

Celebrity Chef: Manish Mehrotra

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Puneet K. Paliwal

Chef Manish Mehrotra

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OT: While you were growing up, were food and travel important to your family?

Manish Mehrotra: When I was growing up in Patna, there was not so much of a restaurant culture. Home parties were self catered—everything was cooked at home. I grew up in a completely vegetarian household—we didn't even use onions and garlic in our cooking. But that really helped me to understand that everyday food can be very tasty. And to make simple food is ten times tougher than to make some fancy ustad wala korma. A lot of my relatives were involved in the food business. Our family owned bakeries and confectioneries. We used to play in our mithai shop karkhanas (kitchen). So food was always around. We also travelled all over India visiting relatives and so had an opportunity to sample different cuisines from around the country.

OT: What do you like to cook when you're at home?

Manish Mehrotra: Maggi! I want my Maggi in a particular way that only I can make—soupy with Tabasco and green chilli sauce and no vegetables.

OT: What's your favourite midnight snack?

Manish Mehrotra: Something gooey with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. And if there's nothing else, I steal chocolates from my daughter!

OT: I believe that when you introduced Khao Suey to the Oriental Octopus menu in 2002/2003 that was the first time the dish was served in a Delhi restaurant...

Manish Mehrotra: Yes, that was the first time that it came out of the house dining room and into a restaurant. Because Khao Suey, from the beginning, used to be a very popular kitty party dish. Mine was a different Khao Suey—a more coconutty northern Thailand version rather than the Burmese one. And it became very popular.

OT: Dishes to die for?

Manish Mehrotra: I'm a comfort food person. Vanwala noodles and mushroom risotto anytime!

OT: What's been your favourite culinary journey to date?

Manish Mehrotra: Shanghai was a complete revelation to me! When I went there in 2003, I tried a few unique dishes such as a huge fish head baked with spring onions. And that was also the first time I tried crispy pork belly—and it was just divine.