

Text **Raynah Coutinho**

Exclusivity alone isn't **Luxury**

The very American 27-year-old executive chef, Alex Sanchez, is credited with the success of The Table in Mumbai which, within a year of its opening, is proving to be tough competition to uber-exclusive Indigo. He chats with 24K on India, on Mumbai's dining out culture, food and what luxury means



What is your interpretation of the Indian palette?

(It is all about) bold flavours and spicy food.

What has been your strategy to take The Table to the position it enjoys today?

Being true to what I do, cooking what I like to eat and listening to feedback. I find that many chefs cook to feed their egos rather than their guests. When I say feedback, I mean the kind that comes from guests not responding well to a dish or also little things that our front-of-house staff

notices. Sometimes, it takes as little as switching the positions of the lettuce and tomatoes in a sandwich to make it easier to eat.

Have any Indian dishes found their way into your own daily diet?

Absolutely. I eat *dal-rice* everyday!

Luxury hotels are clearly defined, and luxury clothing, jewellery and cars are well demarcated. When it comes to food, what would you say luxury is?

My definition has changed quite a bit since I came to India. For instance, no ingredient is more valuable than another. It is about the care that goes into a product. We have a purveyor who brings in ingredients from London and they are all seasonal, all near perfect. If you're expecting me to say lobster or caviar, I'm not



sure because I think today, exclusivity alone is not luxury. Maybe, a seasonal (ingredient) means luxury.

When you're not working you eat at?

Kala Ghoda café is my breakfast spot. I love doing brunch at the Four Seasons. Other than that, I eat at Ayub's, Bade Miyan and Delhi Darbar.

How have you evolved your style to suit India and the Indian diner?

The ingredients here are different. In California, you can rely on the ingredients to work some magic. I can throw them all in, toss it all up in olive oil and turn out a stunning dish where each ingredient is flavourful. But here, I feel the ingredients

are diluted in a way so I have to use more aromatics and condiments.

Also, I have to adapt to preferences, which I don't mind doing at all provided I don't feel like compromising on a dish by making it spicier. Like I said about chefs and their egos earlier — that is a luxury one can afford in many big dining cities of the world where the diner is much more experimental — but it does not work here.

What foodstuff do you miss most from home (the US)?

Burritos!!

What do you like to do when you're not working with food?

Sleep! Other than that, I like watching musicians perform; I am a musician myself. I play the drums. And I like riding bikes but haven't had the chance to do that in a long time. }

