

food  
&  
drink

**fine dine/hangout**

**INDULGE**  
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taste notes

# CROUCHING SALAD & HIDDEN CRAB

Manoj Padmanaban's Big Bandha is back with a bang — this time, with dramatic presentations and global flavours

Manoj Padmanaban:  
Finishing with finesse

As they poured me a flute glass of bubbly at On The Rocks earlier this week, I was taken by surprise when a flaming cube of sugar was dropped into my drink. I watched with fascination as it fizzed to the bottom of the glass and soon took a sip of the drink that now boasted hints of cointreau and bitters. It dawned upon me then that this could be the reason that Manoj Padmanaban has named his latest pop-up dinner by his brand Big Bandha — as 'The Silence', 'sound of good food'. Sure enough, I barely managed a gasp as culinary theatrics vied with interesting flavours for our attention at the sneak peek of the exclusive menu.

## Sound of silence

"I was inspired by the tiny Kagari restaurant in Ginza, where there were barely seven seats and a long queue outside. Once you entered, this amazing bowl of ramen was already placed at the counter — and diners ate without talking. All you heard was the slurping!" shares Manoj, also agreeing that his trip to Japan a few months ago had some influence on

this eight-course menu. However, with a big smile he offers that the 'silence' is just to suggest deeply engaging and satisfying food — laughter and chatter was definitely welcome at the table!

Surrounded by sheaves of handwritten notes and hand drawn images of the dishes, Manoj is a self-taught chef who caught our attention a while back when he had introduced us to *parotta* lasagne. It was such a hit that the 38-year-old is now toying with the idea of entering the frozen food market with ready-to-eat versions of some of his dishes. "On The Rocks offers the perfect elegant setting and a great kitchen team to back up my wild culinary plans," says the maverick chef who has Chef Deva Kumar, the Executive Chef of Crowne Plaza Chennai Adyar Park, ensuring that all his blueprints make it to the plate as per Manoj's creative vision.

## Mystery on a plate

This is Manoj's second sit-down pop-up dinner where there are limited seats (30 per session) and a uniquely curated menu. "The funny part is that we are nearly sold out and barely anyone has

asked us about the dishes or the menu," says Manoj, who is number crunching otherwise as the CEO of The Mayavaram Financial Chit Corp Ltd., and promises that this dinner is all about challenging perceptions of visuals, textures and flavours.

## Sashimi goes vegetarian

He is right. Chicken fried rice for starters and sashimi for the vegetarians? That should give you a taste of the mystery and mischief in Manoj's menu this time. Before the vegetarians panic — trust me, this sashimi is pure vegetarian with a side of wasabi and a stuffed taco that would make a great item for a guess-the-ingredient game! A bite of the proffered doughnut and I realise it is no dessert. Instead, savoury crab stuffed into pastry and dunked into a flavourful seafood bisque charms us with perfectly balanced elements. The salad arrives — masquerading as bite-size sliders. Feta cheese and figs they tell me! "Having lost 18 kgs and having to eat so many boring salads during that time — this is a special for me," says the gourmand. The *bed'a* shot makes a comeback from its last outing at

Everday Exotics — Manoj's pop-up menu at Six-O-One last year. It is another one of his creations that has found a contract with a beverage company and the recipe is now a top secret.

At Crowne Plaza Chennai Adyar Park, On October 5 and 6. Dinner only.  
At ₹2,500 (without a lcohol) and  
₹3,500 (with a lcohol).  
— Sabrina Rajan



Vegetarian sashimi

Pic: Nalshetra Krishna moorthy



Feta & fig salad