



DEMYSTIFYING FUSION INDIAN FOOD

As the world cuisine is becoming increasingly popular in India, the local food is also pushing traditional boundaries.

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The last few years have seen an extensive use of international gourmet ingredients like foie gras, truffle oil and blue cheese, in traditional Indian dishes like kebabs and naans. Fancy ingredients, combined with contemporary cooking techniques are taking even regional Indian food to another level.

But what, one may ask, is the need for this radical change that has been around for hundreds of years in a country like ours that is extremely rich in diverse cuisines?

WHY THE FUSION?

Chef Hemant Oberoi, Corporate Chef, Taj Hotels and Grand Master Chef, Varq restaurant, wanted to reach out to a larger audience rather than be restricted to a particular region or style. According to him, the perfect example of fine dining in Indian restaurants should have an international appeal. Thus were



SOME GOOD READS ARE MODERN SPICE: INSPIRED INDIAN FLAVORS FOR THE CONTEMPORARY KITCHEN BY MONICA BHIDE, THE MASALA ART: INDIAN HAUTE CUISINE BY CHEF HEMANT OBEROI AND CONTEMPORARY INDIAN CUISINE BY CHEF ANIL ASHOKAN

born Varq at the Taj Mansingh, New Delhi and Masala Kraft at the Taj Mahal Palace in Mumbai, serving mini olive naan, tomato and mozzarella kulcha, jalapeno murg tikka and baked *kalakand* croissant. According to him, *Khud* (concept of cooking and serving in earthen pots); Ricetaurant (an international rice-based cuisine); Cal-Indian cuisine (a fusion of Californian and Indian food), are among the few innovations that have worked extremely well.

“The food industry in India has evolved such that there are many restaurants serving fantastic food in great ambience with superlative services, the only way to compete is to create something different,” explains Chef Manish Mehrotra, Old World Hospitality’s Executive Chef, more famously known for designing the path-breaking contemporary Indian menu at Indian Accent, Manor Hotel, New Delhi.

During his early days, his international experience made him realise that despite a rich heritage of regional Indian cuisines, food culture and varied flavours, most foreigners associated Indian food with *chicken tikka masala*, *naan* bread and *biryani*. This inspired him to create Indian dishes with international recognition that enabled outsiders to relate to the Indian cuisine. As a result, one finds *arbi bitterballen*, *paneer tikka* quesadillas, tuna *bhel* ceviche, and foie gras stuffed *galawat* amongst



Mini masala idlis served with assorted dips like hummus, guacamole, salsa, and pesto

Traditional recipes are a stepping stone to create something new

other similarly radical combinations.

CAN TRADITIONAL RECIPES BE BYPASSED?

Certainly not, emphasises Chef Manish. “In order to make foie gras stuffed *galawat*, I need to first perfect the art of making authentic *galauti* kebabs,” he explains. According to him, traditional recipes and techniques are a stepping stone to create something new. But sticking to conventional combinations and cooking techniques, on the other hand, inhibits one’s creativity. He

also believes in changing dishes at par with changing times.

Chef Hemant also believes that it is important for chefs to know the basics of Indian cuisine first and then experiment with different ingredients to create innovative recipes. In his book, *The Masala Art: Indian Haute Cuisine*, he has shared age-old recipes and secrets with contemporary flavours.

WHAT MAKES A BLEND A HIT OR A MISS?

I recently visited an eco lodge in the heart of India, that served only set meals including *peri peri bhindi*, sundried *gobhi*, *sabudana* pannacota, besides other similar concoctions. Unfortunately, none of these dishes worked! Instead, they just turned out to be a confused combination of flavours that worked neither for Indians nor

CLASSIC FUSION



According to the New Zealand born, London-based chef Peter Gordon, fusion food has been around for ages. For instance, Worcestershire sauce is very British, it has

tamarind which is a very Middle-eastern and Asian ingredient. Thai dishes have coriander which is essentially a Mediterranean herb. Without such infusion of ingredients, many cuisines would be much less flavoursome.

GOOD TO KNOW



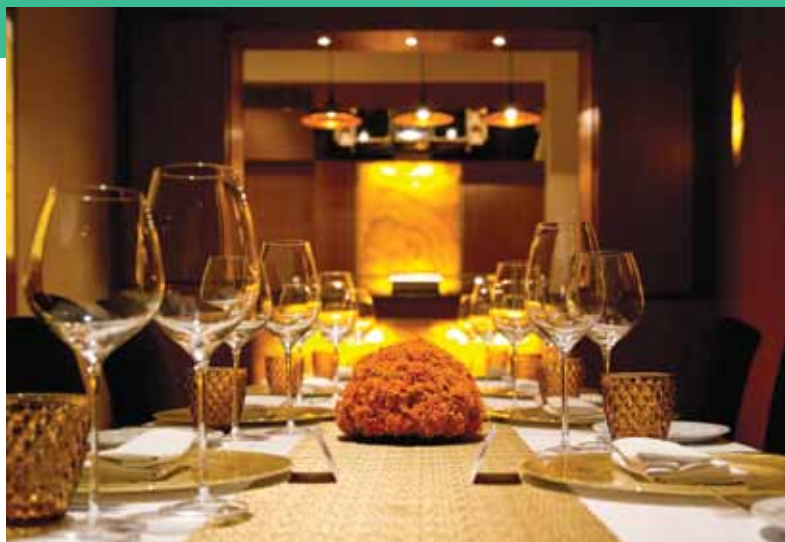
MOLECULAR GASTRONOMY

Charred chicken tikka with coriander foam. Sous vide mutton curry. Freeze dried mango with vanilla smoke. Sounds like experiments with food in a science lab? Well, these are examples of Molecular Gastronomy that blends physics and chemistry to transform the taste and texture of food. The result? New and innovative dining experiences. The term Molecular Gastronomy is commonly used to describe a style of cuisine in which chefs explore culinary possibilities by borrowing tools from the science lab and ingredients from the food industry.



Chef Manish sticks to a few basic principles:

- Play on classic combinations. For example, a bacon kulcha would work because bacon and bread is a classic combination.
- Never mix two Indian cuisines in one dish.
- Ingredients should complement each other.



Indian Accent
Chef's table

Indians are now exploring new countries and cuisines

the international guests staying at the lodge. So we asked our celebrity chefs for some broad guidelines on how to make fusion Indian dishes work.

“One should refrain from resorting to a 'curry-in-a-hurry' cooking style and should have the patience to treat food ingredients with the same generosity as they treat guests,” explains Chef Hemant. The foremost requisite for Chef Manish is to maintain the Indianness in the meal. “While I like to fuse and infuse varied flavours, when you come to my restaurant, you need to be convinced about what I’m serving,” he emphasises.

TRENDS IN THE INDIAN FOOD INDUSTRY

According to Chef Hemant, culinary tourism in India is going through a massive expansion. With greater disposable incomes, Indians are exploring new countries and cuisines, he avers. Also the demand for gluten-free products and people’s desire to cut back on white carbs is changing the recipes. Chef



Manish, on the other hand, predicts lots of new trends in the booming restaurant industry.

Firstly, he foresees a major impetus on kids’ food in the menu. “Kids as young as 8-9 years old know their cheeses, meats and are more experimental than ever before, thanks to food shows like Master Chef,” he elucidates. Secondly, small plates gave way to sharing platters and chefs’ tasting menus.

Finally, according to him one will find more home-cooked food in restaurants, albeit with a twist. So, next time expect to find a delicious yellow dal or a gourmet khichdi when you eat out. ■