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CORPORATE, BUSINESS, AVIATION, LUXURY & LEISURE TRAVEL MAGAZINE

JUNE 2026 - ₹400



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# ATHIVA'S WORLD OF JOY

How Chalet Hotels is shaping a new premium lifestyle hospitality brand for India's modern traveller

TT BUREAU

**T**ravel in India is shifting rapidly. A younger, more aware generation is shaping the conversation, turning hotels into places where comfort, character, and connection carry as much weight as a brand name. They're looking for hotels that understand rhythm, not routine; they want meaningful experiences over predictable luxury. Today's travellers move differently. They carry less baggage (both physical and emotional), blend work with leisure, and choose stays that feel effortless. They don't want hotels to impress them; they want hotels to understand them.

This is the landscape in which Chalet Hotels created Athiva, a lifestyle brand built for the way India travels now. For Chalet Hotels, the decision to launch a consumer-facing hospitality

brand was not simply about adding another hospitality label to an already strong portfolio. It was about creating an upper-upscale lifestyle hospitality platform that could speak directly to the aspirations of the emerging Indian traveller while reflecting the scale and maturity of India's evolving hospitality opportunity.

Athiva brings this understanding to life in small, intentional ways. Stays feel personalised without being intrusive. Workspaces blend into rooms without feeling like offices. Breakfast isn't tied to a timetable because people aren't tied to timetables anymore. And thoughtful touches, like curated additions or mindful snack selections, gently brighten the day before guests realise something was missing.



Derived from the Sanskrit word for “abundance,” Athiva is a premium lifestyle hospitality brand built around three central pillars: joy, wellness, and sustainability. These principles influence not only the guest experience, but also the broader philosophy around design, operations, programming, and long-term brand thinking.

At the centre of the Athiva experience is the idea of joy. While much of the hospitality industry continues to pursue traditional luxury playbooks, Athiva’s philosophy is built around creating experiences that feel immersive, relaxed, intuitive, and emotionally memorable. The emphasis is not on performative luxury, but on authenticity, flexibility, and experiences that genuinely resonate with modern travellers. From small touches that make you smile to big moments that stay with you as memories, Athiva excels in creating experiences that are personal, delightful, and sometimes disarmingly simple.

Breakfast here is served when you desire it, not when the clock declares it. In the rooms, the old minibar has made way for curated Binge Boxes, which feature a variety of locally-sourced snacks and treats to satisfy cravings that strike between meals. Stays include local immersion experiences by default, and wellness here isn’t an appointment, but a feeling that moves with you, with fresh air, sunlit spaces, and rooms designed for rest, not just sleep.

The brand’s positioning is intentionally distinct. Athiva fills the space between traditional hospitality and the new traveller’s expectations, offering refined comfort, intuitive service, and experiences shaped around ease and authenticity. Rather than competing in the ultra-luxury segment, Athiva is focused on the upper-upscale lifestyle space, catering to a younger affluent traveller who values authenticity, wellness, design, flexibility, and meaningful experiences as much as conventional luxury markers.

Athiva’s approach remains deeply rooted in Indian hospitality warmth, interpreted for a new generation of travellers. It combines contemporary lifestyle experiences with an emotional and cultural sensibility that feels distinctly Indian rather than globally standardised.

### **THE ATHIVA WORLD**

Athiva’s development framework is built around a selective and integrated approach to hospitality development.

The starting point is always the market itself. Rather than pursuing expansion purely for scale, Athiva focuses on destinations where long-term demand fundamentals remain strong and structurally sustainable. These may include leisure destinations, emerging lifestyle markets, business ecosystems, wellness-driven travel corridors, or infrastructure-led growth regions.





*Valley View with Sit Out*

However, not every growing destination automatically qualifies as a long-term hospitality market. Athiva's philosophy remains anchored in identifying locations where demand visibility, accessibility, market resilience, and long-term positioning potential align meaningfully.

The second pillar of the model is positioning: Athiva has been conceptualised as an upper-upscale lifestyle hospitality platform tailored to evolving Indian travel preferences. Increasingly, premium hospitality is becoming less about conventional luxury markers and more about authenticity, flexibility, privacy, wellness, and emotionally connected experiences.

This has influenced how Athiva thinks about hospitality experiences across design, service philosophy, wellness integration, food and beverage programming, and destination engagement. The focus remains on delivering premium hospitality experiences that feel contemporary, intuitive, and rooted in the destination itself rather than overly formal or standardised.

Operational integration forms the third pillar of the model: Athiva approaches hospitality development through an integrated framework where operational thinking is embedded into planning and positioning from the outset rather than introduced later.

This integrated approach extends beyond planning and operations into the guest experience itself. Across its properties, Athiva brings its philosophy to life through a series of Curated Additions, thoughtful experiences designed around the changing rhythms of modern travel.

Recognising that guests no longer live by identical schedules, Anytime Breakfast reimagines one of hospitality's oldest conventions by making breakfast available around the clock, allowing guests to begin their day whenever it feels right for them.

Moments of joy are further expressed through Dollops of Joy, Athiva's thoughtful treats and little surprises that quietly brighten everyday experiences. Simple and unassuming, these gestures reflect the brand's belief that memorable hospitality often lies in the smallest details.

Athiva's commitment to wellness and sustainability also extends into the guest room itself, where carefully selected dehumidifying plants help create a naturally balanced indoor environment while reducing dependence on energy-intensive systems. Together, these Curated Additions reinforce Athiva's larger philosophy of delivering experiences that feel personal, intuitive and distinctly human.

The opening of Athiva Resort & Spa, Khandala, reflects this broader approach. Reimagined from the iconic Dukes Retreat, the property combines wellness-led experiences, destination-driven hospitality and contemporary upper-upscale lifestyle positioning within a high-demand leisure corridor connected closely to Mumbai and Pune.

The hotel also marks the launch of Vivaah by Athiva, the brand's destination wedding offering built around seamless planning, personalised experiences and immersive celebrations. Rooted in Athiva's philosophy of joy, wellness, and contemporary Indian hospitality, Vivaah reflects the growing demand for experience-led destination weddings within India's evolving upper-upscale hospitality landscape.



*The A Diner, Signature All-Day Dining Restaurant*



*Panorama Restaurant, Athiva Resort & Spa, Khandala*

## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Athiva's partnership philosophy is centred around long-term alignment rather than transactional scale. Across the broader Chalet Hotels portfolio, partnerships with globally recognised hospitality operators have played an important role in driving operational excellence, distribution reach, and demand access. At the same time, Athiva reflects the belief that certain hospitality formats, particularly lifestyle, leisure, and immersive hospitality experiences, require greater individuality, flexibility, and contextual storytelling.

This balance between institutional discipline and experiential freedom remains central to Athiva's positioning.

The platform also recognises that destination hospitality increasingly extends beyond the hotel itself. Local experiences, wellness ecosystems, culinary storytelling, cultural programming, and community engagement are becoming integral parts of hospitality experiences today.

As a result, partnerships with local stakeholders, designers, experience creators, and operational specialists play an increasingly important role in shaping differentiated guest experiences that feel authentic to each destination.

## BEYOND INDIVIDUAL HOTELS

Chalet Hotels' broader experience across hospitality and commercial real estate has reinforced the importance of this integrated development philosophy.

Hospitality assets today function within larger ecosystems of business travel, retail, commercial infrastructure, leisure experiences, and urban connectivity. This integration often creates stronger demand durability, higher utilisation, and greater resilience across market cycles.

Convention-led hospitality and MICE-driven demand are also expected to play an increasingly important role. Simultaneously, destination weddings, experiential leisure travel, and blended work-leisure travel continue creating new opportunities for upper-upscale hospitality formats.

Athiva's long-term outlook is closely aligned with these structural shifts.

## RESPONSIBILITY AS A CORE DISCIPLINE

For Athiva, sustainability is embedded in the broader development philosophy itself. Chalet's commitment to

achieve Net Zero by 2040 shapes how Athiva is designed, built, and operated. Athiva carries this commitment into the guest experience through energy-efficient architecture, eco-conscious amenities, and community-driven partnerships.

Governance and operational discipline remain equally important. As India's hospitality market grows, institutional credibility, execution quality, operational transparency, and long-term strategic thinking are likely to become key differentiators between enduring hospitality platforms and short-term growth-led models.

## LOOKING AHEAD

India's hospitality sector remains one of the most compelling long-term growth stories globally. Rising domestic travel, infrastructure development, expanding aviation networks, premiumisation, and evolving consumer behaviour are creating sustained opportunities across hospitality formats.

At the same time, the Indian traveller is becoming more experience-led, emotionally driven, and intentional in how they engage with hospitality. This is expected to drive strong long-term growth across the upper-upscale lifestyle hospitality segment, particularly in leisure, wellness, experiential travel, and destination-led markets.

For Athiva Hotels & Resorts, the focus remains clear building hospitality assets and experiences that combine long-term ownership philosophy, institutional discipline, operational excellence, and contemporary Indian hospitality thinking.



*Pool, Athiva Resort & Spa, Khandala*

# NEW RHYTHM OF CHALET HOTELS

Gaurav Singh, COO, Chalet Hotels, sees ATHIVA as a joyful answer for travellers seeking freedom and feeling

TT BUREAU

**G**aurav Singh looks at hotels through asset value and guest desire. As COO of Chalet Hotels, he works where real estate strength and hospitality instinct sit inside the same model.

Gaurav Singh notes, "That duality is our core strategic advantage. Unlike pure-play hotel operators, our decisions aren't dictated by short-term cycles. Our 2.4 million sq. ft. commercial real estate portfolio provides stable, annuity-like income, which gives us the 'capital patience' to make the right long-term decisions for our hotels. We plan our asset lifecycle in decades, not quarters. It allows us to invest in quality and relevance, ensuring our hotels lead their markets for years to come."

## AI WITH A HUMAN PULSE

At Chalet, AI-driven building management systems, mobile-first journeys, keyless check-ins and guest tools have a clear purpose. Gaurav Singh is clear about the approach. He says, "The line is simple: technology should remove friction, not heart. AI should be invisible and efficient. But technology can't deliver a heartfelt welcome. That's where the 'human touch' comes in, and that is—and always will be—the core of our business."

## ATHIVA AND THE NEW GUEST MOOD

What is the simplest way to explain ATHIVA to a first-time guest? Gaurav Singh frames it easily, "I'd say ATHIVA is where premium hospitality meets a new generation of travel. It's a brand built around joy, wellness, and sustainability. Today's travellers value authentic, immersive experiences over standardised luxury. They seek personalised local flavour over cookie-cutter stays. Athiva is designed to deliver exactly that."

Small details carry weight. Breakfast@Anytime removes pressure around fixed morning schedules. Local Immersions connect guests with the soul of the destination. The Binge Box replaces the predictable minibar with something relaxed and generous.

For millennial and Gen Z travellers, these details signal a shift from traditional luxury to hospitality that feels intuitive, flexible and rooted in place.

For Gaurav Singh, they reflect Chalet's larger direction: strong fundamentals, patient capital, useful technology and a human touch.



*Gaurav Singh*

**COO**  
**Chalet Hotels**

# BUILDING VALUE WITH HEART

Shwetank Singh, MD & CEO, Chalet Hotels, is leading the company through a phase of ambitious growth, sharper brand ownership and deeper hospitality integration.

TT BUREAU

He shares, “Our business plan to double in value is built on three pillars: Growth in revenue and EBITDA from existing assets; incremental growth from hotels currently under construction; and value accretion through acquisitions that add to our revenue and EBITDA base.”

He adds, “Accordingly, the three real-world signals I watch most closely are sustained performance and margin expansion in our existing assets; On-time, on-budget, and high-quality execution of projects under development and successful completion and integration of acquisitions.”

### CAPITAL DISCIPLINE, HOTELIER’S HEART

As Chalet shifts from a traditional asset-owner to an integrated owner-operator model, Shwetank Singh emphasises, “The hardest part is cultural. It’s about building a single culture where an asset manager’s capital discipline and a hotelier’s heart can coexist. An owner thinks in decades and return on capital; an operator thinks about the guest who is checking in this afternoon. The magic happens when you get your teams to do both simultaneously, that is, think like an asset owner but lead like an operator. This isn’t something you can mandate; you have to build it. The launch of our ATHIVA brand is the ultimate expression of this transition. We are the author of the entire guest experience, from the balance sheet to the bedside table. That’s the real, challenging, and incredibly rewarding work.”

