

CEIA

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BEYOND THE REGULAR PUNJABI FARE

Much more than just Butter Chicken

Culinary Maestro
Chef Matteo Arvonio
Italy's pride, India's joy!

The Goodness of
Home-Made Chhena
India's rustic cheese



CHEF MATTEO ARVONIO

Italy's pride, India's joy!

In conversation with Bindu Gopal Rao

With an illustrious career spanning different continents, Chef Matteo Arvonio, Executive Italian Chef, JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru makes sure that each of his dishes tells a story of his culinary journey, delivering unparalleled dining experiences. His deep respect for local ingredients and knowledge of food makes sure that each dish shines with flavour and taste. Chef Matteo Arvonio's understanding of Italian cuisine and its nuances has meant that a meal at Alba in JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru is going to be a memorable affair. He speaks exclusively to CEIA to tell us more about his journey to date.

Tell us about your earliest memories of food, and how they influenced your growing years?

When I was a kid, during my vacation, my uncle and I would wake up early and travel to the fish market to choose fresh seafood. My favourites used to be mussels, prawns, and crabs. After coming back home, me and my brother helped with preparing the meal for the entire family and that would be a special occasion. I would experience immense joy when I would cook something delicious that would fill my family with happiness and they were excited to eat it, as was I.

When and why did you first realise you wanted to be a chef?

I realised that I wanted to be a chef at the age of 13. I was lucky to have two passions, food, and travel, that remain constant to this day. I decided to put the two together and realised that as a chef I would be able to travel the world while cooking to my heart's joy. It was a very clear thought, and that clarity allowed me to pursue my interest with a focused approach.

Tell us about your three-decade journey and how you look back at it?

My journey spans over three decades in the



culinary industry as culinary college starts early in Europe. I enrolled when I was 15. This was a life-changing experience as we had to study for 9 months and work for three months during the summer. I had the opportunity to learn from seasoned chefs and mentors, often spending months away from home. At 19, I ventured to Denmark for my first solo stint outside Italy, marking the beginning of my international culinary exploration.

Throughout my second decade, I honed my skills in luxury hotels across Italy and various esteemed stand-alone restaurants throughout Europe including the UK, Spain, Switzerland, and Germany. This period taught me self-sufficiency, adaptability to new cultures and cuisines, and the importance of selecting reputable establishments and working with top chefs. By the end of my second decade, I had developed my culinary style and felt confident in my abilities. In 2007, I embraced a new challenge by accepting a position as Chef de Cuisine in Mumbai, overseeing a fine-dining restaurant. This marked the beginning of my journey outside Europe, leading me to work in diverse locations such as the Maldives, Doha, twice in Shanghai

and Mumbai again. These experiences exposed me to a plethora of new flavours, ingredients, and culinary traditions, allowing me to work alongside talented chefs from across Asia.

Before coming to Bangalore, I worked with two startups in Italy, where I amalgamated my knowledge of Italian, European, and Asian cuisines, resulting in a further evolution of my culinary style.

How have you changed the food at Alba?

At Alba, I bring together the gourmet experiences from various states of Italy, blending them harmoniously with my extensive knowledge of European and Mediterranean cuisines. My aim is to showcase the inherent beauty, rich flavours, and exceptional ingredients of Italian cuisine, while simultaneously infusing it with a contemporary twist. I have tried to showcase the evolution of traditional Italian recipes, while still retaining their authentic flavour.

As you like local ingredients, how do you manage to use them in Italian fare?

One of the keys to Italian cuisine is the freshness of the ingredients. Researching the most interesting and beautiful products in every country is my priority before crafting a menu, and this process never stops. Seasonal and organic vegetables, fresh fish and seafood, and artisanal cheese producers are all essential elements of my cuisine. I carefully select, taste, study, and experiment with these ingredients in my dishes and new ideas.

Does fusion cuisine appeal to you?

Fusion cuisine can indeed be fun and interesting, but it requires a solid foundation of knowledge. We must have a clear reason for creating such dishes or employing particular techniques. Above all, for fusion cuisine to make sense, we must deeply understand the base cuisines we are working with. Otherwise, an immature attempt at fusion can become nothing more than a “con-fusion” that leaves guests perplexed and unsatisfied.



What are your future plans?

I have embarked on an exciting project, and step by step, we're growing with a very young team aiming to continuously improve. Following the successful launch of our new menu and our first Truffle promotion, we are gearing up to introduce our tasting menu next month, offering a new experience to our guests.

What do you think of the culinary scene in India?

I was in the country in 2016 and then I moved abroad. When I came back, I was pleased to see a change that focused on the quality of the product from the part of the producers to chefs. Indian cuisine is becoming technique-based and refined, which is a very interesting change. During Covid-19, Indian food evolved with the challenges and adapted with a focus on including local and regional cuisine, while western cuisine was not able to adapt similarly. I think Indian cuisine is growing in the right direction and I love that.

How do you view food trends?

Food trends can bring about interesting additions to different cuisines. In India, it is interesting that the trend is towards research, unique ingredients, exploring regional and lesser-known cuisine. Sustainability plays a huge role with a focus on quality. Guests have evolved too and are curious about the source of the ingredients and the story behind it. This is a good change because cooking is, after all, a story that is presented on a plate.

