



Spice of life

Amaya co-founder Namita Panjabi conjures up a taste of India as she takes us through the making of some of the key dishes in her Michelin-starred Indian restaurant

India has a great grilling tradition, from street barbecues to skilled tandoor cooking. Our menu celebrates this wonderful grilling tradition with the freshest of produce. Everything comes in fresh every day, is marinated and brought upstairs to be cooked from scratch in full view of the restaurant. Grills taste best when they are eaten off the fire before the meat starts to toughen. We have deliberately not installed fryers in the kitchen, as we wanted grills to be the mainstay of Amaya.

We have four tandoors operating in the kitchen at different temperatures, ranging from 200–350°F. Temperatures fall and rise according to the amount of food cooking in there, and the skill is knowing exactly when each of the multiple skewers is ready. One tandoor is dedicated to just doing the different kinds of bread.

The tawa, a flat metal griddle, is commonly seen on street corners in India. In Amaya we use it for flat kebabs, oysters and scallops. The sigri, the open-flame barbecue, is used for many items that have become our signature dishes: fish, lamb chops and glazed spicy aubergine.

We recommend ordering six to eight dishes per person, and our menu is written according to how long it takes to cook the item so as to maintain a gentle flow of dishes to the table. In north India the broad tradition would be to eat dry food and kebabs and then go on to a curry and biryani to finish.

Unusually for a restaurant in Britain we source spices ourselves from India each year.

We wait for English asparagus to kick off our introduction of asparagus each year and this will continue until late August or



even September, depending on the weather. Good, fresh asparagus tastes wonderful and we do not have to do much to it. We toss it in a wok, which is unusual in itself, and there is a drizzle of chilli sauce.

India does not have much of a tradition of salads, but this cabbage and noodle salad is actually a recipe from our home in Bombay. It uses humble ingredients but has great textures and it just touched the right note with our customers from day one.

Corn on the cob is a monsoon favourite and another one from Bombay. The streets will be filled with vendors barbecuing this now. It is butter, lime and chilli, a simple but yummy combination.

In the basil tikka dish, the poultry is marinated for over 24 hours using a blend of local and Asian basil and other leaves. The green colour is an essential part of the glamour of this dish and it must be made very fry fresh in order to keep the colour. Indian holy basil, known as tulsi, is a revered herb and has many health benefits.

With the seafood dishes, the seabass is barbecued and crusted with shaved coconut and almonds, whereas the prawns are cooked in the tandoor.

Both the blood orange and cinnamon brulée and the Morello cherry cheesecake are summer dishes, so haven't been on the menu long. India does not have a vast variety of table desserts, so desserts for us at Amaya are about taking Western techniques and adding a touch of India.

Our bar team have come up with new fruity and floral cocktails, which are perfect for a pre-dinner drink. And for the meal, we have a wonderful wine list specially chosen to go with spicy food.

ON THE TABLE

Grilled English asparagus

Corn on the cob

Crispy cabbage and noodle salad

Tandoori prawns

Chargrilled seabass

Basil chicken tikka

Blood orange and cinnamon brulée

Morello cherry cheesecake