### LOCAL SOUL, GLOBAL EXCELLENCE

For Shwetank Singh, each ATHIVA property must sit within its own specific context. The focus is on ensuring that every hotel feels hyper-local, rather than “lifestyle generic”.

He says, “We start with three non-negotiable questions: First What makes this destination unique? Second: How does every inch of this hotel, from the lobby’s design to the restaurant’s menu make that uniqueness tangible for the guest? And the most important question: What would be fundamentally lost if this hotel existed somewhere else? If you can’t answer that last question with conviction, you’re building a generic lifestyle product. ATHIVA is the opposite. For example, at ATHIVA Khandala, our ‘Local Immersions’ are about genuine connection, not generic tours.”

Shwetank Singh believes it’s about creating authentic moments that are a direct reflection of our surroundings, a blend of our ‘global excellence with a local soul.’



*Shwetank Singh*

**MD & CEO**

**Chalet Hotels**

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# CULINARY TRAVEL & GOURMET DESTINATIONS SPECIAL 2026



# PLATED TO PERFECTION: THE FINE ART OF EDIBLE DRAMA

From kaiseki restraint to Alinea's spectacle and India's sensory abundance, plating has become one of cuisine's most expressive arts

KAMAL GILL

*“The room stills for a second  
Steam rises like a secret  
Taste turns the silence golden  
Memory refuses to clear the table*”



**W**e feel the pull of a beautifully presented dish before we know why. It is art because food is alive until it is eaten. It melts, wilts, cracks, leaks, cools, sets, collapses, perfumes, stains and steams.

A chef is always racing time, working against heat, air, moisture, gravity and appetite. A perfect plate is therefore never still. It is a brief, beautiful performance held together for a few charged seconds before the fork breaks the spell. Presentation is an art because food is alive until it is eaten. It melts, wilts, cracks, leaks, cools, sets, collapses, perfumes, stains and steams. The chef is always racing against time.

And so, there is almost always a moment at a table when conversation instinctively lowers. A plate is placed. A cloche lifts. A ribbon of smoke escapes. Sauce catches the light. A shard of crisp pastry leans at a dangerous angle. The aroma rises, rich or sharp or earthy, and the diner pauses.

### **THAT PAUSE IS EVERYTHING.**

It is the space between hunger and surrender. Between appetite and memory. Between the chef's hand and the diner's imagination. It is also the moment where food presentation proves its power.

Food presentation, at its finest, is strategy, theatre, science, emotion and discipline arranged on porcelain, clay, leaf, stone, metal or wood. It decides what the diner sees first, what remains hidden, what must be broken, lifted, poured, cracked, dipped, inhaled or shared.

Every great chef knows this. A dish has posture. It has rhythm. It has a front door.

### **THE FIRST SEDUCTION IS SIGHT**

The phrase "we eat with our eyes" is often served lightly, as though it belongs to a culinary quote wall. In reality, the eye is a ruthless critic. It scans freshness, temperature, texture, generosity and intent within seconds.

A glossy sauce suggests depth. A charred edge signals fire. A clean broth implies precision. A trembling custard promises silk. A jagged crumble offers contrast. A perfect quenelle whispers control. A shining glaze can suggest indulgence before the spoon has moved.

Colour is one of the oldest seductions at the table. Green wakes up the idea of freshness. Red carries ripeness, spice and appetite. Gold suggests luxury, warmth and roasting. White brings calm. Black adds danger and drama. A dish of beetroot, goat cheese and herbs speaks visually. So does a saffron risotto, a charcoal-grilled kebab, a pearl-white idli with emerald chutney, a ruby ceviche, a mango dessert glazed like sunset.

Yet chefs will tell you that beauty without logic is weak. A garnish that does not belong is vanity. A flower without flavour is costume. A sauce smear without purpose is old theatre trying too hard. The modern plate has become more intelligent. It must look beautiful, yes, but it must also explain itself.

### **AROMA: THE FIRST WHISPER OF FLAVOUR**

If the eye sets the stage, aroma brings the drama.

The scent of food enters the body before taste. It is immediate, private and almost impossible to resist. Ghee blooming with cumin. Curry leaves crackling in hot oil. Butter foaming around sage. Wood smoke around lamb. Fresh basil torn at the last second. Truffle shaved thin enough to disappear. Charcoal, citrus, garlic, saffron, cinnamon, coffee, caramel, seaweed, pepper, toasted bread.

Aroma has no patience. It arrives and demands memory.

This is why a biryani is most powerful when opened in front of the diner. The first breath carries rice, meat, spice, steam and suspense. It is why a sizzling platter still works in every corner of the world. Sound and smoke prepare the appetite before the fork arrives. It is why ramen, pho, rasam, yakhni and consommé are as much about rising vapour as taste. A great broth does not merely sit in a bowl. It breathes.

The cloche, often dismissed as old-fashioned drama, remains one of dining's most effective devices because it controls fragrance. Lift it too early and the moment is lost. Lift it



*Image Courtesy: Change C.C, Pexels*



*A Visually Striking Cocktail with Fiery Garnish. Image Courtesy: William Prado, Pexels*

at the table and the diner receives the dish as revelation. Chefs understand that aroma is not a supporting act. It is architecture.

### THE PLATE AS A STAGE

Across the world, great chefs use presentation to create a signature as recognisable as handwriting. A dish by Grant Achatz



*Breakfast Served on a Floating Tray. Image Courtesy: Zamac, Pexels*

at Alinea does not simply arrive. It performs. An edible balloon, a tabletop dessert, a course built around surprise: his food makes the diner aware of time, touch, air and anticipation. The plate, in his world, may not even be a plate. It may be the table. It may be the space above the table. It may be the diner's own sense of disbelief.

Ferran Adrià at elBulli changes the very grammar of the plate. Foam, spheres, gels, airs and impossible textures turn familiar flavours into fleeting apparitions. An olive arrives as a liquid sphere. A soup vanishes into fragrance. Adrià makes the presentation intellectual and playful, asking the diner to forget the rules of form and trust the shock of sensation.

Heston Blumenthal at The Fat Duck brings memory, science and mischief to the table. A seafood course arrives with the sound of the sea. A dessert pulls childhood into fine dining. A plate carries nostalgia, chemistry and theatre in the same breath. Blumenthal's genius lies in making the diner taste with the mind as much as the mouth.

Vikas Khanna brings another dimension to the global Indian plate. At Bungalow in New York, his plating carries memory with the polish of ceremony. A spice, a grain, a temple offering, a family table or a regional vessel can each become part of a visual story. His plates often feel quietly ritualistic. Spice becomes mood. Garnish becomes remembrance.

Alain Passard at Arpège brings a different kind of drama, quieter but deeply assured. His vegetable-led plates treat colour almost like music. Carrots, beets, tomatoes, herbs, petals and roots appear with painterly confidence, often arranged as though the garden itself has found composure.

Virgilio Martínez at Central in Lima turns altitude into architecture. His plates move through Peru's ecosystems, from sea level to the Andes and the Amazon, using tubers, herbs, grains, algae, cacao, flowers and wild textures as a vertical map



*Chocolate Dessert Plate with Strawberries and Blueberries. Image Courtesy: Picfast, Pexels*



*Delicious Gourmet Lamb Rack with Vegetables. Image Courtesy: Andrei Marina, Pexels*

of place. A dish at Central feels geological, botanical and cultural all at once. Presentation becomes terrain. The plate becomes a landscape with memory under its surface.

Vineet Bhatia gives modern Indian presentation an early global confidence. His plates move Indian fine dining into a sharper, more composed visual language, where spice, sauce, smoke and regional memory appear with polish and drama.

Joan Roca at El Celler de Can Roca works with elegance, emotion and technical grace. His food carries perfume, memory and precision in equal measure, with dishes shaped around smoke, wine, distillation, family stories and Catalan identity.

Garima Arora at Gaa in Bangkok works with precision, restraint and quiet force. Her plates often stand between two sensibilities, where Thai ingredients meet Indian technique, fermentation, fire and layered flavour. Nothing feels crowded. Nothing arrives without intent.

René Redzepi's Noma alters the global imagination by placing landscape at the centre of the dish. Moss, berries, wild herbs, roots, shells, ferments and Nordic weather enter the dining room. Beauty can be raw, foraged, and deeply seasonal. Noma teaches chefs that a plate can look like a place.

Gaggan Anand brings another current to the table: irreverence, electricity, humour and rebellion. Progressive Indian dining under his hand becomes a spectacle of colour, texture, music, memory and surprise. His plates and menus play with emojis, nostalgia and pop culture, proving that presentation can also wink, tease and provoke.

### **INDIA'S ANCIENT SENSE OF CULINARY COMPOSITION**

India understood this long before tasting menus became theatre.

The thali is one of the world's great design systems. It is circular, abundant and precise. Dal, rice, roti, sabzi, chutney, pickle, yoghurt, papad, sweet and curry do not merely fill space. They create movement. The hand travels across heat, comfort, acid, spice, crunch, softness and sweetness. Colour is not ornamental. It signals function. The thali is appetite-organised.

The banana leaf meal has its own grammar. Placement matters. Sequence matters. The leaf itself carries fragrance,



*Dish Samples For the Seasonal Kaiseki. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*

symbolism and ecology. Chaat is a different kind of genius, a riot that knows exactly where it is going. Sev, yoghurt, chutney, spice, potato, pomegranate, coriander and crunch collide with thrilling discipline. Biryani hides its beauty until the lid lifts. Kebab relies on char and smoke. Mithai speaks through sheen, silver leaf, geometry and colour.

Indian food has never lacked visual drama. Its challenge in fine dining has been translation. How does one take the emotional power of a curry, the generosity of a thali, the chaos of chaat or the fragrance of dum cooking and place it in a contemporary dining room without stripping away its soul?

Manish Mehrotra helped answer that question with modern Indian cuisine that was witty, elegant and deeply rooted in memory. Familiar flavours appeared in unexpected forms, allowing the diner to recognise nostalgia while meeting it anew. Masque in Mumbai brought another answer, more restrained and ingredient-led, using Indian produce, seasonality and



*Image Courtesy: Nima Naseri, Unsplash*



*A Creative Cocktail Presentation with a Tiki Mug. Image Courtesy: The Castlebar, Pexels*

foraging to create plates that feel modern without losing their sense of land.

This is where the Indian presentation becomes especially exciting. It does not need to borrow beauty. It needs to sharpen its own.

### **KAISEKI AND THE POWER OF RESTRAINT**

Among the world's great traditions of food presentation, Japanese kaiseki remains one of the most refined. It teaches what many modern chefs spend years rediscovering: silence can be dramatic.

At Kikunoi in Kyoto, chef Yoshihiro Murata has long shown how a meal can move like a calendar, with bamboo shoots, ayu sweetfish, matsutake mushrooms or snow crab appearing not as ingredients alone, but as signals of a particular moment in the year. At Kitcho, the Kyoto tradition of hospitality turns the bowl, tray, ceramic, lacquer, leaf and space into part of the cuisine itself.

At n/naka in Los Angeles, Niki Nakayama has carried the kaiseki spirit into a contemporary setting. At Den in Tokyo, Zaiyu Hasegawa plays with the form more mischievously, proving that even humour can be precise when the plate understands timing. Kaiseki reminds the culinary world that drama does not always need smoke, gold or height.

### **THE TABLE AS A WINDOW TO CULTURE**

For the traveller, food presentation becomes an introduction to culture. A mezze table speaks of sharing before anyone explains it. Pintxos in San Sebastián turn the bar counter into a gallery. A Moroccan tagine reveals itself in steam. A Peruvian ceviche flashes with citrus, chilli and colour. Afternoon tea in London is a matter of manners. A Rajasthani thali performs hospitality. A coastal seafood platter performs geography. A temple meal performs devotion.

Every destination has a plating instinct. Some cultures stack. Some scatter. Some conceal. Some reveal. Some place abundance at the centre. Some use sequence. Some let the vessel carry identity. Some use fire as a final flourish. The finest culinary travel experiences do not merely feed guests. They give them a visual memory of place.

### **THE LASTING SPELL**

The finest food presentation leaves behind more than an Instagram reel. It leaves a sensation. At Alinea, Osteria Francescana, Noma, Atelier Crenn or Gaggan, the plate becomes memory, mood and meaning. Beauty catches the eye, but feeling lingers. That is the true art of plating: a carefully staged invitation to taste more deeply.



