

The epicurean journey of Hari Nayak

HARI NAYAK, AN INDIAN CHEF, RESTAURATEUR, AUTHOR AND A RENOWNED INDIAN FOOD AND CULINARY CONSULTANT, RUNS SIX SUCCESSFUL RESTAURANTS IN THE US. IN AN INTERACTION WITH WONDERLUST, THE CHEF TALKS ABOUT HIS JOURNEY, LOVE FOR FOOD, ABOUT HIS BOOKS AND MANY MORE.

Sonam Saini

An internationally acclaimed Celebrity Chef Hari Nayak has been alluring food lovers with his unique recipes. Nayak has penned five books about cooking. He has also been featured in the New York Times and Wall Street Journal.

Hari Nayak's tryst with cooking began at an early age. He says, "Apart from watching my grandmother cooking in the kitchen, I used to watch those cooking shows in TV by Martin Yen, Julia Child and Graham Care and thought this is what I want to be. When I would try making any of the dishes at home either the ingredients or the tools weren't available which I admit was slightly discouraging."

The day he first walked into a vocational kitchen in WGSMA (Welcomgroup Graduate School of Hotel Administration), Manipal, he was amazed seeing that most of the things required for cooking and there was no turning back since then.

To feed his curiosity, Nayak used to ask questions starting from his grandmother to street vendors. "I was always curious about cooking and it

was only when I was in Manipal, I started learning the discipline of what it takes to prepare gourmet food." The very next step was CIA (Culinary Institute of America) that helped him in establishing himself into the world of cooking.

Nobody has ever thought that a tinsel town boy will become one of the most sought after Chefs in North America for his contribution in cooking, although not all the path was glamorous. "It has been a humble experience. The road is hard and challenging along with ample of obstacles coming my way such as visa challenges, monetary issues, feeling alone in a new country, doing multiple jobs to pay semester fees," Nayak recalls. Each of the hurdles was enough by itself for all his inspiration and motivation to die.

After spending more than 15 years of his life in the Food & Beverage industry and working with several New York restaurants under renowned Chefs, Nayak still hardly quench his thirst for knowledge. He is constantly learning and always on the lookout for new trends. "While traveling, browsing in a farmers market, or eating at new

FAST FIVE

Signature dish

Pan fried sea trout Coconut rasa

Favorite cuisine

South East Asian

Favorite Restaurant

Highway Gomantak in Mumbai and Per Se in New York City

Favorite food writers

David Lebowitz and Anthony Bourdain

Tips for cooking Indian Cuisine

Grind your own spices for a better flavorful dish; toast your dry spices to bring out the oils before you add it.

restaurants, all translates into my cooking in some way or the other," he said.

While expressing his view about authentic Indian food, Nayak mentions that the word authentic is currently over used. "For example, when you say chicken curry, for a south Indian family- is their preparation any less authentic than it is for a north Indian home? Who decides the level of authenticity? To me authentic ends at home, with family recipes," he mentioned.

His cookbook '*Modern Indian Cooking*' was named best of the season for year 2007 by LA Times. The book was inspired by the style of his cooking that was developed while living in New York. His recently launched cookbook '*Café Spice*' was conceptualized with the same objective in mind, to provide the readers with recipes and tips to prepare quick and healthy Indian dishes, using ingredients that are readily available. He is the culinary director for Cafe Spice- the largest and fastest growing Indian brand in the country.

"I started cooking with Indian spices using local ingredients for guests at home and they would ask me for recipes. That's when I realized there is such a great opportunity here to adapt a more modern style to Indian cooking and taking it to another level," Nayak said. "I have been noticing a trend towards molecular gastronomy and a focus towards better and modern presentation. But more importantly, I see the new trend is to move away from the typical north Indian cuisine and more experiments with regional cuisine which is great because India has so many diverse cuisines to offer outside of what it is known for," he added.

Nayak's restaurants craft a unique blend of traditional and contemporary delicacies which tickled the taste buds of people across the globe. "By god's blessings and people's love for good food, my restaurants have always been well received. NY cuisine is mostly appreciated by people who are willing to experiment and willing to break out of the traditional moulds of Chicken Tikka Masala," Nayak said.

His next book '*My India- A journey through Culture and Cuisine*' will be a travelogue that will offer a platter of Indian dishes to the world. His twin projects in the recent future- restaurants in NYC and India is what the Chef is eyeing at.

Hari Nayak

