It's all in the barrel **PG 12** 

Playing around with casks in which whisky can be aged is one way makers of fine Scotch whisky

remain innovative and rooted to tradition

travel and living **•** at the movies • it's persona

# JP A GREAT

A favourite hangout of **America's A-list celebrities** has now come to Mumbai. **Geetanjali Jhala** finds out what it is about Serafina that makes people want to hang out there

t was the Labour Day weekend, 1994. Two Italian expats in the Hamptons, New York, decided to take a boat ride. "Fabio thought I was inviting him on board my yacht. But really, it was only just a boat with a motor," laughs Vittorio.

"It was pleasant enough and we were hav-ing a good time when suddenly the wind picked up. It must have been about 50 knots. It was so strong that it even broke the mast," says Fabio. The boat capsized and Vittorio Assaf and Fabio Granato found themselves shipwrecked. "We were in the middle of the sea, drenched, cold and hungry, hanging on

to the boat for dear life," he says.

With no help in sight, the Italians were starting to lose hope of being rescued. They decided to keep each other's spirits up by talking about things that made them happy. "We Italians are spiritual about food — we talk about food all the time," says Fabio. "So we started talking about the best pizza and pasta we've ever had." They fantasised about making the "best pizza and pasta in the world" if they made it back to New York.

When the coastguard's boat finally rescued them at dawn, they decided to make good on their promise. In 1995, they opened



From left: Vittorio Assaf & Fabio Granato

the first Serafina restaurant on the first floor of a building in Manhattan. Seventeen years and 14 restaurants later, they opened their 15th Serafina eatery, this time in Mumbai.

Both Vittorio and Fabio have distinct roles: Vittorio takes care of the food and Fabio looks after the operations. What sets Serafina apart from other Italian restaurants in Mumbai is the ingredients, says Vittorio. "For instance, we use only 00 Farina flour for our pizzas, which makes the pizza light and easy to digest, unlike most other pizzas that just sit in your stomach." The menu consists of north Italian dishes. "These are different from the fare available in southern Italy – they use lard (animal fat) for pizzas, while we use olive oil," says Vittorio, who hails from Milan. "Even the way sauces are prepared in the south is different. For instance, they simmer the tomato sauce for hours to make it tastier. Not only does this make it thicker, but also much richer."

Sure enough, the dishes at Serafina are light and unique. The Pizza Tartufo Nero, for instance, has tomatoes, olive oil and mozzarella cheese stuffed inside a wafer-thin biscuit-like crust. The Farfalle Al Limoncello too has a mild, yet distinctive lemon flavour,

one I haven't come across too often. Its bright décor and elaborate wine list make Serafina about more than just the food. But, as Fabio says, the idea was to serve not just the best pizza in the world, but also to give people a good time.

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### India is the first country where Starbucks has decided to use locally sourced beans in its coffee. **R Krishna** tries to figure out how much of a difference this will make to the Starbucks experience

hen Starbucks opened its first outlet in India last week, people lined up outside the store, much like they do when a new iPad or iPhone goes on sale. Such is the brand appeal of Starbucks, which pioneered the concept of coffee chains. But, in a departure from the approach they have taken in other countries, the Starbucks coffee served in Mumbai will be different from the ones served in Seattle and elsewhere, because Starbucks is using locally-sourced beans for the coffee in their Indian out-COVERSTORY

"India represents the first time we have entered a market offering locally sourced and roasted espresso," confirmed Avani Saglani Davda, CEO, Tata Starbucks.

### **CBTL GETS IT FROM LA**

This strategy is different from the ones used by some of Starbucks' competitors in India. The US-based Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf (CBTL), for instance, uses the same blend of coffee beans across the 27 countries where they have outlets, said Mohammed Feroz, the chain's director of franchise operations, Asia Pacific. "Our blend is made from coffee sourced from Costa Rica, Brazil, Guatemala, Africa and Sumatra. The beans are roasted in Los Angeles and then shipped to all our outlets. By doing this, we offer our consumers coffee that they would not find in their own country. And we believe that this blend works great for our customers across the world."

Coffee chains like CBTL prepare blends to achieve a consistency of desired flavours. "Indonesian coffee has a heavy body and low acidity. Brazilian coffee is light, and has nutty and fruity tones. Costa Rica or Blue Mountain in Jamaica may produce the best coffee in the world, but they lack the nuttiness of Brazilian coffee. That's why we blend coffee beans from different parts of the world to achieve a balance of flavours. Coffee in that sense is like a cocktail," explained Feroz.

### **INDIAN COFFEE IS LIGHTER**

Of course, each coffee chain has its own idea of what the "perfect balance" should be. Starbucks did not reveal details of the flavour profile it was trying to achieve with its India Espresso Roast. So we decided to ask coffee enthusiasts about the properties of Indian beans. "Coffee was brought to India from Yemen. So, it has chocolaty notes," said Sahil Jatana, who conducts workshops on brewing coffee. "But the flavour also depends on our soil, and the crops grown along with the coffee. In India, these tend to be spices. And so our coffee has spicy and sometimes citrusy flavours."

But Indian coffee is also lighter compared to coffee from other areas. "That's why South Indian coffee, which is had with milk, is invariably blended with robusta beans, which are a stronger, but less flavourful variety of coffee beans," Jatana

According to CBTL's Feroz, the milder Indian beans need to be roasted longer for it to become strong. But in the process you may burn other flavours. On the flip side, the mellow flavour of Indian beans makes it a good base for blends, which is the reason why the bulk of it is exported to countries like Italy, Germany and Japan.

However, Starbucks is known for using 100% Arabica beans,

which are mellower than robusta beans; so it's unclear how they have managed to come up with a strong enough Indian espresso roast. More importantly, how does the coffee served at Indian Starbucks compare to the original Starbucks flavour in the US?

