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Food infused with a sense of adventure

ADITYA MANI JHA

We have good restaurants here in Delhi," says Manish Mehrotra amiably before adding, "They should just experiment a little more. Also, people who eat out should show a little sense of adventure." Only a little while earlier, he had served me a pair of miniature *kulchas* on a dark, slender slab, the kind French restaurants love to whip out. The onion *kulchas* were smaller than Good Day biscuits, their consistency and crispness just right. What's more, they were caramelized, the onions slow cooked with jaggery and sugar, as Mehrotra later tells me. I suspect my surprise isn't exactly original. I'm certainly no connoisseur, plus he has conned a couple of those in his time, one feels. At Indian Accent (77 Friends Colony West), the afternoon's experiments have only

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begun.

In the first week of October, Mehrotra had travelled to Restaurant Postres at Helsinki, as part of a tie-up with Veen, a Finnish brand of bottled water that I now saw at my table. Chef Samuli Wirgentius from Postres was returning the favour at Indian Accent now, collaborating with Mehrotra (from October 17-20) on a six-course lunch featuring elements of both Indian and Finnish cuisines. "There are a lot of smoked preparations in the food there (at Helsinki)," Mehrotra says. The



Chef Manish Mehrotra

smoked scallops in front of me have a solid, uncomplicated flavour. Once again, he lets me in on



Chef Samuli Wirgentius

the secret. "In Finland, they cook it on haystacks, and towards the end, they sprinkle a little hay ash

on top of the meat."

Novelty is never out of reach throughout the meal. At the half-



Charcoal grilled lamb with broccoli, oysters and cabbage

way point, I'm served a small melon *chuski* (shaved/crushed ice) with a dash of ginger in it. (It's delicious; and what's more, it rests inside a vessel resembling a bonsai pressure cooker) A thoroughly scrumptious brainwave on the *malai* corn/*sarson-ka-saag* spread involves white butter popcorn. The crowning juxtapo-

sition of the lunch arrives with a somewhat cringe-inducing name; Indian Accent Kitsch-Ree. Regardless of my views on the pun, I cannot deny that crispy bacon and chicken nuggets on top are a great idea for *khichdi*.

"I'm a Delhi person myself, and I like eating butter chicken and *dal makhani* sometimes," Mehrotra says, when I ask him about his own preferences. "It's just that owners get stuck making the same four or five things, because of which a lot of people get these notions about Indian cuisine. They view it as cheap, spicy takeaway food, and we have so much more to offer." Finally, Wirgentius walks in with the dessert, which the menu calls 'Finnish Summer'. (Really, what was up with the names? Perhaps this reporter passed by a worthy investigation) Strawberries with a generous dose of whipped cream, on a bed of *grape* ice.

Talk about a sense of adventure.