

## sydney grapevine

ELISABETH KING

THE modern interpretation of Indian food was kick-started in London back in the 1980s and '90s by mould-breaking restaurants such as Chutney Mary and The Cinnamon Club. Today's resurgence of contemporary Indian is different and emanates from Indian chefs of the calibre of **Gaggan Anand**, whose namesake restaurant in Bangkok became the first Indian restaurant anywhere to make the top 20 on the San Pellegrino's list of the world's top 100 restaurants. In February, **Rohit Khattar** opened a New York outpost of Indian Accent, his rule-breaking New Delhi temple of "reimagined" Indian cuisine. The esteemed Abhi's in Strathfield has been keeping pace with the popularity of contemporary Indian. But last year the trend intensified with the opening of Bang and the now-closed Subcontinental. **Dr Sam Prince**, a well-known entrepreneur, philanthropist and restaurateur, who created nearby Mejico and Zambrero in Canberra, has nailed the constantly developing global ethos at his latest venture, **Indu**. Located in a heritage-listed building in George St, the basement premises once housed a branch of Dymocks. Any suggestion of a bookworm hangout has been swept away by design maestros, Project Z, who have turned the subterranean space into a smart refuge of brass bells, embroidered banquettes, open spice jars and a custom-made dosa bar. Cocktails are a major magnet for millennials and tables of 20-somethings were sipping expertly-blended mixes such as the Chennai Chiller, Liquid Yoga and Kerala Kolada on the night we dropped by. The wine list is no afterthought and don't be fooled by headings like Finesse & Elegance and Fire Extinguishers. Quality is the common thread from Jasper Hill Cornella Vineyard bottlings to Trimbach Reserve Riesling. Chef **Bihal Kumar** hinges his menu on Sri Lankan and South Indian flavours. It's all about sharing, but don't let your eyes get ahead of you, small and rich is the guiding tone. We started with two selections - one from the coast and one from the village. Translation: cured sea bass, flamed chillies, coconut vinegar and crispy string hoppers, and sesame rolled beetroot croquettes of hung yogurt, green chilli, ginger and garlic raita. They tasted extra good, knowing that Dr Prince has teamed with Palmera, an organisation assisting village women in rural Sri Lanka.



But the paratha bread is reason enough to make a booking - flaky, crispy and easy to gobble down quickly. From the curries and grill lineup, the bone marrow and Kashmiri lamb curry with yogurt and black cinnamon was a textbook lesson in pairing and presentation. It was tough to make a second selection because the menu is so full of standouts such as Goan pork belly curry to pan-flashed clams and mussels, Kerala coconut broth and brown rice. The deciding vote went to 5-spice crusted barramundi, string hoppers, turmeric and coconut molee, whose unctuousness matched its artwork appearance. You just know the gulab jamun here is not going to be heavy dough balls swimming in a cloying syrup. Nope, out comes the lightest curd kneaded into springy rounds rolled in "coconut sand". In a nod to Western tastes, one of the most popular sweets are the watermelon and mint iced lollies to soothe the palate and "aid digestion". Indu is a must-do for anyone who values Indian food's metamorphosis from oily curries and fusion gourmet to truly elegant modernity. Indu, 350 George St, Sydney; phone (02) 9223 0158.

The new **Primus** hotel is also ensconced in a heritage landmark building - the former Sydney Water Board HQ. A five-star property redeveloped by the Chinese-owned Greenland International Hotels Group, the spectacular lobby drips with Art Deco glamour from the eight red marble columns to the skylight flooding the space with light. The Wilmot is the hotel's slick signature restaurant, and chef **Ryan Hong** is pulling in the punters. Korean-born Hong has worked at some of Sydney's top name restaurants, including Rockpool Bar & Grill and Black by Ezard. The clientele is a mix of corporates, foodies and international tourists enjoying the plush comfort of the hotel's 172 luxury rooms. There's an emphasis on NSW produce in the go-to listings, ranging from sweetbreads, lamb loin and barley through abalone and seaweed risotto, beef tartare and Moreton Bay bugs with edamame and seasonal salads. Worth a visit for the decor alone - a

seriously rich person's idea of modernity. The Wilmot, 339 Pitt St, Sydney; phone (02) 8027 8000.

Opened in December, **Stambuli** brings a slice of Turkey to trendy Enmore Rd. Yet another re-working of a building from yesteryear, the 1950s pink and purple facade of the venerable Marie-Louise Hair Salon has been retained. Inside it's a different design story from black and white tiled floors to marble tabletops and vintage wallpaper, courtesy of interiors wizard Sarah Doyle. The threesome behind the project boast an awesome pedigree - **Ibrahim Kasif** (ex Porteno) and **Elvis Abrahamowicz** and **Joe Valore** (Continental, Mary's, Bodega, LP's Quality Meats). The double-storey restaurant sports a more casual dining area, with stools downstairs and regular tables upstairs. No surprise that Kasif's menu is a contemporary take on traditional Turkish fare, from cold meze plates centred by stuffed mussels, fish and vegetables to hot meze platters of fried fish, and pan-fried liver. The charcoal griddle is constantly packed, not with kebabs and skewers, but with lamb cutlets, chicken, quail and whole fish. Don't miss the seftali - lamb kofta in caul fat and a herb garden of parsley. For an authentic touch, order Turkish wine, raki or Eres beer. Stambuli, 135 Enmore Rd, Enmore; phone (02) 8624 3132.



Above & Top: Delicious food from Indu restaurant.