



Curry Love

By NYX MARTINEZ

In India, curry is a general term used for any savory sauce made from different spices. It goes well with rice or bread.

Photo courtesy of Grace Figovc

THERE'S JUST SOMETHING ABOUT CURRY.

The way it sizzles on one's palate and fills a room with aromatic flavor. The way it conjures memories—for me, distant memories of arriving in a unique world known as India when I was just five years old.

It was a world where elephants and cattle crossed the road, and you didn't dare cross them. Where rickshaws rattled by and we hunted for quartz stones outside our simple house in Madurai, south of the country. Where the first thing that hit you when alighting the airplane was that dizzying scent—of people from all walks of life, women garbed in colorful saris, bearded men wearing ash on their foreheads, and food, spicy food. Food in street stalls and food in iron casts, the dances of spice swirling out on crowded streets buzzing with energy, frantic with noise.

India was crazy, yes, but also tantalizing and delicious.

Twenty-three years later, I won my husband's heart by cooking curry, having learned the secrets of seduction by concocting exotic cuisines. Did India teach me that, her flavorful way of life making such an impression at an early age? I suppose it was, in fact, Thailand, where I lived as a teenager and was introduced to its version of curry, called *gaeng kiew wan*. This use coconut milk to cream the curry, blending it to be either mild or on-fire hot. During a short visit to Malaysia, I learned of their peanut-infused curry, and recently, in Vietnam, was introduced to Saigon's curry soup, a potato-laden dish better eaten with bread than rice.

Imagine my delight when I traveled to Germany, and, on a rain-drenched, intoxicated Oktoberfest night, discovered Currywurst! This *Deustcher* staple street food made its debut in Berlin in 1949, when Herta Heuwer decided to combine ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, and basic curry powder into a concoction poured over grilled pork sausage. Today, Currywurst is almost a German pop icon, the exotic foodie trend that refused to go away.

Last week, a craving forced me into a nearby café whose seasonal gimmick announced a new dish on their menu—curry! I had it for lunch but was more than a bit disappointed because this was not the curry of my youth, not the one strong with turmeric and coriander and cumin, grounded with mortar and pestle, and served with a bowl of curd. This was a distilled version—and you can't water down love.

But tonight, yes! I finally find a place, closer to home than I'd suspected. It's the Legend of India restaurant (Tel: (02) 836 4232; 114B Jupiter Street, Bel-Air II, Makati City, Philippines). The owners and chefs are all Indian, proving there's no better way to get the taste you crave than straight from the source. Celebrating its first anniversary, the young fine-dining restaurant has gained popularity by mere word of mouth. I order the Butter Chicken, Rogan Josh (Goat Curry) and *Palak Paneer* (Cheese with Spinach). One bite and I knew—my search is over. I am satisfied; I have tasted India. ●

FINDING CURRY

RAJU MANDHYAN, host of *Expat Insights TV* (www.mandhyan.com), recommends other places to find Indian cuisine in Manila:

■ **HOLE-IN-THE-WALL:** Swagat restaurant is low-key, well priced and clean, run by Indians Komal and Sanjay Khanchandani. (119 FCC Building, Rada Street, Legaspi Village, Makati City; Tel.: (+632) 752-5669)

■ **NICE QUICK LUNCH:** New Bombay restaurant is popular, delicious, and has grown fast, with a few branches. (Tower 1 G/F The Columns, 6821 Ayala Ave. cor. Gil Puyat Brgy. Bel - Air or 5/F The Podium, ADB Ave. Ortigas Center, Mandaluyong City; Tel.: (+632) 637-4367)

■ **CLASSIC MEAL:** Kashmir restaurant is Manila's oldest Indian restaurant run by an Indian family. Its rich food hasn't changed much in years. (Festejo Bldg., Pasay Road, Makati; Tel.: (+632) 844-4924)

DECONSTRUCTING CURRY



From *basileus*, Greek word for “king,” **basil** is used in many dishes around the globe. It is easy to grow. Herbalists recommend basil for nausea, motion sickness and as digestion aid.

One of the easiest ways to bring a dish to life is by adding **chili powder**. Usually a mix of ground cayenne peppers, paprika, garlic and cumin, chili powder contains the chemical compound capsaicin which helps fight diabetes.

Turmeric, commonly known as “Indian Saffron” in Europe, is a key ingredient in many Indian and Malay dishes. Usually ground into root powder, this distinct yellow spice is believed to be a natural liver detoxifier.

Native to India, **green cardamom** is one of the most expensive spices by weight. It is known to relieve heartburn and improve metabolism. It is also believed to be a natural aphrodisiac.

The **star anise** is a less expensive substitute to the anise herb that provides most curry dishes with a subtle licorice taste. Commonly grown in China, it is also used as an antiviral to Tami flu and avian influenza.

Q&A:

WITH CHEF THOMAS

Indian cooking has influenced the whole world. Today, you can find it almost everywhere. Executive Chef Thomas Figovc of the Leela Hotel in India tells us what defines Indian curry.

Q: How is Indian curry different from other curries around the world? India has many regions with different influences, more than 40 languages and diverse styles of cooking. Generally, Indian curry relies heavily on the quality and kind of blended spices: we call this *masala*. It's a combination of either powdered or pasted spices like cardamom, turmeric, anise, and coriander..

Q: What is the history of curry in India, and where did it originate? Indian history goes back to 3,000 B.C. Some cooking equipment which were used 2,500 years ago are still being used today, such as the tandoor oven or what is known as a clay oven.

Q: Can you tell us about the different regions and their styles of cooking? The land of India had many conquerors who brought their own food and style of cooking with them. Here's how you can recognize some of them:

■ **Awadhi, North Indian area:** Here, it is cooked with many spices such as cardamom and cloves, plus almonds and chestnuts for the gravy of the curry.

■ **Punjabi, Northwest India and Pakistan:** This is well—

known around the world. Their curries are cooked with tomatoes, onions, butter and cream.

■ **Malabar, Western Ghats Area and Kerala:** The use of coconut for seafood and fish is dominant.

■ **Jain / Mharwadi:** You can find this in communities all over India. It is 100 percent vegetarian. Their food is cooked without onions or garlic. The use of *Ghee* (clarified butter) is commended.

■ **Bengal:** Those from this area in and around Calcutta cook their curry with mustard oil, mustard seeds, and often, yoghurt.

In India, curry is eaten with rice or *Naan* bread. Condiments are yoghurts or *raithas*. Vegetables like *allo gobi* are also eaten at the same time. The amazing thing about Indian cuisine is that there are no strict rules with the technique—only the basic standard in terms of what spices to use when getting the right flavor from a particular region. But the best way to learn about curry is to come to India and have a taste from the authentic curry land itself!

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FACT

The **LEELA KEMPINSKI GURGAON** was voted the Best Dining Destination in Gurgaon by the *Times Food and Nightlife Guide* in 2010.



Thomas lives in New Delhi with his Filipino wife Grace (who wrote *Incredible, Indeed* in this issue) and their two kids.