

Publication: The Crest Mumbai;Date: Dec 24, 2011;Section: Cover Story;Page: 8;



HI, HI, AMERICAN PIE

A new generation of globetrotting chefs and restaurateurs has returned home to give Indian gastronomes an authentic taste of global cuisines

PRONOTI DATTA
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

The best consequence of the hordes of expatriates and NRIs migrating to India is an efflorescence of culinary activity across the country. Their occupation of choice seems to be setting up restaurants and food businesses. As a result, there are more dining choices than ever before.

The best example is Goa, where you get some of the best international food in the country. To be sure there are fewer NRIs than expats. But the ones that have settled in the country have established themselves on India's culinary map.

Take Nazneen Rebelo, the owner of the charming Café Chocolatti in Candolim in Goa. Raised in England, Rebelo met her husband Ricardo on a holiday in Goa in 1994. She's a professional speech therapist and hadn't considered entering the food business till friends encouraged her to sell her home-made chocolates.

Rebelo began selling chocolates and later brownies, cookies and coffee. She started Chocolatti eight years ago in the garden of her villa. "I've always had a passion for food, in particular sweet things," she says. "But I really learnt everything in Goa." The place, which serves excellent sandwiches and breakfast, reflects the owner's British upbringing. Rebelo offers an English breakfast, tea with scones and cream, ginger cake and the very British Dundee fruit cake.

Similarly, Uni Vaid moved to India



from the US for love. She married a Delhi boy. A graduate of Wharton, Vaid spent years at a corporate job before her passion for food — and compliments on her cooking — steered her to a career in food.

Six years ago, she started American Ambrosia, a catering business that specialises in American classics like cheesecakes, cupcakes, brownies, pies and breads such as bagels. "I had already known from travelling to India that no one was doing anything American," Vaid says.

"I would look for bagels and cheesecakes. And all were European style. People were making gelatine set cheesecakes. In

food. "After living in San Francisco, you get spoiled by freshness of food, innovativeness, the simplicity of food that's true to flavours," he says. "I said that's what the city needs."

Yusuf grew up in Bangalore and left for the US when he was 18. After finishing college, he made a career in telecom.

"There was one deep passion for food," he says. "I always wanted to open a restaurant. I used to visit Bombay and I found that there were (dining) limited choices. There were few standalones."

It would probably have been easier to open a restaurant in San Francisco. It

Uni Vaid (left) moved to India from the US for love. The Wharton grad spent years at a corporate job before her passion for food steered her to a new career. Six years ago, she started American Ambrosia, a catering business that specialises in American classics like cheesecakes, cupcakes, pies, brownies and bagels. "I had already known from travelling to India that no one was doing anything American," says Vaid

America no one knows that as cheesecake. They expect a pure cream cheese cake with crumb cookie crust."

Mumbai, on the other hand, is being served a piece of the American West coast courtesy Jay Yusuf, who brought a bit of San Francisco with him when he repatriated to India. In November 2010, he opened The Table, a fine dining restaurant that specialises in modern

took Yusuf more than six months to find a suitable location.

Muslim landlords didn't want to lease spaces to a restaurant serving pork and alcohol, he says, while Gujarati landlords disapproved of meat in general. But it's easier to make a mark in Mumbai, which has few fine dining standalones. The difference, he says, is like "owning a Ferrari in Italy and Bombay". ■