

pop-up

THROUGH ROSE-TINTED GLASSES

Manoj Padmanaban

This year, Manoj Padmanaban's Big Bandha brings us a mysterious eight-course meal that is themed around nostalgia but presented with contemporary culinary finesse

LAST TIME MANOJ PADMANABAN'S concept for his popular sit-down dinner was built around silence with a focus on flavour and visual surprises. This year, the CEO and chef-on-demand, has scripted a unique plan for the 30-seat dinner at The Flying Elephant in collaboration with Executive Chef Park Hyatt Chennai, Balaji Natarajan, and promises a curiously interactive meal.

Talking about his journey so far, Manoj says, "I always cooked with instinct instead of precise measurements. Hence, baking was never my forte." Changing that status, Manoj, who is the CEO of The Mayavaram Financial Chit Corp Ltd., has keenly studied recipes, techniques and methods from various kitchens during his travels and we can rest assured it will be reflected at the dinner table next weekend.

Hat & habit

Concocted during a long flight across countries, the script for this meal is designed around 'human habits'. In fact, if you study his teaser on social media — what looks like a hat with a scarf is actually a well-chewed pen cap! Pairing each course with a common habit, Manoj has played with more than just culinary techniques like molecular gastronomy but also moods and wordplay. From the morning ritual of a coffee and the newspaper to the mood during a rainy day — it all finds place in his menu. The former has a popular re-imagined breakfast item that might rustle like a paper, while the latter is a well-known fried snack which is redesigned as a dessert.

Cue the clues

Continuing to be mischievously secretive, Manoj lets on that he will be using ingredients

like truffle, jackfruit, smoked cinnamon and smoked duck among others. Between every course, there will be a short gap where Manoj will give you the story behind each course — the habit that inspired it and the ingredient that has gone into it. He adds that discussions are encouraged. We persuade Manoj to give us one last clue — he obliges with the most cryptic one. "Used during traditional South Indian weddings, as a welcoming tradition, this ingredient is only similar in name but is a completely different item and goes into a French cuisine-inspired dish here!" All we can tell you is that to get this one right — you need to stop and smell the 'roses'!

By prior booking only, at Flying Elephant, ₹3,500 all-inclusive (₹1,000 for paired beverages), on March 13 and 14.

— Sabrina Rajan

Back to TV dinners

Those who have been tracking this maverick chef's exciting culinary journey will remember the baked paratha lasagne that first shot Manoj Padmanaban to fame amongst the local gourmards in Chennai. The fusion dish now has a life of its own as it has been picked by Sumeru Foods to be included in the frozen food section in their bid to promote glocal, fusion dishes. We couldn't be happier — and promptly picked up the veg and the chicken version for a tasting. Pop it into the microwave, preferably with the plastic sheet partially opened, for about four to five minutes. The stringy cheese is simmering mildly and as you eat a spoonful and there is an instant joy in the familiar chicken masala and paratha combination that is oddly well matched with the molten cheese!

The veg version has the korma flavour and again the cheese rules the dish with confidence. Baked Paratha Lasagne Chicken priced at ₹175.

