

Indian Accent Moves to The Lodhi with More Style & Greater Panache -- and Manish Mehrotra Proves Yet Again He's the Master of Indian Cuisine



Manish Mehrotra (left) and his understudy, Shantanu Mehrotra, at the glittering new ground-floor kitchen of India Accent at The Lodhi.

DELHI'S **Lodi Estate** neighbourhood -- home to MPs, civil servants and military top brass -- is named after an Afghan dynasty, the Lodis, who used to rule over much of North India between 1451 and 1526. A decade less than 600 years later, we have a new Lodi Sultan.

He is **Rohit Khattar**, Chairman, **Old World Hospitality**, whose footprint in the shadow of the Lodi Gardens now stretches from **India Habitat Centre**, where his company runs the restaurants and the extensive banqueting operations, to **The Lodhi**, where the Indian Accent has just had a grand rebirth. His original **Chor Bizarre** in Hotel Broadway on Asaf Ali Road and its outpost at Bikaner House are the other major milestones of his food and beverage operations, but Khattar, without doubt, is the Sultan of Lodi Estate.

At the reborn **Indian Accent**, which has moved into the location previously occupied by OTW (On The Waterfront), **Manish Mehrotra** and his long-time shadow, **Shantanu Mehrotra**, ably represented at the front of the house by **Palki Singh**, have made sure no one misses the old location, which had to be abandoned because of the Supreme Court order (subsequently modified) banning the sale of alcohol within 500 metres of national and state highways.



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Ironically, the Supreme Court modified its order less than two weeks after Khattar had decided to move to The Lodhi -- more than eight years after the restaurant opened in March 2009. The change of address may actually work in favour of Indian Accent aficionados, for they would be able to avoid the Ashram traffic bottlenecks and have a smoother ride to the new location, which can seat 65 people and retains the old OTW attraction -- the dining space in the torch-lit water body. What has worked the most, however, is Mehrotra's ability to constantly reinvent the menu and introduce surprises.

I had a good laugh when I was presented with the "world's smallest *gol gappas*" -- each not more than a centimetre and half in diameter -- served atop five micro-mini glasses, each with a different filling, fixed on to a *belan* (rolling pin). It must have been quite an effort to make those *gol gappas*. If this was plain playful, one of the appetisers playfully inter-married seemingly disparate flavours -- beetroot-peanut butter *tikki* served with goat cheese mousse and *kasundi* -- turned it into an umami bomb.

My old favourite, the unputdownable Dal **Moradabadi**, was there, but this time it came with *choor-choor gobhi naan*. So was another eternal must-have -- Kashmiri morel *musallam* with parmesan *papad*. The goat cheese *naan* and stuffed *kulchas* are also there as accompaniments.

My wow moment, though, happened when I was digging into the chunky tamarind crab (from Tamil Nadu, the home state of Mehrotra's wife), sitting on a bed of beans *fougat* in a pool of coconut curry. I have not had such good crab meat in a long time -- and Mehrotra let it speak for itself. Another new favourite turned out to be a chicken ball served with an accompaniment of Punjabi *kadhi* and a half moon on onion *pakoda*. To the same class belonged the gently grilled scallops, lightly *rawa*-fried prawn, Malwani dry prawn *biryani* and kokum curry.

It is inspiring to see how Mehrotra doesn't ever let his creative impulses go to sleep, which is why today, no New York charity dinner, curated by such living legends as **Daniel Boulud** or **Eric Ripert of Le Bernardin**, is complete without a dish bearing the Manish Mehrotra signature.

During the course of my long dinner, Mehrotra was explaining how each tasting menu of seven courses (and "some surprises thrown in") takes up 29 pieces of crockery -- and just the made-to-order dessert platter costs Rs 2,800 apiece. No amount of drama on the table, however, can replace the excitement of eating food created by the master of Indian Cuisine. November 6 is the official opening date of Indian Accent at The Lodhi, but if it's already spilling over with diners, it is because people just can't wait till the formal opening.

AFTER INDIAN ACCENT IT'S TIME FOR KOLAHOI

A LOT OF US are wondering about the fate of Indian Accent's old address, **The Manor**, a boutique hotel in Friends Colony (West) that became famous only because of its better-known tenant. The air was cleared last week by restaurateur and filmmaker Rohit Khattar, Chairman, Old World Hospitality, who said the place would serve only Kashmiri meals, either *a la carte*, or a nine-course *trami* at the set price of Rs 1,295 plus taxes per person; and if you wish to do the whole nine yards (sitting on the floor and eating in the traditional style), you could ask for the 12-course *wazwan* meal at Rs 2,900 per person (only for groups of four or more).

For those who have had the *trami* at **Chor Bizarre**, Indian Accent's sister restaurant, you know what kind of a treat awaits you. The pop-up is called **Kolahoi**, after the famous Himalayan glacier between Sonamarg and Pahalgam, but for Khattar it evokes memories of the restaurant in **Srinagar's Broadway** cinema, which opened in the 1950s and was owned by his maternal grandfather, from where he would pick up seekh *kebabs* wrapped in a cheese *naan*, slip into the projection room and watch the latest release in royal comfort.