

## Fusion is the way forward



Indian Accent serves traditional food with a modern twist that is healthy, wholesome and flavourful

On wintry January days, where nights are exceptionally cold with chilly winds blowing, there is nothing better than digging into sarson ka saag, khichri and vada, albeit with a modern twist. I discovered this the other day when I was invited for a food review at Hotel Indian Accent.

Rather than place all dishes on one's plate making it look clumsy, I was served in Western style of plated food, which is increasingly becoming a popular feature in high end eateries in Indian cities. Each dish covered with flat bottomed plate was placed on the table. Glenfiddich's array of whiskies – some 12, 18 and 21 years old which would have done any connoisseur proud – came alongside. Only after an interregnum of 10-15 minutes was the next dish served so that one could savour the flavour, texture of the dish and enjoy the fruitiness of the scotch.

The highlight of the menu that was meticulously created by chef Manish Mehrotra was that he gave the right balance to presentation as well as preparation. He introduced imported edibles to give unusual aroma to common and light Indian dishes. And saw that dishes were done in a way that they blended seamlessly with Glenfiddich. The single malt scotch –which is matured for years at the distillery – was the accompaniment.

“Normally, it is easier to pair food with wine. Pairing dishes with whisky is difficult but not impossible. My kind of food revolves around the season. To complement whisky, I chose winter food of North India. I gave modern twist by replacing traditional ingredients with imported variety of food to give the dishes an international flavour,” says Mehrotra.

### **Excellent replacement**

The first dish was burrata, sarson ka saag, sweet corn papdi, which was a unique combination. Earthiness of sarson ka saag accompanied with Italian cheese gave this one a distinct taste. However, the ubiquitous white butter – a must topping on sarson ka saag – was missing. Burrata, which was slightly heavy even though the creaminess of the buttery cheese was excellent, more than made up for the dairy product.

This cheese was first unravelled by Chef Mehrotra in an eatery in San Francisco and it endeared him no end. Caramelised onion with jaggery was served with the dish. It was okay but was not the right choice for gur.

### **Modern take**

Winter peas vada, puffed rice and bacon bhel was the next. I am not a big fan of vada but enjoyed its crispiness and hot peas stuffed inside it were indeed comfort food given the biting cold weather outside. Minuscule pieces of bacon, with its smokiness, gave flavour to the bhel. The meat had come all the way from Chile and all cuts had flown in straight from European and South American nations.

### **Spicy tricks**

The much fancied lamb shank was succulent and was done with great care. It required two days of patience and perseverance to prepare this dish, which had all the spices. Chef Mehrotra and his team saw to it that they did not go over the top. So large chunks of meat were prepared in a slow fire to make it tender and retain all the taste. The dish was made in Rajasthani style and naturally spices were there. To make sure that lamb shank was not too spicy for the palette, spices were blended for two consecutive days. It was paired with bajre ki kichri which is healthy and comfort food.



On how spices play a role in his scheme of things, Mehrotra said: “India is a land of spices; it has no predominant spice here. We use spice blend which gives perfect combination to our dishes. Every community has its spices like chat masala, garam masala or Kashmiri ware masala. So I judiciously use them.”

The event unambiguously emphasised that our good old khichri, which we have all eaten ad nauseum at home, has the capacity to stand against the taste of scotch on the rocks. So it was not extra spicy and the meat complimented khichdi, which had millets and was again a good replacement for biryani.

Blending of the East and the West was apparent in the selection of the sweet dishes. Daulat ki chaat with baked figs had familiar as well as unfamiliar flavours. And how could one resist cheeni ki roti with toasted marshmallows. Both sweet dishes were perfectly made to end the dinner.