



Singapore spice

One country, 20 international chefs, an array of mouth-watering dishes, and the creation of culinary masterpieces. Welcome to masterclass.

Interviewed by Riaan J. George



The recently held “Global Chef Exchange 2011” in Singapore was a unique culinary exercise that brought together 20 reputed international chefs from across the globe, in an attempt to get participating chefs to incorporate Singapore’s flavours into their own cooking and to develop recipes inspired by their Singapore experience. The expert culinary panel featured renowned international names like Alvin Leung from Bo Innovation Hong Kong, Matt Stone from Greenhouse by Joost Perth, Mohamad Kamal Eddine from the Burj Al Arab Dubai, Josean Alija from Nerua at the Guggenheim Bilbao and, our very own, Chef Hemant Oberoi, Grand Executive Chef of the Taj Mahal Palace and Towers, Mumbai. Three other Indian master chefs were also present at the event — Executive Chef Anurudh Khanna from The

Park in New Delhi, Chef Kunal Kapoor from The Leela Kempinski Gurgaon, and Masterchef India and Senior Executive Chef Manisha Bhasin from ITC Maurya, New Delhi.

Liquid caught up with Chef Oberoi, who gracefully shared his Singapore experience with us.

Tell us about your experience at the Global Chef Exchange 2011 in Singapore.

It was truly an enjoyable experience for all of us. In spite of travelling to Singapore so often, this trip gave us a whole new perspective of the city. Meeting with leading chefs from around the globe was an unbelievable experience. I learnt new aspects of their life and eating habits. I explored the famous hawker centres, markets, discovered the spices, and interacted with local chefs. This city is truly inspiring for someone like me.

What was it like working with different Indian chefs, each of whom came with different ideologies, schools of thought and backgrounds?

I always enjoy meeting and working with different people. It is nice to know how people think and work. New ideologies are always welcome. I have been in the industry for 35 years and therefore, it is important for me not to appear old-fashioned. I always try to keep up with my contemporaries as well as the newer generation. The food business is all about reinvention and I want to embody that quality.

What was the best part about working with and interacting with chefs from around the world?

They are from different parts of the world and therefore, their thinking



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in Singapore is exceptional. The quality of food, the freshness of the ingredients as well as the variety of inspirations (Chinese, Malay, Indian) are all responsible for this. Moreover, there is no shortage of quality chefs. Tourists and locals in Singapore know and love their food. You can get a good meal at a hawker centre for \$3 or a Michelin star meal at a fine dining restaurant for \$300. So many top chefs like Wolfgang Puck, Guy Savoy, Santi and Daniel Boulud have set up their Asian outposts here. That's what makes a city a food capital.



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is very different. They have different perceptions of our country. Most of them think very highly of India today. I am glad that they have put us on that platform. By interacting with them, I am increasingly convinced that we should be superpowers on the culinary front. Though all the chefs were well-travelled, highly cultured and knowledgeable, I particularly enjoyed interacting with Chef Alvin from Bo Innovation, Hong Kong. He plays with food so differently.

The result of this exchange is the “Prawn Laksa Pilaf”. Tell us about it.

We were asked to create something new and unusual. We first thought of creating a prawn curry with noodles. We finalised on the idea of a pilaf with a different flavour to the prawns — curry leaves, lemon grass and the laksa leaf. It was wonderful. Traditionally, laksa is had with noodles. Our pilaf had an interesting new twist. We also did some Singaporean poppiah rolls with Indian prawn masala filling.

In your opinion, can Singapore be considered as one of the world's food capitals?

Most certainly. The food scene

Lastly, would a similar culinary exercise be successful in India? What are your views on our food scene?

Rather than concentrating only on Formula 1, we should concentrate on promoting our food. We have thousands of recipes which are undiscovered. The French reinvented their classics to become masters. We are fond of fusion but that is not true Indian food. We need to create a genre of contemporary Indian cuisine which is devoid of foreign influences. This is what I have attempted to do at Varq in The Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi, and we hope that contemporary Indian cuisine makes a global impact. 🍷