

Second Innings

In a new space, Manish Mehrotra retains the dexterity that made him the master of modern Indian cuisine

DAMINI RALLEIGH

AFTER SEVERAL years by the wayside, boutique hotel The Manor was put back on Delhi's map in 2009. Restaurateur Rohit Khattar turned his Mediterranean menu into an Indian one, but with a twang. Thus, was born the country's premier modern Indian cuisine restaurant — Indian Accent — steered by chef Manish Mehrotra. With his distinctive approach to modern Indian cuisine, he has, quite literally, become its bellwether. Since flocks of restaurateurs and chefs have followed his *modus operandi*, offering a relatively less damaging proportion of flavour to price. But none compare. It isn't for nothing that Indian Accent is the only restaurant in the country to have featured in the World's 50 Best Restaurants and has been awarded the San Pellegrino Best Restaurant Award in India by Asia's 50 Best Restaurants for the third consecutive year in 2017.

Despite the winning streak, the liquor ban imposed by the Supreme Court hit them hard and stymied the inflow of patrons. The Indian Accent, then, made its way to the Waterfront at the sequestered The Lodhi and threw open its doors to the public last week. The new restaurant, much larger than the one at The Manor, bears modern, minimalist sensibilities but more importantly, has a serviceable bar. Picks can be chosen from an à la carte as well as a well-curated-and-portioned, vegetarian and non-vegetarian Chef's Menu. The first to appear on the table was the amuse-bouche. Danish blue cheese oozing out of two bites of naan along with a luxurious cauliflower and saffron shorba, its pale yellow hue playing off the hand-thrown black terracotta it is served in, and aloo tikki with yoghurt dotted with a few pomegranate arils that sat in the head of a spoon — tiny bites bursting with flavour.

Tandoori prawns wrapped in bacon served with wasabi malai (a tad oversalted) and Chettinad chicken keema paired with lemon

seviyan flavoured with a curry leaf temper along with sago puffs, from the à la carte, further the case that Mehrotra has not merely aped his predecessors who run successful establishments in London but has truly given Indian cuisine a new face, and perhaps new meaning.

The Chef's Menu is an illustration of Mehrotra's dexterity with food. Puchkas are served with five kinds of water including concoctions of garlic and buttermilk, and cinnamon and pomegranate while a duck khurchan cornet with herbed yoghurt and chilli chutney stands in the middle of a bowl of namkeen dal. It is not just the intricate plating but the gaiety infused in the presentation that makes the food all the more enjoyable — baked basa sits in a leaf clipped together by the tiniest wooden clothes-peg and to get away with the conceit of serving anar and churan kulfi in a toy pressure cooker! (pictured)

The tender, slightly tart but sweet pork ribs enveloped in a meetha achar, accompanied by sundried mango and pickled kohlrabi and a warm coconut curry embracing crab meat flavoured with tamarind, preceded a bowl of black dairy dal, fresh water chestnut and wasabi raita paired with soft kulchas stuffed with pumpkin and pork. Desserts comprise Haji Ali inspired custard apple cream, winter carrot halwa crumble, and fig and whiskey ice-cream. Though Mehrotra's interpretations are roused by modern influences, they remain securely anchored by the Indian palate. Modernisation is not imposed on Indian recipes thereby ensuring that textures and flavours, complimentary and contrasting, create harmonious unions. His plating, too, does not instigate a longing for the unpretentiousness of Indian cuisine. It looks, smells, feels and tastes like our own. With the second edition of Indian Accent, Mehrotra proves yet again that food is, at once, material, metaphor and magic.

MEAL FOR TWO: Rs 10000 (including drinks)
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**FOOD
REVIEW**



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