

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. }