*Colorful and Aromatic Indian Meal. Image Courtesy: saveurs secretes, Pexels*



*Delightful Ensemble of Diverse Flavors. Image Courtesy: Abhishek Sanwa Limbu, Unsplash*



*Image Courtesy: Nidhin KSM, Unsplash*



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# A FORKFUL OF QUIET LUXURY

At the world's finest tables, the smallest objects often carry the strongest sense of place

TT BUREAU

A luxury dining room now announces itself before the first amuse-bouche appears. The glass may sparkle, the linen may fall in a perfect square, yet the hand usually meets the clearest signal first. A fork with a pleasing weight. A knife with a cool satin edge. A spoon shaped like a small piece of sculpture.

Cutlery has moved beyond background service. In palace hotels, design restaurants, private aircraft cabins and yacht dining rooms, it now acts as a code. Guests read it fast. Heavy silver suggests ceremony. Black-coated steel hints at urban drama. A hammered spoon speaks of craft. Social media sharpened this awareness. The plate still matters, yet the place setting has entered the frame.

For hotels, this has changed the economics of the table. Tableware is no longer anonymous stock. It is brand language. A restaurant in Singapore may commission a fork for one concept. A Dubai hotel may pair champagne metal with marble and velvet. A desert retreat may choose bronzed cutlery against pale stoneware, echoing sand, rock and low light. Even the smallest café within a luxury hotel now understands that a spoon can carry the mood of an entire brand.

## OLD SILVER, NEW AUDIENCES

Europe's silversmiths understood such theatre long before camera phones. Christofle, founded in Paris in 1830, built prestige through imperial courts, embassies, luxury trains and grand hotels.





Mayur Dwar Dinner Set by Namrata Kedia

Puiforcat became admired for architectural restraint. Ercuis, established in 1867, found its place in hotels and ocean liner service.

Their patterns travelled through power circles. Scrolls, beads, crests and polished surfaces gave hierarchy a physical form. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European dining rituals entered princely and Gulf households. French silver appeared in Hyderabad, Jaipur and along the Arabian coasts, often beside local metalwork, carved wood, brocade and regional porcelain.

India still holds that memory with striking ease. At Falaknuma Palace in Hyderabad, now managed by Taj, the famous 101-seater dining table keeps the mood of the Nizam era service alive.

In Jaipur, Rambagh Palace's Suvarna Mahal uses chandeliers, frescoes, silver and gold-rimmed porcelain as a complete royal stage. The meal gains gravity because the setting carries history.

### THE SAME PATTERN, MANY WORLDS

A single flatware design can now have a restless life. It may appear at a formal dinner in Paris, in a Gulf airline's first class cabin, on a Mediterranean yacht and inside a Mumbai sky residence. The old palace instinct has simply gained mobility.

Christofle, Robbe & Berking and Thomas Lyte have created special services for jets and superyachts. Pieces may be lighter, shorter, easier for compact storage, or arranged in bespoke cases. Familiar ritual follows the traveller across air and water.

Private residences have joined this world with grand confidence. Antilia in Mumbai, known for its vast scale,

marble, crystal, ballrooms and several dining areas, reflects an entertaining culture closer in spirit with a hotel than an ordinary home. At that level, monogrammed silver, aircraft dining sets and gold accented flatware belong within the design scheme.

The guest experiences a seamless loop. Palace suite, private cabin, yacht deck, tower dining room. Each space may feel distinct, yet the fork in hand can create a strange continuity. Luxury recognises itself through small repeated gestures.

### WHEN A SPOON BECOMES CRAFT

The grand European names still carry power, although desire has widened. A new group of artisan studios treats flatware as jewellery for the table.

In Brooklyn, silversmith Heath Wagoner makes hand forged sterling pieces with hammer marks, slight irregularities and occasional pearls or stones. The appeal sits in evidence of human labour. A spoon carries time, pressure, heat and hand skill. It feels personal in an age of perfect replication.

Copenhagen, Kyoto and Beirut offer parallel currents. Scandinavian simplicity, Japanese wabi sabi and Arabesque detail enter the shape of handles, bowls and blades. Hotels using such work make a clear statement. Their dining rooms are curated, not merely equipped.

Chefs understand the advantage. A hammered spoon can hold a single oyster with quiet drama. A broad satin knife can turn tableside carving into a controlled performance. In a crowded fine dining city, these details help one meal remain in memory after many menus blur.



Dinner Set by Cutipol. Image Courtesy: Julie Wettergren

## METAL HAS A MOOD

Material changes the entire meal. Sterling silver remains the classic marker of old-world luxury. It warms quickly in the hand, develops patina and carries association through weight. Silver plate gives a similar visual message on a banquet scale. High-grade stainless steel, once considered everyday, now suits modern fine dining in brushed, matte and sculptural forms.

Finish creates another layer. Gold, rose gold, and black PVD-coated flatware became strong looks in UAE hospitality reports for 2025. Brushed and hammered surfaces soften glare, catch candlelight and hide small scratches.

In Saudi Arabia and the UAE, bronzed or blackened cutlery pairs well with sand-toned linen and pale ceramics. In Dubai and Doha, warm gold sits comfortably beside marble, velvet and skyline views.

Shape matters as much as shine. Long, slim profiles feel classical. Chunkier handles suggest a current mood. Ultra

minimal brushed steel belongs with the clean interiors seen in several new Saudi design hotels. The diner may never analyse the decision, yet the body notices balance, grip and edge.

Sound also shapes memory. Heavy cutlery with thicker plates keeps a room calm. Lighter pieces, sharper clinks and brighter porcelain suit banquet halls, Indian weddings and lively brasseries. Restaurants manage atmosphere with metal as carefully as lighting. A well-chosen spoon can make chilled soup feel smoother; a balanced knife can keep a long tasting menu comfortable.

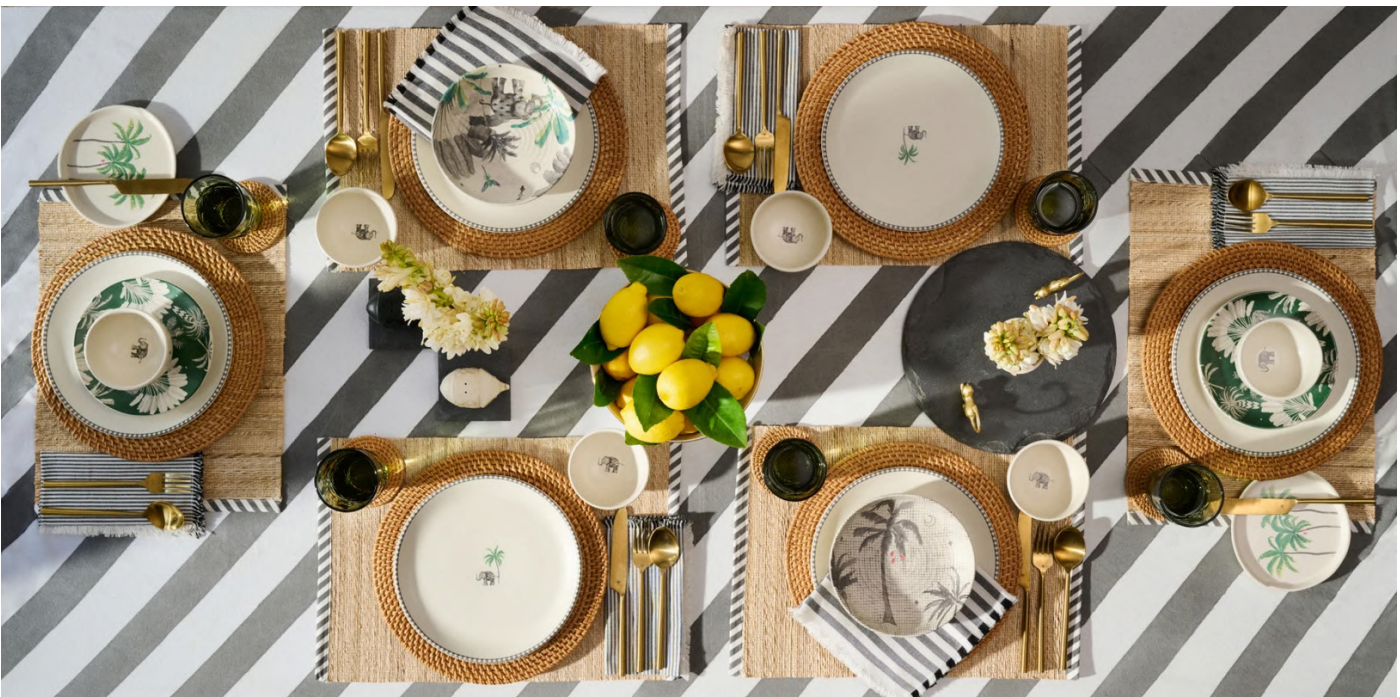
## ETIQUETTE, COLLECTORS AND THE NEXT TABLE

Cutlery still choreographs behaviour. In Western tasting rooms, the arrangement of forks and knives gives clues about course order and formality. In India, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the table may be more flexible. Luxury hotels can set polished cutlery while respecting hand eating for regional dishes. Good hospitality allows both codes with grace.

Collectors have also entered the story. Vintage hotel silver, stamped with crests of old liners, clubs and palaces, appears at auctions, flea markets and specialist dealers. Some travellers enjoy the hunt. A fork carrying the mark of a vanished hotel can hold the romance of an entire journey.

The future seems divided between hygiene technology and handmade pleasure. Antimicrobial coatings, self-sanitising surfaces and experimental smart utensils are already part of the conversation. At the same time, hotels seek objects rooted in place, culture and touch. Indian and Middle Eastern makers, along with regional producers such as RAK Porcelain in the UAE, have room within this evolving table.

The next time a meal begins in an Indian palace hotel, a Riyadh tower, a Kyoto ryokan or a chef's counter in Brooklyn, the menu can wait for a second. The fork may already have spoken.



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FLAVOURS

# THE WORLD IN KERALA'S KITCHEN

Kerala's cuisine carries trade, faith, migration and memory in every coconut-laced, spice-rich bite

TT BUREAU



**K**erala's cuisine has always lived beside the sea, long before "fusion" became a fashionable restaurant word, the Malayali kitchen had already learned how to welcome the world and still taste entirely of home. Rice, coconut, pepper, curry leaves, fish, tapioca, banana, tamarind and kodampuli form its local language. Yet the accents are many: Arab traders, Jewish settlers, Portuguese colonisers, Dutch merchants, British plantation culture, Chinese maritime contact, Gulf migrants and diaspora cooks have all left quiet marks on the plate.

### **RICE, MEAT AND MALABAR HOSPITALITY**

One of the clearest examples of this exchange is the Arab-Malabar connection. For centuries, the Malabar coast, especially Kozhikode, Kannur and Thalassery, had close links with Arab traders. Trade brought with them religion, marriage ties, community habits and new ideas of hospitality. The Mappila Muslim kitchen grew within this world, blending Arab, Persian and native South Indian traditions into a cuisine of rice, meat, fish, ghee, eggs, dried fruits and slow-cooked gravies.

Rice is the foundation here, but it behaves in many ways. It becomes bread, filling, sweet and ceremony. Ari pathiri is a beautiful example. Made with rice flour, hot water and salt, it is kneaded into a soft dough, rolled into thin discs and cooked on a tawa. It is pale, tender and deliberately understated, designed to fold around chicken, mutton or beef curry.

Malabar biryani carries the celebratory side of this tradition. It often uses short-grain rice such as kaima or jeerakasala, prized for aroma and softness. Meat is cooked separately with onions, ginger, garlic, green chillies and spices. Rice is cooked until almost done, then layered with the meat, ghee, fried onions, cashews, raisins and herbs. The pot is sealed and finished on gentle heat. The result is fragrant rather than heavy, rich without being loud. Its luxury lies in restraint.

Mappila cuisine also has a talent for festive construction. Chatti pathiri layers thin pancakes with egg, meat, nuts or sweet fillings until it becomes a savoury or sweet cake of celebration. Arikkadukka stuffs mussel shells with spiced rice mixture, bringing together seafood and grain in one compact coastal bite. Mutta mala, made of egg-yolk threads cooked in syrup, and unnakkaya, ripe banana filled with coconut, egg, nuts and raisins, show the delicate sweet side of the same kitchen.

### **COCONUT MILK AND KOSHER**

The Jewish influence in Kerala is quieter, but equally layered. Cochin Jewish cuisine developed through the meeting of Jewish dietary law and Kerala's local abundance through discipline, substitution and domestic intelligence.

