a diminutive blue cheese -filled naan. Spices dance and dazzle in the broth but not so much that the two main elements cannot be identified. The naan gives a shout out for all the breads woven into the menu such as phulka, dosa, pao, roti, papad and kulcha, the bedrock of Indian eating and often the saving grace in Indian restaurants far less blessed than this one.

Millet khichdi, beef laal maas (Rajasthani curry), Parmesan yoghurt, a far cry from what the British took from India in the name of kedgeriee, is extraordinarily rich and savoury. This is Indian food but not as we know it, Jim. It is as if a new life-giving force has entered. Delicate potato sphere chaat (snack) with white pea mash is the twinkling good fairy at the christening.

Not turning to the transformations implicit in molecular gastronomy, Indian Accent dishes instead cheekily borrow and adapt as exemplified in the main course of ghee roast lamb , roomali roti pancakes. It is a take on Peking duck with the “handkerchief breads” standing in for pancakes, batons of cucumber among the raw veg and four chutneys in place of hoisin or other sweet bean sauce.



Soy keema with quail egg

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A sort of paella described as malvani dried shrimp rice accompanies seared scallops with rava prawns — the prawns dusted with semolina and rice flour Goan style before frying. As an accompaniment priced separately at £4 but included in the two/three course deal, the logic of which is not worth unravelling, we choose black dairy daal with naan or gluten-free roti. I hear this as duty-free roti, which is another detail to tussle with.

A preternatural dessert is makhan malai made with aerated saffron milk topped with rose petal jaggery brittle and almonds, which only comes together and makes beatific sense once it is in your mouth. Doda barfi (condensed milk) treacle tart is served as a sensibly small cylinder with vanilla bean ice cream. As a rule of thumb, if you don't recognise a word it is most probably a bread — speaking of which, a black pudding kulcha is an absolute must — or a region or district of India. It will not be something that doesn't belong.

At an evening meal, my friend Miranda Carter describes the first course of Kashmiri morels with walnut powder and Parmesan papad as like “little twin Himalayas with a Parmesan sun”. They are extraordinary mushrooms both in size and ungritty texture. We agree that the beet and peanut butter vadai (savory fried snack) with goats' cheese pachadi (purée) cunningly uses the nut to eliminate the hair -shirt virtue of beetroots and their inevitable companion goats' cheese.

We order too much at dinner — so much beckons — and obviously lunch is less expensive. In the foothills of a steep wine list I very much like the Austrian varietal blend Johanneshof Reinisch Gumpoldskirchner T radition (£44) that waltzes with spices elegantly. Welcome back Manish.

Currently open Mon-Sat noon-2pm & 5.30pm-10pm. Lunch: £25/£30 for two/three courses. Six-course tasting menu £45. Dinner, £55/£65 for three/four courses; nine-course tasting menu £80