### **MASKED WITH MILK**

Such comparisons, it turns out, may be difficult to make. "A majority of Indian consumers prefer milk added to their coffees. Milk masks a lot of the flavour notes that can help differentiate between coffees. So, even if you have had Starbucks abroad, you may not be able to tell the difference," says Jatana. According to him, it takes several years for coffee tasters to develop their palates, which then helps them decipher where the coffee comes from.

"Coffee is not like wine where it is easier to tell the differences between two varieties. Coffee lovers who consume a lot of coffee may just be able to tell that the coffee is different. But I don't think they will be able to tell where the coffee beans are sourced from," says Jatana. According to CBTL's Feroz, their coffee blend is prepared in

a way that makes it suitable to be used with fresh milk: "Since 80% of beverages we sell are milk-based, we ensure that we use only fresh milk. Our competitors use milk that's sold in tetra packs and thus compromise on the flavour." Ultimately, taste is subjective. According to some, Star-

bucks's move to source Indian beans will pay off since Indians prefer mellower coffee. Also, it raises the image of Indian coffee. On the other hand, there are coffee enthusiasts who are disappointed that they will not get the original Starbucks fla-

The best way to decide, of course, is to have a cup of coffee and decide what works best for you.

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### **Burma: Rivers** of Flavor

Foreign influences have contributed to Burmese food's omplex but delicious flavour. With salads being the high point of the book - as the people of Burma make salads out of every food item available to them — the author introduces Burma through its cuisine with ingredients like ginger, chillies and garlic



## True Food: Sea-sonal, Sustain-able, Simple,

Andrew Weil, Sam Fox

and Michael Stebner The use of fresh items always does wonders for your health. The authors use ingredients that not only help to tantalise your taste buds, but are healthy as well. The book is filled with easy to cook, simple recipes that deliver



### Unforgettable Fall Recipes with

Bill Taylor

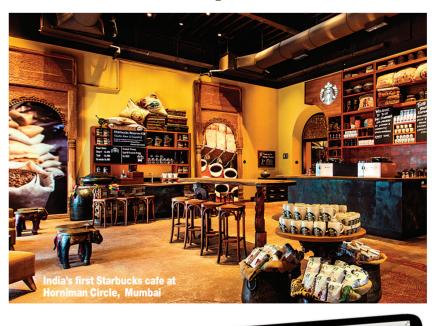
This book includes a list of recipes that make use of coffee. Recipes pair coffee with other ingredients like pump kin, nuts, spices mixed with fruits such as pomegranates, making them interesting. Sample this: there are recipes like the Apple Pie with a Caffeine Kicker and Hazelnut



### Cookbook

Yotam Ottolenghi and Sami Tamim

Jerusalem has a mixture of cuisines with Muslims, Jews and Christians being a part of its population. The 120 recipes in the book bring together the food culture of different parts of Jerusalem. The book guides the reader in making some very tasty vegetable dishes and desserts.



forum for foodies

### **R** Krishna

Browsing through cooking websites and blogs is a great way to explore new recipes. And if you are passionate enough about cooking, you can start your own blog to document your experiments in the kitchen. But while starting a normal blog is simple enough, a food blog can be intimidating for formatting to add recipes, describe the cooking process, and, of course, upload

gorgeous pictures. This is the pain point that a new social

network for foodies, called Cucumbertown, seeks to resolve.

**India** represents

the first time we

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market offering

locally sourced

-Avani Saglani

Tata Starbucks

Our beans are

roasted in Los

shipped to our

—Mohammed

Feroz. director of

CBTL, Asia Pacific

outlets

franchise

operations.

Angeles and then

Davda, CEO,

and roasted

espresso

"When you look at websites like http://www.simplyrecipes.com, you'll see that it needs custom design. The recipes are written in free text. Every recipe structure is slightly different from the previous since people tend to forget how to write it in the precise same form every time. Uploading and arranging many, since it requires certain pictures is difficult, and adding a rating to the recipes requires helps from computer programmers. This works for those who are determined to build a website. But most people want peace of

life and simplicity," says Cherian Thomas, co-founder and CEO of the company.

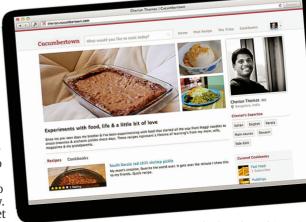
If you visit Cucumbertown, you can browse through recipes just like on any other cooking website. You can browse according to cuisines, ingredients, or the time required to cook. But its when you sign up for it, that the real utility of Cucumbertown becomes apparent.

You can upload recipes, which will be rated by your peers. You receive points based on the rating your recipe gets. And your points, in turn, determine your rank within the "tribe", which is

referred to. With such a model, the service nudges people to not just upload as many recipes as they can, but also to upload quality recipes.

The quality of recipes is also regulated in one other way. Based on the points people get for their recipes, the algorithm assigns proficiencies. "If you

write a pizza recipe, a person who has high expertise in pizza recipes (points) will be notified. He/she takes a look at it and recommends technical correchow the Cucumbertown community is tions in a subtle way. The elders in the



system help the biryani recipe, and a write a variation on new ones with this. This altruistic model is actually a play on human emotions, and since people who contribute in Cucumbertown are already very passionate, they don't mind doing it. In fact they love to review recipes," says Cherian,

adding that this is the sort of model they experimented with at his earlier workplace Zynga, the company behind social games such as Farmville.

Cucumbertown's new features similarly enhance the social aspects of tweaking recipes. For instance, they introduced a new functionality recently, where a user can take "someone's

top of it".

Such features certainly mark Cucumbertown as different from other websites out there. But will everyone come to the feast? That's for foodies to decide.

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