Kosher practice keeps meat and dairy separate. In Kerala, coconut milk became the answer. It gave richness without dairy, softness without cream and body without breaking religious rules. In this kitchen, coconut milk became faith, flavour and technique at once.

A Cochin Jewish fish curry explains this beautifully. Kerala's coast offers fish a plenty, but kosher rules shaped what could be used. The fish could be cooked with coconut milk, turmeric, ginger, pepper, curry leaves and souring agents, creating a dish unmistakably Kerala in flavour yet Jewish in structure. The method is gentle. Aromatics are cooked carefully, spices are added with restraint, fish is simmered without rough handling, and coconut milk is introduced to bring softness.

Coconut rice, enriched with coconut milk and spices, could appear on festive tables. Pastel, a fried pastry filled with spiced meat, chicken, egg or vegetables, offers another layered example. Its form carries echoes of Iberian and Jewish travel histories, while its filling speaks in Kerala spices.

### **VINEGAR, STEWS AND THE CHRISTIAN TABLE**

European influence entered Kerala through coastal settlements, Christian communities, seminaries, plantations, bakeries and club culture. The Portuguese left some of the clearest marks, especially in Kerala Christian cuisine. Vinegar, meat preservation, stews, breads, cakes and roasts became part of local food habits, later joined by Dutch and British layers of tea-time snacks, cutlets, puffs and bakery culture.

Fish moilee, or meen molee, is among the most graceful examples. It is often linked with Portuguese-era influence, though its present form is fully Kerala. Fish is cooked gently in coconut milk with ginger, garlic, green chillies, curry leaves, turmeric and a touch of acidity. Some homes lightly fry the fish before simmering it; others cook it directly in the gravy.



*Appam and Chicken Stew. Image Courtesy: Kerala Tourism*



*Ari-Pathiri. Image Courtesy: Kerala Tourism*



*Chatti Pathiri. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*

Thin coconut milk helps the fish cook without breaking. Thick coconut milk finishes the dish with silkiness.

Vindaloo tells a sharper story. In coastal Christian kitchens, meat marinated with vinegar, garlic, chilli and spices created a new logic of sourness and preservation. It should not be understood only as a fiery curry. Vinegar tenderises meat, gives it keeping power and adds a bright acidity distinct from tamarind, raw mango or kodampuli. Pork or beef, slow-cooked until the masala darkens, carries the memory of Portuguese technique filtered through Kerala spice.

### **NETS, WOKS AND CHINESE MEMORY**

Maritime trade with China also left its echoes in Kerala's food culture, not through one defining recipe, but through the way

food was procured, stored, prepared and imagined. The most visible reminder is the cheena vala, the Chinese fishing nets of Kochi and Kollam. These cantilevered nets became part of the coastal rhythm, drawing fish, prawns and crabs into nearby markets and waterfront kitchens, where they entered familiar Kerala preparations such as meen curry, fried fish and seafood roasts.

Chinese memory also lingers in the objects and words of the Malayali kitchen. The cheena chatti, a wok-like iron vessel, found its place in tempering, shallow frying and quick stir-frying. The cheena bharani, a glazed ceramic jar, became associated with storing pickles and preserves, quietly linking trade goods to Kerala's fermentation and preservation habits. These traces suggest that Chinese influence in Kerala was less about importing a finished cuisine and more about shaping everyday food practices: how seafood reached the table, how pickles were stored, how ingredients were tossed over heat, and how foreign objects slowly became domestic essentials.

### **A CUISINE THAT KEEPS ITS CORE**

Kerala's kitchen has always known how to receive the world without losing itself. Arab traders gave it rice-and-meat grandeur. Jewish homes showed how coconut milk could honour faith. Portuguese and European kitchens brought vinegar, stews, bread and cake. Chinese contact left nets, vessels, names and later Indo-Chinese habits. Gulf migration added mandi, shawarma, grills and kunafa. Internal migration and diaspora life continue to reshape the table.

Yet the final flavour returns to a familiar grammar: coconut, rice, pepper, curry leaves, fish, fermentation, spice and memory. That is why Kerala cuisine feels rooted even when its story crosses oceans. It changes, but it does not drift. In every appam, pathiri, moilee, biryani, kappa or shawarma, Kerala keeps doing what it has done for centuries: turning arrival into belonging.



*Chinese Fishing Nets in Kochi. Image Courtesy: Brian Snelson, Flickr*



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# INDIA'S NEW POUR HAS ARRIVED!

India's new pour is stylish, food-loving and ready for the gourmet table

**TT BUREAU**

For years, the Indian beer order had one clear brief: make it cold, make it crisp, and make sure something spicy was nearby. A chilled lager with tandoori prawns, fried fish, kebabs or bar snacks became part of the country's easy-going hospitality grammar. It worked at beach shacks, hotel banquets, airport lounges, cricket nights, wedding bars and long seafood lunches.

## **NOW THE GLASS HAS DRESSED UP.**

Indian beer is no longer sitting quietly in the summer corner. It is moving into flavour-led territory, built around grain, fruit, spice, smoke, rice, honey and regional identity.

The mood is sharper, more food-aware, more expressive. Across India, microbreweries and craft beer rooms are becoming places where the evening begins, menus stretch longer, and the plate and glass finally start flirting.

## **MICROBREWERIES, BITES AND BRILLIANT CRAFT CULTURE**

The new Indian beer story is not about one famous label. It is about the rise of the neighbourhood brewery, the taproom, the brewpub, the small-batch experiment and the chef who now thinks about beer as seriously as wine.

India's craft beer market is set to grow strongly over the next decade, driven by increased urban demand, premium drinking habits and a growth in microbreweries. An industry estimate for 2025 pegged the India craft beer market at USD 5.8 billion with steep growth expectations by 2034.

## **THE MAIN PLAN**

The biggest change is experiential. The microbrewery is not an after-dinner stop. It is the dinner plan, the date plan, the office escape, the birthday table, the Sunday lunch that slides lazily over into the evening.



Image Courtesy: Anil Sharma, Unsplash

This is just right for India. We are not a quiet drinking culture. We make a lot of noise, order together, overfeed guests and fight over the last kebab with love. Add a stage, and all of this becomes a microbrewery. Beer is brewed before your eyes, served fresh, explained casually, matched with food, and often dressed in music, design and the unmistakable comfort of a table that plans to stay a while.

Global brewery trends 2025 also point towards neighbourhood breweries, community engagement, limited batches, collaborations with chefs and artists and experiences that go beyond the drink itself. In India, it seems less imported, more natural. A brewpub, with food, friends and local flavour, is just right for the country's social rhythm.

### SMALL BATCH, BIG PERSONALITY

The magic of craft beer is that it refuses to be a one-size-fits-all refreshment. Small batches let brewers test, tweak, and occasionally misbehave. A wheat beer might have a citrus edge. A stout can flirt with coffee and jaggery like warmth. A sour can take on the tang of street fruit. A lager can be cleaner, leaner, classier.

The best Indian craft beers now understand restraint. They are not throwing random masala into a tank for shock value. The stronger trend is local flavour with intention. Brewers are looking at grains, fruits and spices as ingredients with structure, not decorative drama. Recent commentary on Indian craft brewing notes a shift towards local grains, fruits and spices becoming part of a more mature brewing language.

### REGIONAL INDIA WALKS INTO THE GLASS

The new craft beer wave has found its strongest accent in regional flavour. India gives brewers an outrageous pantry: basmati rice, millets, kokum, gondhoraj lime, mango, jamun, guava, pepper, cardamom, honey, coffee, cacao, chilli, palm sugar, citrus peels, herbs and smoke.

A coastal brew can sit naturally beside fried calamari, prawn recheado, cafreal or fish koliwada. A rice-led lager can glide into

appams, dosas, coconut seafood and light biryani. A tart fruit beer can lift chaat, ceviche-style seafood, chilli-salt fruit and fresh cheese. A stout can move beautifully towards chocolate, coffee desserts, date pudding and ghee-rich mithai.

This is where India has an advantage. Our food has enough heat, fat, acid, crunch and spice to make beer work hard. The right craft beer refreshes, cuts through richness, softens chilli, brightens fried food and gives grilled meats a cleaner finish. It behaves like a clever dining companion.

### THE NEW GOURMET PAIRING

For years, beer pairing in India meant "serve it cold with anything spicy." That still works, but the new table is more interesting.



Image Courtesy: KKS, Pexels



Image Courtesy: Our Whisky Foundation, Pexels

Wheat beers love citrus, herbs and seafood. Pale ales can handle grilled chicken, sharp cheeses and smoky tikkas. Sours are brilliant with chaat, pickles, fruit and coastal plates. Dark beers sit handsomely with barbecue, roasted mushrooms, chocolate and caramelised desserts. Crisp lagers remain unbeatable with fried snacks, prawns, pakoras and hot afternoons.

It's all about the contrast and cleansing. Indian food often has layers of chilli, oil, spice, smoke and tang. The carbonation in beer helps refresh the palate between bites. Lower-alcohol craft styles also allow for long meals, especially in a country where lunch can balloon without apology.



Image Courtesy: Omerhavivi, Pexels



Image Courtesy: Pedro furtadoo, Pexels

### DESIGN IS PART OF THE DRINK

The new beer movement looks better too. Packaging is getting cleaner, smarter and more tactile. Labels are starting to tell stories with minimal typography, local art, batch notes, playful illustrations and seasonal cues.

That's important because craft beer is also a visual culture. Now a bottle or can has to look good on a retail shelf, on a restaurant table and in a social media frame. The 2025 worldwide packaging conversation spotlights eco-friendly glass, recycled materials, returnable bottles, minimalist design, textured labels, batch-specific information and limited-edition artist collaborations.

For Indian microbreweries, packaging is not just skin deep. It can convey city identity, local ingredients, festival editions and food pairing cues. A good label design can tell you it's a coastal, monsoon, festival, summer or late-night stout before you've even taken a sip.

### SUSTAINABILITY GETS STYLISH

Brewing takes water and energy and grain and packaging, so sustainability can no longer be a polite footnote. Brewmasters are emphasising water conservation, energy-efficient brewing, local sourcing, spent-grain reuse and lower-impact packaging at breweries around the world.

This has real weight in India. It's the right thing for a microbrewery to do in terms of local sourcing, creative spent grain, reduced transport impact and smarter packaging design. It's about telling a better story to a younger diner that reads labels, asks questions and enjoys a brand with a conscience.

### BEYOND THE METRO PINT

The craft beer conversation started in metro areas, but the appetite is spreading. Industry reports have highlighted growing demand for premium beer outside the big cities, with tier two markets showing more interest in better quality drinking experiences.

That makes sense. India's smaller cities are dining out more, travelling more, celebrating more and demanding sharper hospitality.



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Fes, Morocco. Image Courtesy: Abdelmoughit LAHBABI, Pexels

# THE OLD WORLD CHARM OF COURTYARD HOMES

The world's most atmospheric stays often begin with a doorway, a pause and open sky

**TT BUREAU**

In the world's warmest regions, grace hides behind plain walls. Beyond the glare of a medina, the moist heat of a Tamil street, or the bright hush of a Spanish lane, a house opens inward. Air cools, then gathers scent: orange blossom, wet stone, lime plaster, polished tile, rain on clay. Above, a framed piece of sky hovers in silence. Homes built around an open heart make shelter feel private and alive.

Across Morocco, South India, Rajasthan and Southern Spain, courtyard houses have answered heat, privacy and domestic life with elegance. Riads in Marrakech and Fez, Chettinad mansions, Kerala nalukettu homes, North Indian havelis and Andalusian patios differ in mood and material, yet each gives the house an open-air heart.

## THE HOUSE TURNS INWARD

Courtyard houses emerged where family life stayed guarded against the street. A modest exterior could conceal a garden, fountain, carved galleries, shaded verandahs or rooms around a central void. Entry begins with compression: a narrow doorway, a passage, perhaps a small vestibule. Then space opens. Light drops in. Water murmurs.

The courtyard gives the house its rhythm. Rooms face it, corridors circle it, balconies observe it. Sound changes inside its walls, as traffic fades and voices lower. Air gains room for movement. Tea, meals, work, festivals, games and afternoon rest once gathered around that square.

## CLIMATE AS A QUIET CRAFT

Before mechanical cooling, builders in hot climates worked with shade, airflow, mass and moisture. A shaded courtyard creates a calmer microclimate. Water assists evaporation in dry regions. Plants soften glare. Thick walls slow heat gain. Stone, lime, terracotta and tile hold night coolness, releasing it gradually.

