

OUTLOOK

Five-Spice Mix (And The Remix)

The 'Plain Jane of Indian food' is actually a delicate, native diva—and the palanquin beckons
NEHA BHATT

Gujarati fare is certainly a plateful of comfort food: richly flavoured veg preparations paired with delicate kadhi, an army of sweet and sour pickles and chutneys, the softest of rotlis and appetising khichudi topped with dollops of ghee along with a side of gur. The preparation and choice of veggies (or meat) changes from region to region, from aakha dongdi (whole onions in gravy), undhiyu (mixed vegetable), sev tamatar to spicy chicken/fish masala. Inner richness and external non-visibility, it shares this trait with most other traditional cuisines. "Gujarati food is seen as common man's food, not what you call upmarket fare," says chef Manish Mehrotra of Delhi's experimental Indian Accent restaurant. "It has not travelled the way Punjabi, Awadhi and some bits of South Indian cuisine have across India." Mehrotra is one of the few to have tinkered with the cuisine to fit fine dining tastes, and brought to the table dishes like Silken Tofu Gathia with a Kokum Kadhi, Shrikhand with Fresh Berries or Khandvi Ravioli (see recipe).

Outside of Gujarat, there could be other reasons why Gujarati khana hasn't matched the conquering zeal of butter chicken or masala dosa. "Gujarati cuisine is not always very easy to adapt outside Gujarat," says Mehrotra. "Unusual ingredients like purple yam or kand, a favourite among Gujaratis, as also different types of beans and arbi ke patte, are not readily available everywhere." People also often think of Gujju fare as "too simple (read boring)", but actually, believes Khanna, "Gujaratis don't know simple flavours at all. What they cook is multi-dimensional, having perfected the art of the five-flavour balance. Even their vrat ka khana is usually bursting with flavour. Due to historically having been short on fresh produce, they have learnt to make more with less, and mastering the art of chutneys and preserves."



The Italian Job

A recipe by Manish Mehrotra Indian Accent

Khandvi Ravioli, For 4 Portions

Ingredients

For khandvi sheets

- 110 gm gram flour (besan)
- 50 gm corn flour
- 25 gm sugar
- 2 gm turmeric powder
- 2 gm yellow chilli powder
- 10 gm curd
- 800 ml water

For mixed-cheese mash

- 75 gm goat cheese
- 15 gm cottage cheese
- 10 gm chopped bell peppers
- 2 gm crushed roasted cumin
- 2 gm crushed black pepper
- 2 gm chopped fresh mint leaves
- 10 gm butter
- 5 gm ginger juliennes
- 15 gm cherry tomatoes
- 15 gm fried pine nuts
- 1 khakhra

For Beurre Blanc

- 15 ml fresh cream
- 5 gm butter
- 1 gm garam masala
- Salt to taste

Method

For making khandvi sheets

- Mix all the ingredients in a large mixing bowl using a whisk, mix well to make a smooth mixture
- Strain through a fine sieve into a kadhai
- Start cooking the mixture on slow flame stirring continuously to avoid any lump formation
- Keep stirring as the mixture starts thickening
- Cook for 10 min, till mixture becomes thick, shiny and spreadable
- Pour the mixture on a clean tabletop and spread evenly and thinly using a dough scraper to a 1 mm thickness
- Let it cool and set for 5 min. Trim off the edges and cut into 5-inch sheets.
- Carefully roll the sheets, cover and refrigerate

For mixed-cheese mash

- Grate goat cheese and cottage cheese; mix bell peppers, black pepper, roasted cumin and fresh mint. Refrigerate.

For khandvi ravioli

- Spread the rolled khandvi sheets on the table. Cut around 35-40 round discs of 3.5 cm using a round cutter.
- Place about 4 gm of mixed cheese mash on half of the discs. Cover it using the remaining discs making a ravioli.
- Cover and refrigerate; keep till use

For Beurre Blanc

- Heat cream in a non-stick pan, add butter, garam masala, salt and water to adjust consistency. Remove from flame. Keep in a clean bowl.

For finish

- Heat butter in a non-stick skillet, sauté ginger and green chilies
- Add cherry tomato halves and turn the flame off
- Place the ravioli carefully without any overlap
- Turn the flame to slow, cook for 30 sec and flip the ravioli
- Add pine nuts and arrange the ravioli on the serving dish topping with the cherry tomatoes, green chilies, ginger and pine nuts
- Finish with beurre blanc and serve with crushed khakhra