

FOOD & WINE

Trailblazing Indian Chef to Open Tandoor-Driven Concept in Miami This Month



Hemant Mathur, who helmed the first Indian restaurant in America to earn a Michelin star, will open his first Florida concept, complete with his critically-acclaimed lamb chops.

CLARISSA BUCH January 07, 2019

Hemant Mathur has worked almost every day since he immigrated from [India](#) more than 20 years ago. He came with a mission to celebrate the cuisine of his homeland, which ultimately led his now-closed New York City hotspot Devi to become the first [Indian](#) restaurant in America to receive a [Michelin](#) star.

Ever since, Mathur has opened and led some of the most popular Indian restaurants in the country, many of which were located in NYC. That journey has led him to collect a few Michelin stars along the way, an accomplishment he still can't quite shake all these years later.

"I went to cooking school in India and worked in many hotels before coming to the U.S.," he says. "I never thought I'd end up here."



Later this month, Mathur will check off yet another achievement he never thought possible—relocate to Miami to open a restaurant. Maska, set up just outside of the city’s downtown area, will showcase a reimagined menu of Mathur’s award-winning food, including his signature tandoori lamb chops and a cocktail called the Maska Mule.

“Indian food is everywhere now,” he says. “But it’s also changing a lot. More Americans are visiting the country and learning about the food in a different way. That has influenced my restaurants and menus. Customers want the real experience, not an Americanized version.”

The 7,000-square-foot restaurant will be one of Mathur’s largest to date, complete with a lounge area, a full-service bar, and an open kitchen with a visible tandoor oven. In partnership with Rickshaw Hospitality Group’s Pravin Mascarenhas and Shamsu Lalani, Mathur will split his time between Saar Indian Bistro, which he opened this past spring in Midtown Manhattan with his wife,



“Maybe I dreamed of opening a restaurant in Miami, but I never knew it would happen,” he says. “I’ve spent most of my career in New York, so now I’m traveling back and forth. It’s nice, especially in the winter.”

In Miami, Maska is decidedly more casual than some of Mathur’s previous restaurants. With high-ceilings, mid-century modern furnishings, hanging plants, and not a single white-tablecloth in sight, the atmosphere is casual and chic.

But don’t let the interior fool you: The menu is exactly what a Mathur devotee would expect. It features a combination of home cooked-inspired items and popular Indian street foods, offering a glimpse of the many flavors and cultures reflected in Indian cuisine.

The menu is broken down into three categories, small plates, Maska Marke (dishes from the tandoor), and large plates, with items like the tandoor lamb chops, as well as goan fish curry, butter chicken, and samosas. There are quite a few items unique to Miami, including the white fish and corn ceviche with sweet potato chips, the tacos with pulled duck, and the octopus masala with dill yogurt.

“We’ve incorporated a lot of local seafood into the menu because of our location,” he says. “It’s important to take advantage of what’s nearby and in season.”





With Maska, Mathur will become the first chef with Michelin cred to debut an Indian restaurant in Florida. The opening comes as Miami sees an influx of Michelin-pedigree restaurants, including New York's Sushi Azabu in Miami Beach, Washington, D.C.'s Fiola in Coral Gables, and Thomas Keller's Surf Club Restaurant in Surfside. Still, the Michelin guide has not yet made its way to Miami, which means no restaurant in the area has ever received a Michelin star on its own.

"After all these years, it feels great to bring my food to Miami," he says. "People are no longer afraid of trying new cuisines, especially Indian. I've seen such an increase in interest when it comes to Indian food, so it's exciting to have an opportunity to elevate Miami's Indian food, just like I've done in New York."

Maska. 3252 Northeast 1st Ave., Miami. 786-971-9100.