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3 ways Indian Accent is not a typical Indian restaurant

Chef Manish Mehrotra tells us how the upscale import from New Delhi is different.



New York has been home to the polar opposites in Indian cuisine for years, but the space between [Junoon](#) and Curry Row is becoming more interesting.

First, it was last summer's neon-colored newcomer with a swagger, [Babu Ji](#). Now, New Delhi's acclaimed [Indian Accent](#) has made the trek to Midtown West next to Le Parker Meridien hotel. Executive chef Manish Mehrotra came over with the restaurant and explained how he's running a different kind of kitchen.

Expand your horizons

Is butter chicken your yardstick for an Indian restaurant? At Indian Accent, you'll have to fork over a \$14 supplement for it — the menu consists of two (\$55), three (\$75), four (\$95) and chef's choice (\$110) courses. Not only that, it won't be presented like you expect: Mehrotra wraps this classic curry, as well as saag paneer, inside a pocket of nan bread, then cooks it in a tandoor oven. His nan doesn't use self-rising flour, which makes the resulting kulcha thinner and crispier than the nan most diners know.

The unique presentation, a signature dish in India, too, allows for the contrasts in texture that are often lacking in Indian food. But it's also a way to get diners to order something more adventurous. "Indian food has to move forward," explains Mehrotra. "The whole idea was there is so much in India to offer but people outside India know very few dishes. But India is such a large country with such diverse culture, so many things which are very very good and we want people to know about them also."

Traditional and modern at the same time

"In India also, the concept was that we follow tradition because [change] cannot come without tradition," Mehrotra says. "So all our recipes, the curries, the masala, we follow the traditional method." The modern part comes in with ingredients and presentation. Ever seen quinoa on an Indian menu before? Mehrotra makes it pulao style with silken tofu kofta. Tamarind sea bass gets a bed of herb barley in Kerala moilee, a coconut milk-based stew.

And while almost 75 percent of the menu is what's served in New Delhi, Mehrotra found ways to bring New York into the restaurant. The kulcha can be stuffed with smoked bacon or pastrami in mustard butter, while vindaloo is made with pork belly.

Home cooking gets the spotlight

Mehrotra has no interest in adding his own entry into the endurance race of hottest dishes. That's because it's a restaurant gimmick — Indian Accent is meant to be like the kitchen of an Indian home, where people also eat differently than when they go out.

"All the dishes are cooked in such a way that they're not oily or extraordinarily spicy or chili-based food. At home, we don't eat chilis in India; my mother never made spicy food at home," he says. "So it's always, always when you go to a restaurant that you eat curry-based food, or heavy food with cream and butter, and chili. But at home, you eat simple food, and definitely spices are there, but for flavor, not to make the food hot."