Research supports what vernacular architecture knew through use. Shaded zones, planted sections and areas near water can register differences between 2 and 4 degrees against harsher sunlit patches. In proportioned hot climate courts, outdoor air can fall by above one degree, while interiors may sit nearly two degrees cooler. Height, width, wall thickness and planting affect light, wind and thermal comfort.

In humid South India, air movement matters deeply. Open sky courts act as chimneys. Warm, damp air rises and escapes. Breezes are drawn along shaded verandahs and aligned doors. Deep eaves and tiled roofs guard against monsoon rain. The house feels cooler than the street, brighter than a closed room, alive with air yet sheltered.

## MOROCCO'S INWARD PARADISE

In Morocco, the riad offers the most theatrical version of this idea. The word originally meant garden. Behind tight lanes in Marrakech or Fez, a plain wall may open into carved plaster, zellij tile, painted cedar, arcaded galleries and a central fountain. A citrus tree or planted bed often claims the middle.

The riad draws on Islamic garden symbolism and older Mediterranean traditions. Family life remained shielded while light and air entered freely. Women, children and guests could use the outdoor space without exposure. Many riads now live as intimate guesthouses, where breakfast appears beneath orange leaves, mint tea lands beside the fountain, lanterns catch in glazed tile, and one ribbon of water fills the house with sound.

## CHETTINAD'S LIGHT-FILLED MANSIONS

In Tamil Nadu, Chettinad mansions carry a different grandeur. Built by the Nattukottai Chettiars, a mercantile community with global trading networks, these houses can stretch deep behind restrained facades. Teak, lime plaster, Athangudi tile, stone and timber columns create linear interiors where several courtyards appear in sequence, moving guests inward through public and private zones.

These courts work as architectural lungs. Pillared verandahs hold shade while admitting light above. Pitched tiled roofs and deep eaves manage monsoon water. Slightly sunken



Kerala Nalukettu Courtyard. Image Courtesy: Temple Town

surfaces, channels and durable floors help drain sudden rain. Thick masonry stores and moderates heat.

Their emotional charge is considerable. Courtyards have hosted weddings, rice feeding ceremonies, festival rituals, card games, gossip, drying chillies, drying sarees and children's baths in metal tubs under the open sky. Restored mansion stays carry those traces quietly.

## RAJASTHAN AND THE HAVELI CHOWK

Rajasthan's havelis add desert drama. In Jaisalmer, Shekhawati and Bikaner, intricate stone facades, jharokhas and jaalis rise beside narrow lanes, while real life gathers in the chowk. Hot dry summers and crisp winters shaped compact plans, thick stone or lime walls, small shaded openings and internal courts acting as lightwells and cooling pockets.

Studies of Shekhawati havelis note passive strategies such as high thermal mass walls, tall volumes, low albedo inner floors and carefully sized courts. These can keep



Chettinad Courtyard in Aranmanai siruvayal. Image Courtesy: Chettinad Architectural Heritage

interiors around 20°F cooler than the street. At night, cool air settles in the chowk, and enclosing walls protect that reserve.

Socially, havelis often used a sequence of courts: an outer area for business, guests and storage, inner courts for women, children and household routines. The chowk hosted music, gossip, rituals around a tulsi plant or shrine, grain grinding, papad drying and lessons. Chai beneath carved pillars or evening air through stone lattice can define the stay.

### **KERALA'S RAIN HELD IN A SQUARE**

Kerala's nalukettu homes gather around the nadumuttam, a central open court tuned for heat, humidity and monsoon drama. Sloping tiled roofs, generous eaves and deep verandahs frame the opening, while laterite or brick walls add thermal steadiness. The court lets warm air rise, captures breezes and brings daylight deep inside. During rain, water falls within protected edges, drains and overhangs.

Culturally, the nadumuttam carries a sacred presence. Lamps, tulsi plants or small shrines may occupy the space. Families gather there for puja, stories, evening talk and sleep, with rain drumming on roof tiles. Morning tea can feel ceremonial, with wet tiles, filtered light, birds above and a faint breeze moving through the house.

### **ANDALUSIAN PATIOS IN BLOOM**

Southern Spain gives the courtyard another personality. Andalusian patios, especially in Córdoba and Seville, descend

through Roman atrium traditions and Islamic garden culture. Whitewashed walls, azulejo tiles, potted plants, climbing vines, orange trees and ceramic fountains shape small paradises inside city homes.

They cool through shade, thick construction, vegetation and water, while serving as social arenas for family and neighbours. During Córdoba's Fiesta de los Patios, private courts open for public viewing and become fragrant galleries of flowers, tile, music, wine and flamenco. A casa patio stay places the traveller inside that continuity, where a fountain can define Andalusia as vividly as any plaza.

### **HOW TRAVELLERS CAN READ THEM**

A courtyard stay deserves close reading. Notice the temperature on entry against the street. Watch how rooms relate to the central court. Observe water, planting, night lighting and sound. A well-used court feels active without noise, calm without emptiness.

As urban heat rises and travellers seek lower energy comfort, architects are returning toward internal courts in boutique hotels, townhouses and contemporary homes. Simulation studies, climate adaptive design and machine learning quantify benefits older builders understood through instinct.

Seek the riad, the Chettinad mansion, the Haveli, the Nalukettu homestay, the casa patio. Choose places where light, wind, water and memory share the same square. A courtyard knows how a house should breathe, and how a journey should linger.



*Cordoban Patio. Image Courtesy: Living Tour*

*Master of complications*

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**FRANCK MULLER**  
**GENEVE**

LUXURY

# FINE TASTE, FINER PRICE TAGS

Rare ingredients become luxury icons when culture, craft and desire meet on the plate

JEET BHATTACHARYA



**T**he world's most expensive foods do not reach that status by taste alone. A high price often begins with rarity, weather, patience, careful grading, fragile handling and a strong sense of occasion. Some ingredients need thousands of flowers. Some depend on one landscape, one breed, one short season. Some carry strict certification. Others become expensive because chefs, collectors and diners turn them into objects of desire.

#### **A PINCH OF GOLD AT \$3,500 PER KILOGRAM**

Saffron is considered gold dust in the culinary world and is worth its price because it is one of the most delicate harvests. A few fine red stigmas are collected from each saffron crocus by hand. The flower is tender. The usable part is very small. The work is slow. That's why a small box of saffron can cost more than a generous bag of just about any other spice.

But saffron never acts like a common spice. It is used in pinches because its strength is in aroma, colour and elegance. A few strands can warm a biryani, deepen a paella, add richness to a risotto or lend kahwa its golden glow. In desserts, it lends a soft perfume that feels festive without being loud.

Its luxury is in transformation. Rice looks more rich. Milk sweets are more for a ceremony. Sauces add colour and depth. Saffron does not require quantity to prove its value. Its beauty is in how little it takes.

#### **MARBLE THAT MELTS AT \$149 - \$170 A PIECE**

Wagyu gained fame for its marbling, that fine lace of fat running through the meat. The fat softens during cooking and gives the beef its plush texture, gentle sweetness and buttery finish.

Kobe takes that prestige to another level. It's a highly regulated form of Wagyu and linked to specific cattle, origin rules and strict quality standards. Certification adds trust and scarcity. Diners are paying for breed, feeding, grading, location and careful handling.

At the table, Kobe is often served with restraint, quickly seared, thinly sliced, placed in sukiyaki, cooked on a teppan or presented as part of a tasting menu. Heavy sauces would miss the point. Luxury is in the feel. The beef practically melts away, leaving richness, not weight.

#### **THE CUP WITH A BACKSTORY AT \$100 A CUP**

Kopi Luwak became famous because the story of how it is made sounds almost unbelievable. Asian Palm Civets eat coffee cherries, and the beans pass through the digestive system of the animal. The beans are then collected, cleaned, dried and roasted. That odd journey made the coffee one of the most talked-about luxury brews on the planet.

It is priced on rarity, curiosity and a belief that the process changes the flavour of the beans. Some drinkers say it tastes less bitter, smoother and softer than regular coffee. The story is definitely a plus. It's the kind of cup you order partly because it tastes good and partly because it comes with a conversation.



*Beluga Caviar. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*

#### **SUSHI'S MILLION-DOLLAR MOOD AT \$230 - \$470 PER POUND**

Bluefin tuna has a powerful place in sushi culture because of its texture, fat and freshness. Different cuts offer different pleasures. Akami is lean and clean. Chutoro is richer. Otoro, the fatty belly, is prized for its soft, lush texture. At a serious sushi counter, the fish is handled with quiet precision. Temperature, ageing, slicing and timing all matter.

The market drama around bluefin adds another layer. At major New Year tuna auctions in Tokyo, certain fish have sold for astonishing sums.



*Strawberries with Edible Gold. Image Courtesy: Dana Garcia, Pexels*



Wagyu Beef Sashimi with Garnish. Image Courtesy: Jon Discipulo, Pexels

### PEARLS WITH PEDIGREE

One of the most potent symbols of old-world luxury is beluga caviar. Its attraction is based on texture, salinity and restraint. The eggs are valued for their delicate pop, smooth finish and clean taste of the sea. They are typically served chilled, sometimes with blinis, crème fraîche, egg, potato, champagne or vodka.

The style of serving matters as caviar is easily overwhelmed. It calls for small spoons, mild flavours and a conscious temperature. There should not be anything shouting around it. The experience is quiet, refined and slightly ceremonial.

Its price is driven by rarity, slow-producing sturgeon and strict conservation controls. Real caviar should be traceable and legally acquired.



The Golden Opulence Sundae. Image Courtesy: Nuggsiccream



Foie Gras on Toast. Image Courtesy: David Todd McCarty, Unsplash

### THE BLACK JEWEL OF JAPAN AT \$135 – \$250+ FOR 50G

Densuke watermelon proves that fruit can be a luxury when rarity is combined with presentation. It is grown in Japan, particularly Hokkaido, and is known for its glossy dark skin, crisp red flesh and clean sweetness. It's seasonal, limited and often bought as a premium gift.

Densuke is best served cold, with no toppings. No fancy garnish required. Its appeal is in the clean slice, deep colour and refreshing sweetness. It shows that luxury can be as simple as a perfectly ripened fruit, served at the perfect moment.

### SILK, SALT AND SPAIN \$100 A POUND

Jamón ibérico, especially bellota, is expensive because it needs time, landscape and skill. The best hams come from Iberian pigs fed on acorn-rich pastures. Their diet lends the meat its nutty aroma and silky fat. Once salted, the ham is cured slowly, often for years, until the flavour becomes deep, savoury and complex.

The cut is part of the luxury. A skilled carver slices the ham by hand into ribbons that soften at room temperature. Each slice should be balanced between meat and fat. Too thick and the texture is clumsy. Too cold, and the fragrance remains concealed.

### THE SCENT OF SERIOUS MONEY \$356 PER OUNCE

White Alba truffles are a luxury of aroma. They grow underground under certain conditions and are located with the help of trained dogs. Their season is short, their supply is uncertain, and their shelf life is brief. They start to lose intensity as soon as they are picked, so timing is important.

That fragility is priced into them. You cannot treat a white truffle casually. It must arrive fresh in the kitchen, be carefully stored and served while its scent is still strong. Chefs shave it over warm pasta, risotto, eggs or potatoes because the gentle heat releases its perfume.

### DESSERT DRESSED FOR DRAMA AT \$820

The Golden Opulence Sundae is one of the fun sides of luxury dining. It's ice cream, one of the most familiar comforts in the

world, and it dresses it up in excess. A sundae becomes a spectacle with premium vanilla, rare chocolates, edible gold, and elaborate presentation.

The price of it is not just the ingredients. Its performance. The dessert comes with drama, begs for photographs and gives the guest a story to tell. It is luxury with a wink, extravagant, theatrical and fully conscious of its own fame.

#### **DINING IN 24 CARATS AT \$5 - \$7 PER SHEET**

Edible gold is luxury in its most literal form. It does not add flavour, aroma or texture in any meaningful way. Its purpose is visual impact. A sheet of gold leaf on a dessert, a few flakes over sushi, a shimmer on chocolate or a gilded cocktail instantly tells the diner that the dish has entered performance mode.

Its price comes through purity, handling and presentation. Food-grade gold must be extremely pure, usually 23 or 24 carat, because ordinary jewellery gold may contain other metals. It is considered biologically inert, which means it passes through the body without being absorbed, and it is used in some regions as a regulated food additive.

