

ATUL KOCHHAR SPICING UP OUR LIVES





The innovative Indian chef, born in Jamshedpur northern India Atul Kochhar is revered for his masterful use of spicing.

Born into a catering company, food has always been central to Atul. His career took off when he went to work for the Oberoi group of hotels in New Delhi. Progressing quickly, he was soon head hunted across continents to work in the UK.

Never complacent with the quality of his work, he returns to his homeland whenever possible to research new recipes and ingredients. His acclaimed cookbook Indian Essence is the product of one such trip and he is currently working on a second book on Indian vegetarian food.

He has represented South-East England in the BBC's Great British Menu three years running, in 2006 Kochhar beat renowned chef Gary Rhodes in order to represent the South-East in the final round.

This year Atul has opened two new restaurants - Vatika in the Wickham Vineyard, Hampshire (vatikarestaurant.co.uk) and Ananda in Dublin.

Atul's new Wickham restaurant Vatika (which means vineyard or orchard in Sanskrit and Hindi), is in City Life country, we took the opportunity to ask the Indian born British chef a few questions, particularly about what inspires him and his vision for the future.

DID YOU ALWAYS WANT TO BE A CHEF, AND WHY?

Yes, Dad was a caterer and I was always mesmerised to see him cook with the speed and ease and the numbers he catered for. He became my champion and I just followed him – this made it all the easier for me to pursue the career of a chef.

IF YOU WEREN'T A CHEF WHAT OTHER PROFESSION WOULD YOU PURSUE?

Being born to Asian Indian parents, the expectations are always high – to be a doctor, engineer or a chartered accountant. On reflection I think – I would have ended up as a doctor.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU IN YOUR COOKING AND YOUR LIFE GENERALLY?

For my cooking – it's seasons and home grown food that has always been my inspiration.

For my life – it is my family, my wife, children and my charity "Find Your feet" which works with vulnerable families living in rural India and Malawi helping them to build a future free from hunger, poverty and discrimination. All this keeps me going – I want to do so much more for my family. This one life doesn't seem enough.

YOU HAVE ACHIEVED A GREAT DEAL IN A SHORT TIME, WHAT IS THE NEXT BIG THING FOR ATUL KOCHHAR?

I have always taken life – the way it comes on a day to day basis. What would be the next thing – I really don't know.



ON THE COUCH

Atul Kochhar takes a moment with the City Life psychologist to sum up his psyche, one word or so at a time.

THE MOMENT BEFORE PRESENTING A NEW DISH FOR THE FIRST TIME?

Critical

WINNING?

Great

LOSING?

Not so great

HOW YOU FEEL WHEN YOU RETURN TO YOUR HOMETLAND, INDIA?

Emotional

AND WHEN YOU COME BACK TO THE UK?

Happy

THE LOVE OF YOUR LIFE?

Deepti, Amisha, Arjun

YOUR FAVOURITE DISH?

Smoked black lentil stew.



A LITTLE SPICE IN THE COUNTRY

VATIKA RESTAURANT REVIEW

Approaching Vatika, a restaurant nestled in the vineyards of Wickham, you'll immediately appreciate the quietness and serenity of the location. This is Michelin starred Atul Kochhar's new country outpost, headed up by protégé head chef Jitin Joshi, whose credits include Benares and The Capital.

The restaurant is situated in a plain brick building, mostly grey in decoration with fabulous views out over the vineyards seen through double doors and landscape picture windows, the barn like interior has three large and impressive chandeliers shaped like cart wheels, and a wall of wine bottles. All attention is on the food, "modern British with an Indian twist" sort of a seventy thirty split in favour of the British element, our chef Jitin reliably informed us. The reverse is true of Benares, Atul's London restaurant which leans more towards Indian.

I was joined for lunch by my colleague Danielle, Stuart from My Jam who kindly arranged this lunch and Davinia, Atul's very able PA.

We knew we were in for a treat when the bread locally baked to Jitin's own recipe was served with spiced salts in test tubes!

The lunchtime menu is inventive, varied and interesting, and includes starters Tandoor Cooked Squab Rocket Leaves and Rye Croutons, King Edward Cakes Greengage Preserve and Tamarind Foam are standouts.

The mains are equally inventive and original, including Spice Battered Fish Turmeric Crushed Potatoes and Pickled Cabbage, Fallow Venison Biryani and Blackberry Raita, and Pearl Barley Risotto, Red Onion Rings and Parsley Pesto are good examples from this excellent lunchtime menu.

The menu made it all the harder to make your choices. A tough job, but we were able



to soldier on to the desserts. Outstanding examples from the dessert menu included such gems as Chocolate Mousse, Orange Jelly and Filo Crisp, Carrot Pudding and Vanilla Ice Cream.

The wine? A good choice from an extensive wine list, we sampled the local Wickham red, which was very smooth, full bodied and fruity.

Service throughout the afternoon was meticulous and unobtrusive.

The waiting staff must be complimented they helped make a good afternoon a great and memorable one.

The courses were interrupted by canapés and pre desserts, which further embellished the Vatika experience.

