

Where in New York can you get some blue cheese naan?

Indian Accent's second outpost gives the Big Apple a taste of modern Indian cuisine



Sweet Potato Shakarkandi with Kohlrabi and Crispy Okra

Salt, that most humble and basic of ingredients, gave Chef Manish Mehrotra a few sleepless nights. Mehrotra has spent the past few months in New York City, setting up the second outpost of his award-winning and wildly celebrated contemporary Indian restaurant, Indian Accent, and while he might have anticipated procurement problems for his more exotic Indian ingredients like gucchi (morels), he wasn't prepared to have a hard time when it came to salt. "Somehow the salt we found here just didn't work," says Mehrotra, a few days before tonight's opening. "I needed good old Tata Salt." He soon found that he couldn't do without other faithfuls like Amul butter and cheese, either. "Sometimes, you need that very specific umami accent that only Amul cheese can give," he laughs.

That doesn't mean he's not taking full advantage of the expansive pantry that New York offers. A variety of blue cheeses, from Stilton to Gorgonzola were stuffed into baby naans and blistered in a tandoor, till he found a particular variety of Danish blue that was robust enough to stand up to the heat. The crusty exterior of the bite-sized disks makes a sharp contrast to the piquant, molten cheese inside.

That blue cheese naan is symbolic of what Indian Accent is aiming to do—undo and rebuild what New Yorkers know about Indian cuisine. Typically, what they know has been largely limited to 4.00 am kati rolls after a drinking binge, or cheap and greasy butter chicken takeout from a Curry Hill establishment. Mehrotra wants to throw open the doors to the staggering breadth and depth of Indian cooking, and familiarise the city with finely-tuned regional and cultural differences. The sleekly minimalist gold interiors with rich wooden accents of the 70-seater midtown space mirror the modern energy he's infusing into desi cooking.

Humble elements make an appearance in one of the first dishes we try, Soy Keema with Quail Egg, which is flanked by two tiny kafir lime leaf-infused paos. "I wanted to show that Indian breads go beyond naans and roti," Mehrotra says. The robust, spiced tomato-infused mince is enlivened by the dainty egg that can be mixed in to create an impromptu keema ghotala, a tribute to his days as a culinary student in Dadar, Mumbai. Soy, a popular staple for farmers because it's non-perishable and nutritious, is a nod to his roots in Bihar.

Mehrotra introduces flavours from the south with the mustard seed-studded Duck Chettinad, sandwiched between idli discs and topped with foie gras; as well with tamarind-coated fish atop a bed of moilee. Another moment is when a house-made paneer (Mehrotra couldn't find good enough paneer so the restaurant makes their own) comes in a butter pepper garlic sauce that Indian diners will recognise as a combination used popularly with seafood.

Many hits from the New Delhi location feature on the menu, like the sublime baby-back rib simmered in coconut milk and smothered with chunda, the sweet-sour-spicy Gujarati pickle. And all the while, Mehrotra's keeping the exchange going—his tribute to NYC is in the form of a pastrami-stuffed kulcha. For desert there's the North Indian morning treat Makhan Malai, an ephemeral pale yellow cloud that disappears like a dream when it hits the tongue, leaving behind a memory of saffron and cream.

As Mehrotra and Rohit Khattar, chairman of Old World Hospitality, get ready to open, they're hopeful and excited to showcase their version of India: fresh and unexpected, with the past very much interwoven into the present. "New York is a difficult city to break into, but if it embraces you, it does so wholeheartedly," says Khattar. They should have no trouble belonging. The restaurant opened its doors last night, 25th February 2016, and will take reservations for dinner only.

123 West 56th Street, New York. Tel: 212-842-8070. Indianaccent.com/nyc



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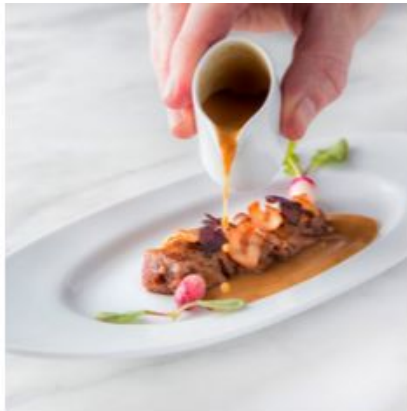
Soy Keema with Quail Egg and Lime Leaf Butter Pao



Silken Tofu Kofta with Quinoa Pulao and Bottle Gourd Curry



Pork Belly Vindaloo with Goan Red Rice



Pathar Beef Kebab with Garlic Chips and Bone Marrow Nihari



Paper Roast Dosa with Wild Mushrooms, Black Truffles and Water Chestnuts



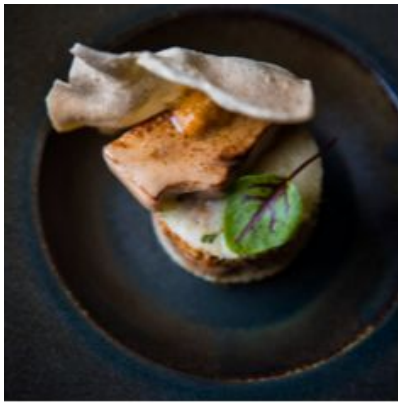
Makhan Malai with Saffron Milk, Rose Petals, Jaggery Brittle and Almonds



The Papad Platter being prepared



Kashmiri Morel with Roasted Walnut and Parmesan Papad



Duck Chettinad with Foie Gras, Idli and Pearl Onion Chutney



Doda Barfi Treacle Tart with Vanilla Bean Ice Cream



Dal Gosht or Lamb Lentils with Cumin and Sunchokes



Crispy Seviyan and Rice Pudding with Coconut-Jaggery Ice Cream



Butter Pepper Garlic Paneer



Baby Squid with Crispy Rice and Chutney



Kolhapuri Chicken with Peanut Cucumber Koshimbir



The interiors