#### **SILK ON BRIOCHE AT \$60 - \$80 PER POUND**

Foie gras has always had a sort of complicated prestige. At its best on a menu, it's smooth, rich and almost custard-like, served as a terrine, pâté, mousse, torchon or a seared slice with fruit, brioche or a sharp reduction. It's the texture that makes it good. It melts in your mouth, coats the palate and gives a small portion an enormous presence.

Its price is associated with tradition, skill and controversy in production. Classic foie gras is made from the enlarged liver of a duck or goose, usually produced through force feeding, a practice that has made it one of the most contested luxury foods in the world.

#### **THE FOREST'S PRICIEST SECRET AT \$500 PER KILOGRAM**

Matsutake mushrooms are expensive because they are not easily cultivated. They occur naturally in close association



*Matsutake Mushrooms. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*



*Fried Matsutake Mushrooms. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*

with forest ecosystems, especially pine forests. Its season is short, its supply unpredictable and skilled foragers must know where to look. That uncertainty gives it an almost treasure hunt-like quality.

Its value also comes from cultural value. Matsutake is associated with autumn, gift giving, and seasonal menus. A perfect specimen is a matter of freshness, rarity and timeliness. Miss the season, and the moment is gone. That's the attraction.

#### **THE KING OF THE COLD COAST AT \$70 - \$110 PER DOZEN**

Coffin Bay King Oysters bring a little scale to the luxury chat. They are not the oyster equivalent of a dozen eggs. They are large, slow-growing oysters from the clean waters of Coffin Bay, South Australia, often cultivated over a period of several years rather than the usual shorter oyster cycle. The high price is due to the size, the time it takes to grow and the limited supply.

The appeal is instant. A King Oyster arrives like a centrepiece with its deep shell, firm flesh and briny freshness. It can be served simply with lemon, mignonette, champagne vinegar or nothing at all. The purity is the point. The sea should taste near, cold and clean.



*Saffron Crocus Blooming in a Srinagar Garden. Image Courtesy: Ovais Ibn Farooq, Pexels*

# FRAGILE FRONTIERS OF FOOD

From LED-lit greens to air protein, farming is finding new ground beyond soil and seasons

M GOUTHAM



*A Floating Farm in Bangladesh. Image Courtesy: Mostafijur Rahman Nasim, Unsplash*

The world's food systems are entering a difficult new era. Rising temperatures, unpredictable weather, shrinking farmland and pressure on water are forcing a rethink of how food is grown. Yet human ingenuity has always found ways to farm at the edge of possibility, and today that instinct is taking on bold new forms.

Across the world, scientists, growers and food innovators are turning unlikely spaces into productive ones. Herbs grow in sealed rooms beneath carefully programmed LED lights. Greenhouses glow through long winter nights. Microbes feed on gases inside stainless-steel bioreactors and become protein-rich ingredients. Floating farms place cultivation on water in regions where land is scarce or floods are becoming more frequent.

## GREENS SPROUT IN THE DARK

One of the clearest shifts in future food production is the move away from depending entirely on the great outdoors. In places where winter is long, land is limited, heat is rising or water is scarce, growers are beginning to recreate the basic conditions plants need inside controlled spaces.

Technology makes up for everything the environment fails to provide, making way for vertical farms and plant factories that create all the necessary factors indoors. Crops are grown on stacked shelves under LED lights that can be adjusted for colour, strength and duration. These "light recipes" can influence growth, leaf shape, colour and, in some cases, flavour.

Oftentimes, even the soil can be foregone for efficiency; using hydroponic or aeroponic systems, nutrients are delivered

to the roots through flowing water. No dirt. No land. No soul required. Sensors monitor temperature, humidity, carbon dioxide, airflow and nutrient balance, while software helps keep the growing environment stable.

Perfect for growing crops like leafy greens, herbs, microgreens, baby leaves and some berries, this model works best with delicate foods that can lose texture, flavour and shelf life during long transport - where growing them closer to cities, hotels, restaurants and supermarkets makes practical sense. It also gives regions affected by cold, darkness, poor soil, water stress or urban landscapes another way to cultivate fresh produce.

Nothing stops this technology from knocking on doors. Mini hydroponic units and microgreen systems are finding their way into apartments, balconies, kitchens and compact urban homes. They will not feed a city, but they do change the relationship people have with food. A small tray of basil, mustard microgreens, or lettuce grown indoors offers a quiet reminder that farming does not always need a field. Sometimes, it begins with light, water and a corner of the home.

### PROTEIN OUT OF THIN AIR

The most unusual frontier may not involve plants at all. Air protein, also known as single-cell microbial protein, asks a different question: can protein be made with gases, electricity and microbes instead of soil, crops or animals?

The process takes place inside bioreactors. Certain microbes are fed gases such as carbon dioxide, hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen, along with minerals. As they grow, they produce protein-rich biomass, which can then be separated, dried and used as a food ingredient. In one sense, this is a new industrial food process. In another, it extends a much older tradition. Humans have always used microbes to transform food through bread, beer, yoghurt, cheese and vinegar. Gas fermentation takes that relationship further by feeding selected microbes with gases and clean energy instead of crops, sugar or grain.

The ingredient produced through this process is not necessarily meant to appear as something unfamiliar on the plate. Its future may lie in everyday foods: protein bars, noodles, baked goods, drinks, dairy alternatives and meat substitutes. This makes the idea more practical than it first sounds. The change may happen quietly, through ingredients added to foods people already know and eat.

The larger promise is independence from some of nature's conventional constraints. Such ingredients can be produced with little land and water in places where conventional agriculture is difficult.

The challenge is that bioreactors still need clean energy, regulation, investment, safety systems and public trust. For air protein to become part of the mainstream food system, it must move beyond novelty and prove itself as safe, scalable, affordable and useful.



Indoor Farming. Image Courtesy: Nicheagriculture.com

### FLOATING HARVEST

Climate change is not only about heat and dry spells. It also brings stronger storms, frequent floods and unstable growing conditions. This has made flood-resilient cultivation an important part of future food planning. Floating farms, aquaponics and algae systems are gaining interest, especially in regions with limited arable land or rising water stress. These systems do not treat water simply as something used to irrigate crops. They make it part of the growing environment itself.

The idea may seem modern, but it has older roots. In ancient Latin America, communities learned to farm with water rather than against it. Mexico's chinampas, often called floating gardens, were raised agricultural islands built in shallow lake zones and surrounded by canals. Around Lake Titicaca, Andean waru waru fields used raised beds and canals to protect crops from drought, floods and frost.



Vertical Farming. Image Courtesy: Tasha Kostyuk, Unsplash



*Microgreens. Image Courtesy: Oks Malkova, Pexels*

Modern water-based farming follows a different technological path, but the underlying idea feels familiar: when ordinary land becomes difficult, the growing environment can be reshaped. Aquaponics brings fish and plants into the same circular system. Fish waste becomes a nutrient source for crops, while plants and microbes help clean the water before it circulates back.

Algae cultivation adds another layer to this water-based food future. Algae can be grown in ponds, tanks or controlled aquatic systems, and can be used for food, feed, oils, pigments and protein. Research describes algae as a potential sustainable food source because it can provide proteins, lipids, carbohydrates, fatty acids, vitamins and minerals.

These systems require careful balance. Oxygen levels, nutrients, water quality, disease control and biological stability must be managed closely. They are not ready to replace mainstream agriculture, but they expand the idea of where food can grow.

### **THE PROMISE AND THE POWER BILL**

Controlled food systems are not replacing traditional agriculture, but they are becoming a useful support as climate pressures grow. They allow growers to use water more carefully, reduce dependence on pesticides and bring certain kinds of production closer to cities.

The challenge lies in making these systems practical at scale. Lights, heating, cooling, pumps and automation all need reliable power. Infrastructure is expensive, and crop choices must make economic sense. The recent difficulties faced by some vertical farming companies have shown that technology alone cannot carry the model. A farm still needs clear demand, careful costs, strong logistics and a realistic route to market.

This is why the future is likely to be mixed rather than absolute. Conventional farms will remain essential, especially for staples and large-scale food production. Alongside them, greenhouses, vertical farms, floating systems, algae-based ingredients and microbial proteins may take on more specific roles.

In a world where the weather is less predictable and land is under pressure, farming is not turning away from nature. It is learning how to work around nature's new uncertainties, using design, energy and biology to keep food growing where older methods may struggle.



*Hydroponic Agriculture. Image Courtesy: AMOB, Flickr*



वन की बात

**KASEZ**



सत्यमेव जयते



GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRIES

# KANDLA SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE

Kandla Special Economic Zone bearing the distinction of being the first SEZ in the Asia-Pacific region, was inaugurated by Late Prime Minister Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri on 7th March, 1965 as an Export Promotion Zone which was seamlessly converted into a Special Economic Zone in 2006. KASEZ has been awarded as "First Green Industrial City of India" in Platinum Category for the year 2021-2026, under IGBC Green Cities rating for existing Cities in industrial cities category. This zone is home to 281 exporting units providing employment to over 28,000 persons.

Kandla Special Economic Zone offers opportunity to set up new manufacturing units in various sectors such as engineering, pharma and chemical, Textiles, timber and plywood and new emerging technologies including E-Vehicles and their accories. 36.92 Ha (100 Acres) is being developed into 75 plots of size ranging from 2800 sqm to 6300 sqm which is an opportunity ready to be seized by investors.

## BENEFITS AVAILABLE/SALIENT FEATURES:

- Exemption from various Central & State duties & taxes.
- Single window clearance concept.
- Proximity to two major ports, viz., Kandla Port & Mundra Port.
- Well connected to NH 8-A, Railway Station- 2km away.
- Un-interrupted Power Supply and water supply
- Round the clock security by Ex-servicemen.
- Installation of Software based LED streets lights
- Single point entry and exit
- 24x7 Customs clearance at doorstep

## COMPLETE EXEMPTION FROM :-

1. All customs duties levied upon all imported goods.
2. Both basic custom duty as well as IGST on goods for development, maintenance and authorized operation of SEZ units.
3. Stamp duty levied on lease deed and other documents from SEZ units.
4. GST on goods brought from Domestic Tariff Area to a SEZ unit.
5. GST on services provided to SEZ units consumed within SEZ

More than 25 Ready to move Factory Buildings & Warehouses are available in Kandla SEZ, Vacant land/plots are available in Adani Port SEZ, Sterling SEZ, Dahej SEZ and other SEZs in Gujarat. Kandla SEZ also Notifies available space from time to time on website.

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# WHEN INDIA TAKES THE WORLD'S BEST TABLES

Stars, stories and spice define the global rise of India's most ambitious dining rooms

**CHANDRUTPAL DAS BORO**

Indian food now commands three-star rooms in Dubai, Mayfair townhouses in London, and restored Thai homes in Bangkok as a reason travellers reroute flights, book suites, and plan entire evenings around a single reservation.

At Trèsind Studio in Dubai, on a rooftop terrace at St Regis Gardens on Palm Jumeirah, confidence arrives quietly. Barely twenty guests sit amid blonde wood, candlelight, and an open kitchen. A 17-course and 20-course range of surprise tasting unfolds one porcelain vignette at a time, guided by Chef Himanshu Saini's landscape-led India.

The Rising India menu moves across four acts, covering the Thar desert, the Deccan plateau, the coastal plains, and the Himalayan north. Small landscape sculptures sit on the table as chapters arrive. A pani puri appears as a crisp globe filled with avocado and jicama, then receives green plum aguachile, linking Mexico and Mumbai. Onam sadya returns as coconut ice cream, spice stone, and fermented pineapple. A coastal broth may follow, scented with tomato and southern sweet spices.

The Michelin Guide calls Trèsind Studio the first Indian restaurant worldwide to be awarded

three stars, its highest rating, and praises the experience as "worth a special journey". Its number 13 position on The World's 50 Best Restaurants list has made it a gourmet pilgrimage site for diners pairing the rooftop meal with a Palm Jumeirah stay.

Indian chefs abroad now shape a refined language where spice, memory, precision, region, and wine programmes share the stage. The result feels intimate, polished, and unmistakably Indian.

**THE GLOBAL STAGE**

Indian cuisine's rise in Michelin circles began in London. In 2001, Chef Atul Kochhar earned a star while leading Tamarind in Mayfair, a moment that changed how Indian cooking was read in elite dining rooms. Chef Atul Kochhar opened Benares in 2003, earned another star there in 2007, and built a modern British Indian idiom around seasonal produce, game, seafood, Scottish salmon, local lamb, smoked aubergine, fenugreek, tamarind, and spice.

