



CHEF
HARINAYAK
Chef, restaurateur, author

In 10 years I do not doubt that Indian cuisine will stand right next to French and Japanese cuisine in terms of international popularity

Career highlights

Hari Nayak started testing his hand in his home kitchen when he was around 14, without thinking that he would ever become a chef. It was later when he joined the Hotel Management Institute (WGSMA) in Manipal, that he started thinking that he wanted to become a professional chef. "During my hotel management education, I started putting in extra hours in the hotel kitchen that was part of our school. I had to educate myself at the best cooking school of the world. I choose the CIA - Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park NY. It was probably the best decision of my career," says Chef Nayak.

He has worked alongside the best of chefs and mentors like Daniel Bolud, Albert Adria, and Marcus Samuelsson. His first book 'Modern Indian Cooking' was named as one of the top 10 books of the year. He shares his enthusiasm, "I enjoy writing books as much as I enjoy cooking. It drives me to learn and research more about our cuisine. There is so much to learn. It is best to share the knowledge that I have learnt through my experiences and creating a unique style of cooking. It is a very humbling experience to see my books being used as guides in many hotel management and culi-

FIVE FUN FACTS

MY FAVOURITE CUISINE
Mangalorian coastal & Mexican street food

MY FAVOURITE RESTAURANT The French Laundry, Napa Valley

MY GREATEST INSPIRATION Seasonal ingredients and cuisines from other parts of the world

MY BEST DESTINATION FOR FOOD Kerala & Singapore

MY FAVOURITE TIME-OUT Photography and food travel to a culinary destination

nary schools." He is also credited with creating the first mainstream Indian national QSR in the USA in partnership with Wholefoods Market.

On being a gamechanger

"I always knew that I wanted to do something different. As a sibling where my sister is a doctor and my brother is an engineer, I wanted to go into nontraditional field. When I came to the US in 1995, Indian food was not well represented. The

local Americans knew very little of Indian food. It was the basic creamy curries and naan bread. The few restaurants that were considered the best were serving very average food. Today there are so many restaurants and chefs who are doing such an amazing job to represent our cuisine and culture," says Chef Nayak. He feels that it is a good time for Indian cuisine as it is being widely accepted and loved. "I use my Western training and incorporate into the traditional flavours of Indian cooking. That makes it modern and unique. The locals and Indians who want something new and exciting enjoy it. It is a unique niche market," he adds.

Focus on innovation

Chef Nayak's culinary style is a cuisine that is a blend of traditional Indian dishes with a modern twist and classic Western dishes flavoured by Indian spices and seasonings. He says, "For my seasonings, the focus was American and Western with a flavour

punch from ingredients and spices from India and around the world. The spices were inspired by American BBQ rubs created with an Indian twist."

He feels that being a celebrity chef does glamourise the profession. "This is a good time for chefs. The profession needs to be glamorised and celebrated. This reminds me of the days when I used to work in the hotels back in India. I think gone are the days where the general manager of the hotel wanted only the people who wore suit and tie to be out in the lobby and restaurants interacting with the customers. Now they are proud to showcase the white uniform

and the chef. Customers want to know and be one with the person who is responsible for the meal that they enjoyed," he observes. He adds, "Chefs are more educated these days. It is a global phenomenon and it is here to stay. Hence the open kitchen trend that is very common now around the world."

Future vision

The presence of many top Indian chefs internationally who are doing extremely well is increasing, especially in London and New York. "They are influencing our cuisine to put it on the global culinary map. It helps our cuisine and country very much and makes a significant impact. I feel we are all working towards one common goal - to showcase India, and Indian chefs are not far behind; we stand equal with the world's top chefs," he proudly claims. He believes that more chefs are going to join the movement. "In 10 years I do not doubt that Indian cuisine will stand right next to French and Japanese cuisine in terms of international popularity," he sums up.

As told to Steena Joy



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