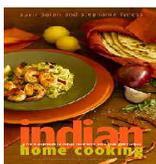


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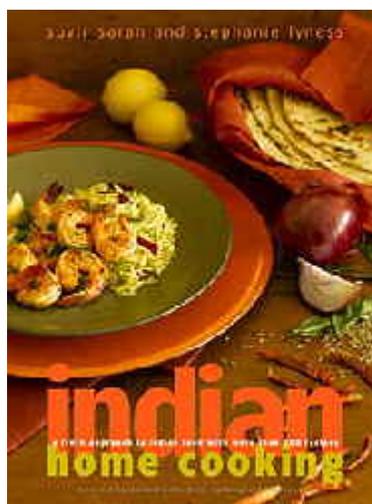


Indian Home Cooking in the Flatiron District!



Chefs and Co-Owners Suvir Saran and Hemant Mathur are bringing Indian home cooking direct to the Flatiron District, in their 75-seat restaurant, [devi](#), which opened in September 2004, which was a busy year for Chef Suvir Saran, as his cookbook, that he co-wrote with Stephanie Lyness, ***indian home cooking &ndash; a fresh introduction to Indian food, with more than 150 recipes***, Clarkson Potter/Publishers also debuted in 2004.

When I had dinner at the restaurant in July 2005, I asked him about how his book came about, and he said, "When I came to the US 13 years ago, what I missed most was good, honest Indian food, with good Indian flavors, which is how this baby came together." It is a beautiful cookbook filled with a mix of history, culture, and anecdotes from his childhood memories. As for Suvir Saran and Hemant Mathur, they have worked together for 11 years.



In addition to their regular summer menu, which began in July, they also offer vegetarian and non-vegetarian tasting menus. Edward F. Nesta joined me for dinner, and we sampled both of the menus, beginning with an Amuse Bouche of a cashew nut croquette with tamarind chutney that had a crunchy exterior with a delightful spicy tamarind sauce.

The tasting began with *Bombay Bhei Puri* (rice puffs, tamarind, mint, tomatoes and onions) and *Sprouted Mung Chaat* (sprouted mung beans, tomatoes, onions, tamarind & mint chutney, papadam), which Gil Daniel, paired with an Agriolas Costamolino 2004 from Sardinia, Italy.

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Our next course of *Aloo Chaat* (crispy potatoes, tamarind & mint chutney, lemon juice, cilantro, chaat masala) and *Grilled Scallops* (roasted red pepper chutney, Manchurian cauliflower, spicy bitter-orange marmalade) was paired with a BV Coastal Estates Private Cellars 2003 Chardonnay, from California. We continued with crispy *Samosas* (spinach & goat cheese, and potato & peas) and *Lamb-stuffed Tandoori Chicken* (with a yogurt-mint sauce) that were paired with a Wild Boar Routas 2004 from France, which had a honey nose with balanced pear on the palate.

Tasting menus must be served slowly in order to appreciate the nuances of each of the courses, and our waiter, Timothy Swanger, a stand-up comedian when not working at the restaurant, kept us entertained throughout the evening. He also thought I might like to see Chef Hemant in action, and took me into the kitchen where I watched him make an *Onion-Parmigiano Kulcha*, that I couldn't wait to try.

Back at my table in a room draped with richly colored Indian fabrics, and seated on a banquette covered with a pattern of multi-colored squares of crushed velvet, it reminded me of the rich colors of the spices of Indian. When Chef Suvir came by to sit with us, he explained that when his mother walked into the restaurant, she told him that he must have been remembering his childhood, because the fabric pattern was the same as the one that he had on an ottoman in his room. It appears that in addition to Indian home cooking, he also brought a little of his childhood home into the restaurant.

Tasting continued with *Manchurian Cauliflower* (garlic infused tomato sauce, scallions) and *Parsi Halibut "Paatra Ni Machi"* (mint-coconut chutney, tomato rice), which was delicate tender halibut cooked in a banana leaf, unwrapped and then dressed with a flavorful coconut sauce, paired with a Valley of the Moon 2003 Pinot Noir from California. Timothy also brought us Chef Hemant's delicious *Onion-Parmigiano Kulcha* (a stuffed bread) that was hot and served with a coconut lime sauce.



Our next course of *Tandoori Prawns* (pomegranate marinade and Karaee Bhindi), were Sri Lanka farm-raised prawns that were large, flavorful, succulent and spicy accompanied by a crispy okra salad and *Matar Kee Poori aur Bhaji* (puffy pea bread, spiced potato curry), which was a slightly bland dish that unfortunately was overshadowed by the fabulous *Tandoori Prawns*. Gil paired this course with a Reilly's "Dry Land" Shiraz 2001 from Claire Valley, Australia.

*Abha Aunty's Baingan* (baby eggplant, sweet & sour tomato-tamarind sauce, parwal kee sabzee, tomato rice and Indian wax gourds thinly sliced) had the type of spiciness that I enjoy, and the wax gourds were interesting with a pumpkin flavor. The *Tandoor-Grilled Lamb Chops* (sweet & sour pear chutney, curry leaf

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potatoes), which were extremely tender, marinated with a creamy yogurt coating, and cooked medium rare. Both dishes were paired with a Bull Rush Merlot 2002, from the Matua Valley, New Zealand.



We ended our tasting menus with sweet perfection with Pastry Chef Surbhi Sahni's creations of *Emperor's Morsel Shahi Tukra*, (crispy saffron bread pudding, cardamom cream, candied almonds), and a silky *Mango Cheesecake* with a brûlée topping paired with a Duck Walk Vineyard Blue Berry Port 2003 from Long Island, and a Vidal Blanc Ice Wine 2003 also from Duck Walk Vineyard.

Afterwards, we had the opportunity to chat at length with Chef Suvir, and learned more about this interesting chef from New Delhi, Indian, who firmly believes in always learning, and that "ego shouldn't keep you from learning, which sometimes involves learning what is wrong, which sometimes turns out well, and that you find magic when you least expect it." With one cookbook published, and two more cookbooks on the way, (in 2006 and 2007), it would seem that he has little free time, but he continues to test new recipes, cook, read, and is also writing a novel about an Indian man that comes to the US and finds food. A classically trained Indian singer, he fits in music lessons, plays with his 2 cats (which he is allergic to, but loves) and a Great Dane/Labrador mix dog, and travels when he can because "it opens up your palate and you learn a lot."

As for Chef Hemant, he is a quiet man who is a tandoori master, who also apparently gets little sleep, and when Suvir told us that Hemant has a baby girl, just 2 years old, Hemant's face lit up with the smile of a proud father.

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