Chef Vineet Bhatia created another template. Often credited among the first Indian origin chefs awarded a Michelin star, Chef Vineet Bhatia later earned recognition for Rasoi by Vineet in Geneva in 2009. His

restaurants in London, Geneva, Dubai, and wider global addresses proved Indian flavours could carry tasting menus with architectural plating, European technique, and serious wine pairings while keeping an Indian soul intact.

Singapore added its own milestone. Chef Manjunath



*Chef Vineet Bhatia, MBE*



*Meen Dakshini by Chef Atul Kochhar. Image Courtesy: Benares Restaurant*

Mural gave Southeast Asia its first Michelin-starred Indian restaurant when *The Song of India* earned a star in the debut Singapore guide in 2016. Set in a colonial bungalow on Scotts Road, the restaurant plated kothimbir wadi, Lucknawi lamb shank, and venison laal maas amid artworks, verandas, and soft light. It made Indian dining feel like a complete evening, not a supporting act between hawker meals and hotel bars.

Bangkok brought a sharper, more experimental note. Chef Garima Arora's *Gaa*, set in a renovated Thai house, earned its first Michelin star in 2018 and a second in 2023, making Chef Garima Arora the first Indian woman chef running a two-star restaurant. Her menus use Indian techniques on Thai ingredients, drawing on jackfruit, coconut, fermented fish sauce, tropical fruit, and Noma sharpened fermentation into cuisine with Indian emotion and Thai immediacy.

### **PIONEERS ABROAD**

For culinary travellers, Europe and the Middle East now read as a string of Indian tables. Chef Atul Kochhar's UK restaurants, including *Kanishka*, *Sindhu*, and *Riwaz*, show Indian fine dining can sustain several evenings without repetition. *Benares* remains a Mayfair marker, where British seasons meet Indian spice with ease.

Chef Vineet Bhatia's influence travels even wider. *Rasoi* in London and Geneva showed that a townhouse or hotel dining room could host refined Indian cooking, including tandoori spiced smoked salmon, tamarind glazed quail, and European sauces. Today Chef Vineet Bhatia consults across Geneva, Mauritius, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Mumbai, while shaping menus for *Ziya* at *The Oberoi*, Mumbai, where seven and ten-course degustations unfold against Marine Drive.

Chef Manjunath Mural's *The Song of India* remains a reference point for colonial bungalow dining in Asia. Its Michelin

recognition across several years inspired later concepts such as *Varq* and *Amrith*, carrying refined Indian flavours into private dining and gentler formats. The experience had the feel of a residence, with cocktails, veranda calm, kebabs, biryani, and a city return lit by memory.

Bangkok's *Benares* adds sous vide and molecular gastronomy across tandoori lobster, *Sikandari raan*, foie gras with Indian spice accents, vegan dishes, gluten-free breads, wine pairings, and cocktails. *Finch* and *Chandni Chowk* bring Old Delhi branding, music, tacos, chaats, and grills. In Bangkok, Indian food now carries nightclub energy, fine dining polish, and street memory in one city.



*Chef Atul Kochhar*



Smoked Masala Ribs by Chef Vikas Khanna. Image Courtesy: Junoon Restaurant



Chef Vikas Khanna

**BANGKOK AND DUBAI: INTIMACY AS LUXURY**

At Gaa, Chef Garima Arora explores street snacks, pickles, fermentation, spice layering, and micro courses eaten with fingers, spoons, and sometimes no cutlery. An Indian breakfast may meet a Thai lens. A paniyaram-style bite may carry fruit and chilli. The old wooden house gives the meal a private, human quality.

Dubai's Trèsind Studio offers choreographed intimacy. Its surprise menu celebrates India's four compass points with gentle theatre. Local microgreens and herbs grown in the rooftop garden appear beside slow-cooked meats, coastal seafood, vegetarian celebrations, and street food memories in miniature art. Guests receive a booklet mapping the regions and storylines, turning dinner into cartography.

The ritual may begin at Popadom Botanic Bar, the adjacent cocktail space, before guests enter the studio for a multi-hour tasting. For a certain traveller, this is Dubai's new luxury rhythm: suite, spa, desert drive, and a reservation carrying three Michelin stars.

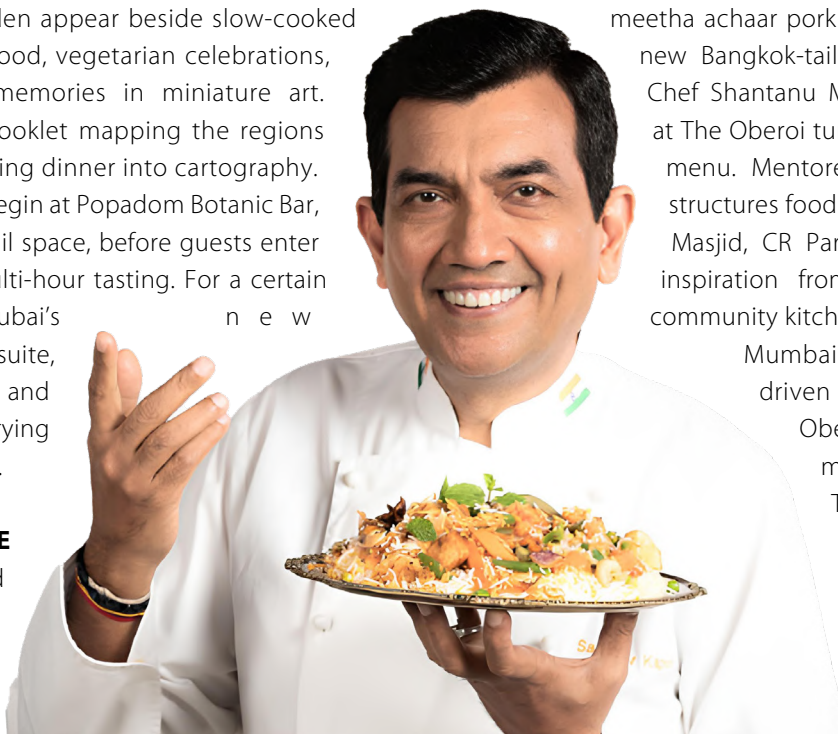
**ECHOES AT HOME**

Recognition abroad has returned with force inside Indian hotel dining rooms.

In New Delhi, Indian Accent has long been a bellwether, first at The Manor and now at The Lodhi. Its tasting menus reframe chaat, regional snacks, and classics through global ingredients and contemporary technique. A seven-course progression may begin with wild mushroom soup and blue cheese naan, pass through khakra tartlets with vatana and dhokla, then reach Kanyakumari softshell crab or fish in sol kadhi sauce.

Indian Accent's influence also travels. In 2024, it announced a culinary residency at Anantara Siam Bangkok, taking meetha achar pork ribs and daulat ki chaat, with new Bangkok-tailored plates, under Executive Chef Shantanu Mehrotra. Back in Delhi, Dhilli at The Oberoi turns the city itself into a tasting menu. Mentored by Chef Vineet Bhatia, it structures food around Chandni Chowk, Jama Masjid, CR Park, and Nizamuddin, drawing inspiration from homes, street stalls, and community kitchens.

Mumbai has responded with chef-driven tasting rooms. Ziya at The Oberoi offers modern Indian menus by Chef Vineet Bhatia. Trèsind Mumbai presents 10 and 14-course chef's tasting menus built around indigenous flavours, molecular techniques, and regional reinterpretations. Its Chef's Table: Exploring



Chef Sanjeev Kapoor



**VACHERON CONSTANTIN  
GRAND LADY KALLA EDITION**

India, guided by Chef Himanshu Saini, focuses on regions such as Malvan and Sindh. Further south, Taj Falaknuma Palace in Hyderabad makes Nizami cuisine the spectacle at Adaa, where heirloom recipes linked with the Nizam kitchens shape dum biryani, khatti dal, kebabs, shorba, curries, and royal set menus. The St Regis Goa brings similar seriousness to Goan and Konkani traditions.

This homecoming also rests on three public figures who gave Indian cuisine confidence at different registers. Chef Manish Mehrotra made modern Indian dining feel precise and playful. When Indian Accent opened in New Delhi in 2009, blue cheese naan, meetha achar pork ribs, and Daulat ki Chaat gave nostalgia a sleek new room. After around 24 years with the parent group, Chef Manish Mehrotra stepped aside in 2024, then launched Manish Mehrotra Culinary Arts with Amit Khanna and Binny Bansal. Nisaba at Sunder Nursery, Delhi, opened in early 2026, named after the Sumerian goddess of grain and knowledge, with grain, fire, comfort, blue cheese naan, and meetha achar pork ribs at its heart.

Chef Sanjeev Kapoor shaped public appetite on a far larger canvas. Khana Khazana, Asia's longest-running cookery show, broadcast in as many as 120 countries and has reached hundreds of millions. Chef Sanjeev Kapoor made the chef visible, approachable, and aspirational long before chef-led restaurants became lifestyle destinations. Khazana in Dubai opened in 1998. More than 200 cookbooks, FoodFood, Wonderchef, The Yellow Chilli, Bohra thalis, and Himachali dham all formed part of his wider culinary ecosystem.

Chef Vikas Khanna carried Indian cuisine into another global arena. Raised in Amritsar and trained in Indian hotel groups, Chef Vikas Khanna endured difficult early years in America before becoming executive chef at Junoon in Manhattan. Under Chef Vikas Khanna, Junoon earned a Michelin star, marking a turn in New York's high-end Indian dining scene. As author, filmmaker, MasterChef India host,



*Chef Himanshu Saini*



*Chef Garima Arora*

humanitarian, and creator of Holy Kitchens, Chef Vikas Khanna gave Indian ambition an emotional, diaspora-shaped face.

### THE NEW INDIAN TABLE

Today, diners fly into Dubai for Trèsind Studio, Bangkok for Gaa, London for Chef Atul Kochhar's legacy, Singapore for Chef Manjunath Mural's colonial bungalow elegance, and India for the roots. Indian cuisine has become spice-forward, regionally obsessed, visually polished, and comfortable with wine pairings and three-hour dinners.

Malabar tides, Thar dust, Nizami kitchens, Goan coasts, Mumbai sea views, and Delhi gardens now appear through tasting menus instead of travelogues. The new Indian table feels rooted, glamorous, and ready for its long global evening.



*Pomegranate Lamb Chops by Chef Sanjeev Kapoor. Image Courtesy: Khana Khazana, Dubai*



**BIANCHET ULTRAFINO MASERATI**



# THE GARDEN MOVES TO THE DESSERT PLATE

The dessert plate is turning greener, glossier and far more glamorous with unexpected luxury ingredients

**TT BUREAU**

**D**essert has found its new muse in the garden. Beetroot, carrot, pumpkin, fennel, sweet corn and even green pea are slipping into cakes, custards, tarts and gelatos with surprising ease. The idea feels modern on a fine-dining menu, yet Indian kitchens have always understood the charm of vegetables in sweets.

The new dessert mood gives that instinct a sharper wardrobe. The flavours are familiar, the styling is sleeker. A beetroot brownie arrives with a glossy ganache. Carrot halwa turns into cheesecake. Lauki finds itself inside a tart shell. Pumpkin becomes a silk-smooth panna cotta. The garden has entered the pastry kitchen, and it has done so with excellent posture.

## **BEETROOT IN VELVET**

Beetroot brings a happy drama to dessert. Its beautiful colour alone has the confidence of a couture gown, deep ruby, moody and rich.

When beetroot is mixed into chocolate cake, it adds moisture and an earthy depth that makes cocoa taste darker and rounder. In brownies, it lends a fudgy softness. In a beetroot halwa tart, it carries Indian nostalgia into a more polished dining room setting.

Its strength lies in balance. Beetroot has enough natural sweetness to belong in a dessert, yet enough earthiness to stop a dish from feeling sugary and flat. A chocolate beetroot cake feels grown-up, with a flavour that lingers beyond the first hit of cocoa. Add cream cheese, orange zest, pistachio or dark chocolate, and beetroot, and it becomes surprisingly glamorous.

## **GAJAR GETS A GLOW-UP**

From ancient times, carrot knows how to gel with desserts. It softens beautifully, carries spice well and becomes lush when cooked slowly with milk. Gajar ka halwa remains one of India's great winter pleasures, with grated carrot simmered down until it turns glossy, fragrant and rich.

