

## The 10 best restaurants in NYC of 2016 so far



The gap between kati-roll canteens and white-tablecloth Indian has grown wider in the past few years—and leagues more interesting. There's Hemant Mathur's quartet of low-pressure, hyperregional Indian restaurants along Lexington Avenue's Curry Hill; Alphabet City's Babu Ji, a forward-thinking Melbourne import opened last year by husband-and-wife team Jessi and Jennifer Singh; and Floyd Cardoz's return to Indian cooking at Paowalla, a casual tandoor-fired Soho spot due this summer.

Brought into this fold is Indian Accent at Le Parker Meridien New York, the first international outpost of Rohit Khattar and celeb-chef Manish Mehrotra's South Delhi blockbuster, India's sole representative on the S. Pellegrino list of world's best restaurants. (It currently sits at No. 77.) On looks alone, Indian Accent edges closer to fine-dining than fun-loving, all inoffensive grays and sculptural plating—the only similitude of Indian flash is one gold-leafed wall—and its menu is stuffily organized into prix-fixe options and a chef's tasting menu.

But then arrives an amuse bouche of warm naan imbued with, what is that, blue cheese? Yes, it's a funky core of sharp Danish blue. Amuse, indeed. Supplemental kulcha (\$9)—stuffed Punjabi flatbread—also acts as a small-scale vehicle for reinvention: Mehrotra confronts Indian classics like butter chicken and saag paneer in the form of stewy fillings, but then there's also pastrami with mustard butter, a New York wink.

Dishes are much looser than that rigid menu and sober room make them out to be; the vindaloo stars pork belly, and even quinoa makes an unexpected cameo, acting as a pulao base for a stunning tofu kofta moated with bottle-gourd curry. A baby back rib arrives sweet and sticky from coconut milk and meetha achar (North Indian mango pickle), with little regard for how white or freshly pressed the front of your button-down is. Crispy baby squid comes with small newspaper cones of crispy rice, like India's answer to fish and chips, and a to-share papadam tasting (\$22, supplemental) is like an upscale appetizer sampler, with a host of mix-and-match house chutneys. Fine-dining it definitely is, but happily, Indian Accent isn't above letting you eat with your hands.