City Life experienced the lunchtime menu, we talked with Jitin who was anxious to tell us that the evening menu was equally inventive but had more elements to it. All ingredients are sourced locally, which can only bode well for the local economy and local reputations.

I look forward to sampling the current autumn menu, which features equally delicious offerings such as LOBSTER BARLEY- Crumbed Lobster Claw, Pearl Barley Risotto and Innis & Gunn Jelly, RABBIT CABBAGE- Confit Wild Rabbit, Jellied Cabbage and Lemon Custard from the Starters and from the Mains, HALIBUT PEANUT - Roasted Halibut, Saffron Fennel and Peanut Sauce, and PRAWN TURNIP- Tandoori Tiger Tail, Goan Style Turnips and Tamarind Glaze.

I personally think that this can only get better, Atul, Jitin and his team have a winning formula with Vatika, India has made great strides into the heart of the Hampshire countryside, and can only make further steps with the unstoppable combination of fine local Wickham wines and the unique Vatika dining experience.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!



WHAT WE HAD

Own recipe locally baked bread with a range of spiced salts and butter.

CANAPÉS

Paprika Cheese Straws, Green Olives stuffed with Mint Chutney on a bed of Curried Mayonnaise, this was delicious, lot of taste and textures.

STARTERS

Orange Cured Mackerel, Mustard Raita, Radish Fritters- great combination, the fritters were very delicate and subtle in taste that complimented the cured mackerel, beautifully presented.

Honey Glazed Duck, Artichoke Puree, Clove Dust- what a clever arrangement, the duck was beautifully moist.

MAINS

Charred Basil Chicken, Israel Cous Cous, Smoked Tomato Fondue- this was great, particularly loved the spicy tomato fondue, great contrast to the charred chicken, looked really appetising on the bed of cous cous.

Fallow Venison Biryani, Blackberry Raita, my colleague really enjoyed this, the blackberry raita she claims was magical.

PRE-DESSERTS

Caramelised Black Olives, Melon and Ginger Granita with Lime Leaf Foam Topping- this we all agreed was delicious, the olives were particularly good, unique!

DESSERTS

Fennel Bread and Butter Pudding, Ginger Custard- a great twist on an old favourite, great presentation, the plate just served to frame this delicious treat!

Must confess though, could have eaten another couple of servings!

Saffron Yoghurt Parfait, Pistachio Biscotti, and Lime- This looked lovely, particularly the Biscotti, a real dish of contrasts

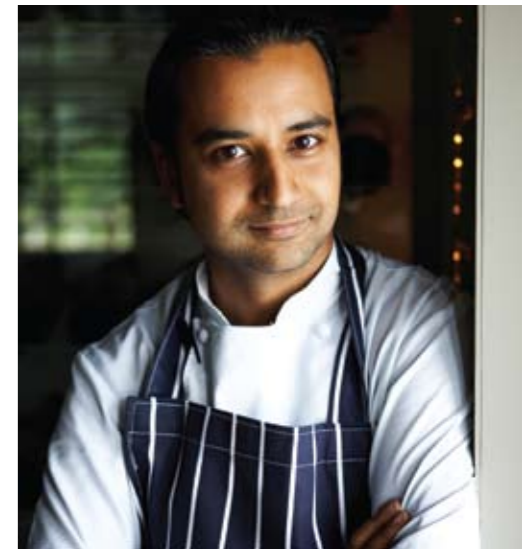
POST DESSERT

Chocolate Bourbon Biscuits, Nutmeg Donuts on a Raspberry and Red Wine Conserve- this was a lovely idea, miniature donuts to accompany the fresh brewed coffee.

DRINKS

Wickham Red- Wickham Vineyard, 2004/5 The local red, very smooth, deep and fruity.

Trebbiano di Soave and Garganega, 2001 Savoury and herby, a classic Italian white.



Vatika is open:

Wednesday - Sunday

Lunch 12pm - 2-30pm

Dinner 6.30pm - 9.30pm

Lunchtime:

£19.50 two courses £24.50 three courses

Dinner:

£30.00 two courses £35.00 three courses

Vatika Restaurant

Wickham Vineyard

Botley Road

Shedfield

Southampton

S032 2HL

Tel 01329 830 405 or email reservations

info@vatikarestaurant



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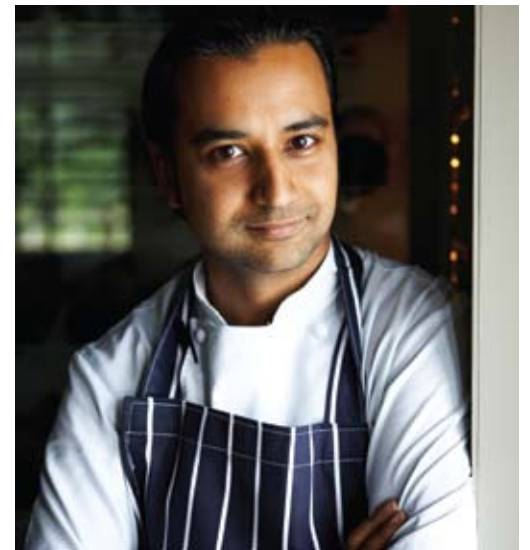
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