The modern pastry version takes that same warmth and gives it a new frame. Gajar halwa cheesecake works because the creaminess of cheese meets the grainy richness of halwa.

Carrot cake with jaggery caramel brings a broader Indian accent. Saffron, walnut, citrus, cream cheese, rose, and pistachio all sit comfortably with carrot, making it one of the easiest vegetables to move between home-style comfort and plated elegance.

## **ROOTS WITH A SWEET SECRET**

The more intriguing side of vegetable desserts begins with ingredients that rarely get dessert fame. Parsnip, celeriac and fennel may sound like soup-pot regulars, yet each has a softer side.

Parsnip has a natural honeyed note. Baked into a maple cake, it gives warmth and quiet sweetness. Celeriac has a nutty, almost creamy personality when cooked gently, which makes it interesting in custards and vanilla-led desserts. Fennel becomes mellow and aromatic when roasted or caramelised, bringing a



*Gajar ka Halwa Served in Copper Bowls. Image Courtesy: Saveurs Secretes, Pexels*



Exquisite Chocolate Dessert. Image Courtesy: Just\_b\_nice\_Pexels

soft aniseed perfume to panna cotta, citrus tarts or cream-based puddings.

You need a careful hand to work with these ingredients for a dessert. Their charm comes through when sweetness supports them instead of burying them. A fennel panna cotta with orange, a parsnip cake with brown butter, or celeriac custard with vanilla and almond can make diners pause in the best way.

### SWEET CORN, TOMATO AND GREEN PEA JOIN THE PARTY

Now, here are some vegetables that already carry dessert energy. Sweet corn is naturally milky and sweet, making it wonderful in ice cream, custard, crème brûlée and puddings. A sweet corn crème brûlée has the sunny softness of summer, especially with caramelised sugar and a pinch of sea salt.

Tomato behaves beautifully when treated like a fruit. It can become jam, sorbet, tart filling or compote. With strawberry, basil, balsamic or vanilla, the tomato turns bright and juicy.

Green pea sounds bolder, yet its fresh sweetness works well with mint, white chocolate and mascarpone. A green pea and



Delicious Fig Tart Topped with Powdered Sugar. Image Courtesy: Jonathan Valdes, Pexels

mint semifreddo can feel chic, pale green and almost floral when the flavour is kept light.

### INDIA HAD THE ANSWER

Indian sweets are the best argument for vegetables in dessert. Lauki halwa, beetroot halwa, petha, kaddu kheer and pumpkin payasam are based on an old idea of texture and transformation.

Slow cooking can transform a bland vegetable into a delicate gourmet dish. Milk thickens. Ghee is shining. Cardamom and other spices hint at mystery. Nuts add crunch. Time does the rest.

Today, chefs can put their own stylish spin on these classics. Lauki halwa can be poured into a crisp tart. You can layer the petha with rabri cream and almond crumble.

Purple yams can be cheesecaked. Pumpkin payasam can be served with coconut praline and jaggery caramel. The soul is still moored, the presentation feels like it's ready for a tasting menu.

### TRUFFLE ENTERS DESSERT

At the luxury end of this story sits truffle, the ingredient that can make a simple dessert feel instantly extravagant. Truffle brings an earthy, musky aroma that works especially well with fat-rich flavours such as vanilla, white chocolate, mascarpone, hazelnut, honey, custard and ice cream.

Its price comes from rarity, labour and fragility. Truffles grow underground and are usually found with trained dogs. Each piece is dug out by hand, then moved quickly because it begins losing moisture and aroma soon after it's harvested. White truffles are especially prized, seasonal and difficult to cultivate, with recent white truffle prices of around €6,000 to €7,000 per kilogram in Croatia's Istria region.

That explains the glamour around truffle desserts. A few shavings over honey semifreddo, white chocolate mousse or vanilla panna cotta can change the entire mood of a plate. Truffle needs restraint. A little feels luxurious. Too much overwhelms everything around it.

The most famous modern example is Cellato's Byakuya gelato. The Japanese luxury ice cream used white truffle, sake lees, cheese, edible gold and white truffle oil, and was certified by Guinness World Records as the most expensive ice cream. Cellato listed the dessert at 880,000 yen, placing it firmly in the world of edible spectacle.

### THE COUTURE DRIZZLE

Luxury oils have infiltrated the dessert course, too. They are finishing touches, added at the end to give aroma, gloss and character. Drizzle truffle oil on vanilla bean ice cream, pistachio oil on cheesecake, blood orange olive oil on dark chocolate mousse, argan oil on honeyed yoghurt or premium olive oil on panna cotta and a simple sweet will feel styled.

The trick is dosage. These oils should arrive as a final accent. A few drops can give lift, fragrance and polish. Heavy-handed use makes the dessert taste forced.

### ARGAN OIL, MOROCCO'S NUTTY GOLD

Culinary argan oil carries a lovely story of place. It is associated with Morocco, especially the region around Essaouira, and is made from roasted argan kernels, which give the oil its warm, nutty aroma. The FAO highlights culinary argan oil as a delicacy linked with Moroccan women's cooperatives and a threatened ecosystem.

Its luxury lies in geography, labour and cultural value. The argan tree grows in a limited region, the production process requires skill, and the flavour is distinctive. In desserts, it works beautifully over vanilla ice cream with honey, almond cake, date tart or yoghurt with figs. It brings a roasted, golden warmth that feels both rustic and refined.

### THE GREEN VELVET FINISH

Roasted pistachio oil brings a subtle luxury to desserts. There is no loud sweetness as in pistachio paste, no crunch of chopped nuts. Rather, it ends with a light, fragrant, nutty finish that leaves a gentle impression on the palate.

The real beauty of it is the smell. That's why pistachio oil works better as a finishing touch than as an ingredient in a batter, where much of its delicate fragrance can be lost to baking. It pairs beautifully with fruit tarts, saffron puddings, white chocolate mousse, almond cakes, panna cotta and ricotta desserts. It offers a graceful green richness with berries, figs or poached pears.

### CITRUS WITH SWAGGER

Blood orange olive oil brings a brighter, more playful energy to the dessert plate. It has the richness of good olive oil, lifted by the tart, slightly bitter charm of blood orange.

What makes it exciting is the contrast between fruit and fat. The oil gives body, while the blood orange adds brightness and aroma. It works beautifully with almond cake, olive oil cake, panna cotta, chocolate tart, mascarpone desserts and fresh berries.



*Dessert with Cream, Berries, and Crumbs. Image Courtesy: Valeria Boltneva, Pexels*

A small drizzle over vanilla gelato with a pinch of sea salt can feel beautifully modern. Over dark chocolate, it cuts through the richness and leaves a clean, citrusy finish. Stylish, sharp and full of character, blood orange olive oil gives dessert a little Mediterranean swagger.

### LAMBDA AND THE COLLECTOR'S POUR

For a true luxury cue, Lambda Ultra Premium Olive Oil sits in a league of its own. Lambda is also known as the first luxury olive oil in the world since 2007. The brand says it is made in limited production, using olives from old Greek trees, handpicked and pressed with care, then bottled and labelled by hand, with every bottle passing five quality controls.

That is why such an oil is more than a pantry item. It is a mirror of origin, limited quantity, handwork, packaging, quality control and brand storytelling. It comes with vanilla gelato, sea salt panna cotta, olive oil cake, figs with ricotta or almond sponge on a dessert plate. It gives the dish a subtle collector's flourish.



*Luxurious Array of Gourmet Truffles. Image Courtesy: Jonathan Borba, Pexels*

SHOWCASE

# FOOD, FRAMED WITH FEELING

Pancakes, porridge and aubergines reveal food photography's playful, intimate and quietly luxurious creative possibilities today

TT BUREAU



The 2026 World Food Photography Awards brought together nearly 9,000 entries across more than 50 countries, revealing how widely food can be read through culture, design, memory and daily ritual. Now in its 15th year, the competition spanned 27 categories and placed equal value on technical control, emotional clarity and an original visual idea. Winners were announced at Mall Galleries in London on 2 June, followed by a public exhibition featuring 203 finalist images.

Among the most compelling works were six photographs shaped by very different moods. Four came through Belgian stylist Sarah Ghijssels' portfolio for the Hotel Art Group Food Stylist Award, photographed by Sandra Declercq. A Swiss morning scene by Sarah Vanessa Schneider brought intimacy and restraint. Jordanian photographer Hussam Sleiby offered humour through a family portrait built around aubergines.

### BREAKFAST AS PERFORMANCE

Stacked Morning carries immediate drama. Pancakes rise in a tall column layered with cream, berries, jam and syrup. One final pancake hangs above the stack, holding the frame in a brief moment of suspense. Gravity becomes part of the styling, while glossy syrup adds pace and appetite.

The picture is indulgent, though every element remains controlled. Each berry contributes colour. Cream softens the



Preparing Porridge. Image Courtesy: Sarah-Vanessa Schneider

geometry. The suspended pancake gives the composition its theatrical edge. A familiar breakfast gains the confidence of a fashion image, yet comfort still sits beneath the spectacle.

### PAIRING BEFORE COOKING

Ghijssels' Raw Pairing series takes a more considered route. Wine pairing usually appears through finished plates. Here, raw ingredients carry the idea. Flavour is suggested through colour, texture, shape and visual weight.



Raw Pairing No.3. Image Courtesy: Styling by Sarah Ghijssels | Photo by Sandra Declercq



Raw Pairing No.2. Image Courtesy: Styling by Sarah Ghijssels | Photo by Sandra Declercq



*Stacked Morning. Image Courtesy: Styling by Sarah Ghijssels | Photo by Sandra Declercq*

Raw Pairing No.1 arranges pak choi, mushrooms, noodles, egg and red chilli as a vertical construction. Broad leaves bring freshness and calm, while mushrooms add earthiness. Chilli introduces heat and tension. Fine glassware creates fragility around the heavier food forms.

Raw Pairing No.2 works with artichoke, Brie, pasta, peas and shallot. Salt, richness and vegetal bitterness guide the pairing. Pale tones make the image feel softer, while the suspended forms prevent stillness. The artichoke brings sculptural volume, the Brie adds creamy visual weight, and the smaller ingredients keep the frame lively.

A brighter energy enters Raw Pairing No.3. Langoustine, lemon, grapefruit and asparagus gather around slender wine glasses. Citrus colour gives the frame lift. The polished shell catches the light, while asparagus introduces long, clean lines. Acidity, freshness and texture become visible before any dish is assembled.

Across all three works, glassware acts as architecture. Ingredients hover, lean and balance. The series gives wine pairing a visual grammar rooted in flavour relationships instead of finished recipes.

### **A SLOW MORNING**

Sarah-Vanessa Schneider's Preparing Porridge: Slow Morning, entered in the M&S Food Rising Star category, shifts the pace completely. Oats pour into a bowl beside a fog-softened window. Cool blues meet warm browns, creating a scene that feels hushed and deeply personal.

Very little happens, and that is the point. The gentle action captures a familiar ritual: breakfast before conversation, work, or movement begins. Soft light keeps the mood subdued. Nothing competes for attention. Comfort arrives through stillness.

Its strength lies in observation. The photograph understands how routine can carry emotion, especially during quiet mornings shaped by weather, warmth and repetition. The choice of porridge adds another layer, bringing associations of nourishment, simplicity and care.

### **A FAMILY WITH AUBERGINE ROOTS**

Hussam Sleiby's Family Portrait, featured in the MPB Award for Innovation, takes food photography into comic theatre. A white aubergine and a deep purple aubergine pose as mother and father behind an ornate gilded antique frame. Three striped offspring stand proudly in front.

Warm, dramatic lighting gives the group a stately air. A rustic wooden table and peeling wall add age, texture and nostalgia. The scene resembles an old household portrait, complete with pride, formality and inherited character.

The humour works because the treatment is sincere. Sleiby gives vegetables the dignity of family history. Their shapes, colours and arrangement create personality without any human figure appearing. The antique setting also gives the visual joke unexpected tenderness.

### **SIX WAYS OF SEEING FOOD**

These photographs show the range within contemporary food imagery. Breakfast becomes spectacle. Raw produce carries the logic of wine pairing. Porridge expresses silence. Aubergines play an entire family.

Each artist keeps appetite present, though none depends on a plated dish. Styling, light and composition carry the meaning. In every frame, food becomes a way of seeing mood, character and memory.



*Family Portrait. Image Courtesy: Hussam Sleiby*



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