

Business Standard

19 OCT 2013

Bon Apetit with Nordic flavours

What happens when a Finnish chef and Indian chef whip up regional delicacies? Avantika Bhuyan finds out

Nordic flavours served on a platter by a masterchef — this is what gourmands in Delhi can look forward to in the next couple of days. As part of the first edition of VEEN Connect, a culinary exchange programme started by Lapland-based VEEN Waters Finland, that seeks to bring together chefs and sommeliers from across the world, Chef Samuli Wirgentius from Helsinki's Michelin-starred restaurant Postres will be whipping up Scandinavian delights at Delhi's Indian Accent till October 20.

Through his elaborate six-course menu, Wirgentius wants to break preconceived notions about the food from his region. "We don't use as much cream or salt as some believe. Our food philosophy is to keep the natural flavour of each ingredient intact. For instance, a sorrel leaf is served as it is, so that its own flavours

enhance the dish."

The simplicity of flavours comes through in the first course of potato, dill and brown butter. Brown butter, or *beurre noisette*, happens



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to be a classic of French cooking, and is used in dishes both sweet and savoury. One bite of this dish and the combination of the nutty brown butter and the sweetness of dill bursts on the palate. The second course of scallops with grilled fennel, sorrel and fennel pollen involves smoking — a technique that is used extensively in Iceland, Finland, Denmark and Sweden. The main course is a charcoal-grilled fillet of lamb served with grilled cabbage, broccoli and oysters. "The dish is served *sans* cream, but we have used broccoli in such a

way that it gives a sense of creaminess," says Wirgentius. The *pièce de résistance* of the menu is the dessert which encapsulates the spirit of the Finnish summer. "My childhood memories resound with images of strawberry and cream. As a homage to that, I have created strawberry parfait, crumble and grape granita," he says.

This epicurean initiative also saw Manish Mehrotra, executive chef, Indian Accent fly down to Helsinki earlier this month to give the clientele at Postres a taste of India. Keeping the flavours honest, he whipped up a *chaat* with spheres of potatoes, fresh



The roasted endives, broccoli, grilled cabbage and capers vinaigrette

green peas and spinach crisps. The idea was to recreate tastes from prominent regions of India. So the north was represented by a creamy version of the Kashmiri *aloo bukhara qorma* and the southern flavours found justice in the Kerala pepper baked fish, *mollee* curry served with white bait *papad*. "If I had to pick one dish that was my favourite, it would have to be the *mollee* curry," says Wirgentius who hosted Mehrotra at Postres. The dessert, again, emerged as the jewel on the crown with Mehrotra doing a spin on the traditional *besan laddoo*, with *laddoo* tart and *mithai* cheesecake. "The sandy texture of the *besan laddoo* crust perfectly complemented the creamy cheesecake within. We served this with a sorbet and lots of fresh berries, which Helsinki is famous for," says Mehrotra.