

LIFE & STYLE FOOD & DRINK



How to curry favour with politicians

Vivek Singh, the chef behind the most popular curry in Westminster, on its enduring appeal

I've been executive chef with the Cinnamon Group since 2001. That was at the start of the wave of modern Indian cuisine in Britain. The Cinnamon Club in Westminster was the first restaurant in the group to open about 14 years ago and it's a temple of gastronomy. It's very close to the House of Commons so it's popular with many Members of Parliament.

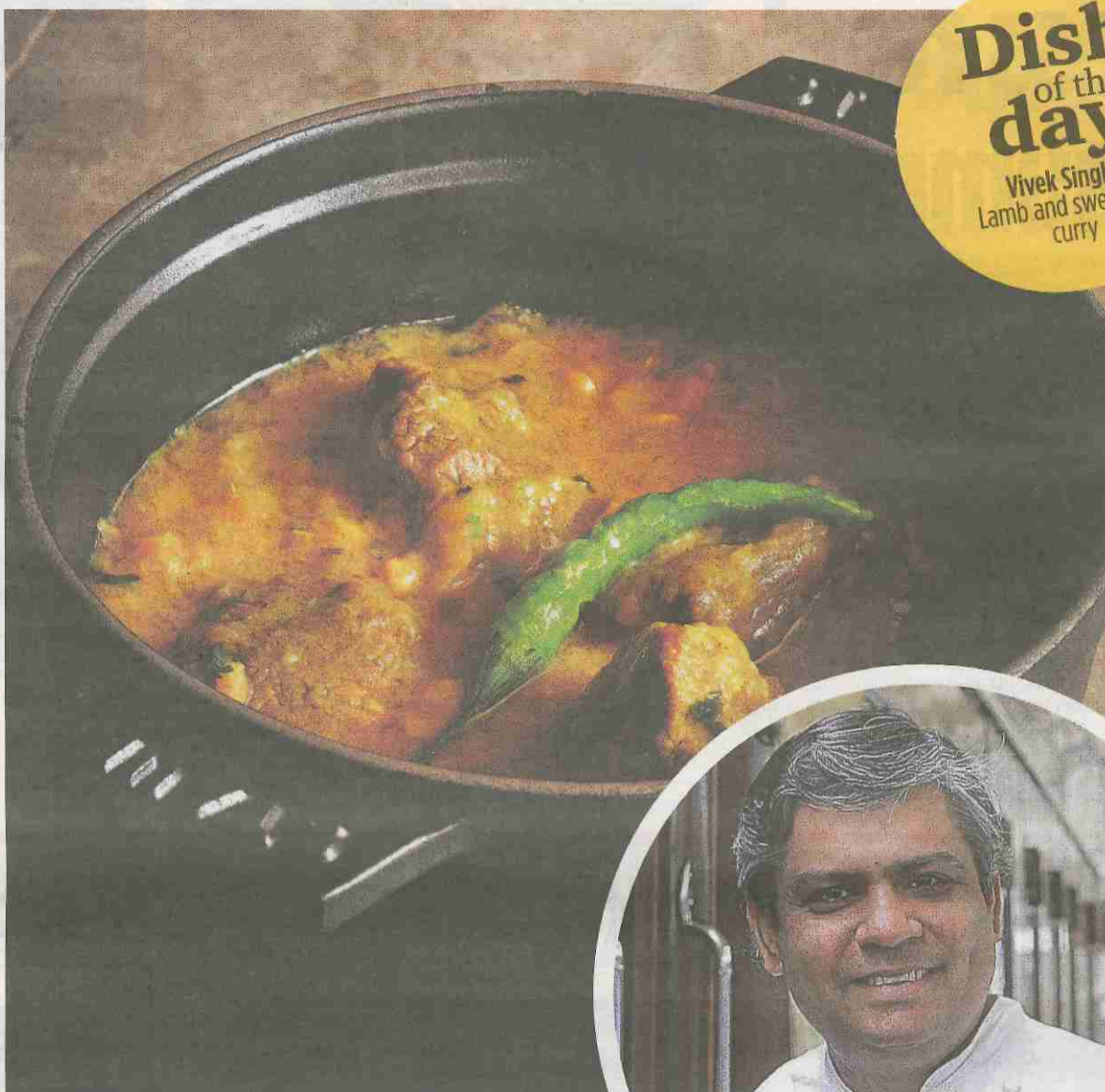
Cinnamon Kitchen in Devonshire Square in the City is younger and funkier. Cinnamon Soho is the most accessible of the restaurants; it's the sort of place you can have a few small dishes before you go out. The group has something for everyone, whether you want to go for high chai, a snack before you go out, or a three course meal. But there's an ethos of creativity and making the best of quality seasonal produce that unites them all.

The lamb and sweetcorn curry is one of my favourite dishes when it's on our menu. Out of all the curries we make, that's probably the one I would make at home. It's popular because it's quite familiar, but the lamb and sweetcorn combination is unusual at the same time. It's a thing of beauty because of its simplicity.

The traditional way to make it is to make an onion paste, because when you're cooking for 10 to 12 people as you would be in an Indian family, that's a lot of onions to chop. If you're just making it at home, make sure you don't burn the onions and it's very straightforward from there.

We're evolving contemporary Indian cuisine and pushing boundaries but, at the same time, I think we know when to leave things alone because they work well.

In the UK, you've got the most beau-



Dish of the day

Vivek Singh's Lamb and sweetcorn curry

INGREDIENTS

- 750g boneless lamb shoulder meat, trimmed and diced into 2.5cm pieces
- 6tbsp ghee or vegetable oil
- 12 cloves
- 4 black cardamom pods
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 onions, finely chopped
- 6 green chillies, slit lengthways
- 2tsp salt
- 1tsp ground coriander
- 1tsp ground cumin
- 1tsp ground turmeric
- 1tbsp garlic paste
- 200g sweetcorn kernels, frozen or canned
- 250g plain yoghurt
- 125ml lamb stock or water, plus extra if necessary
- 6cm piece of fresh ginger, peeled and finely chopped
- 50g fresh coriander leaves and stalks, chopped
- Juice of 1 lemon

Method

- To start making the curry heat the ghee to smoking point in a heavy-based pan and add the cloves, cardamom pods and bay leaves. When they crackle, add the onions and cook on a medium heat until golden.
- Add the green chillies, salt, ground coriander, cumin and turmeric and stir for 1 minute. Stir in the garlic paste and continue cooking for 1-2 minutes.
- Now add the lamb and cook, moving it around on a high heat, for 4-5 minutes, until lightly browned all over. Stir in three-quarters of the sweetcorn kernels and gradually add the yoghurt, stirring well after each spoonful. If you add it too quickly, it will split and make the curry grainy.
- Once yoghurt is incorporated, continue stirring and allow the mixture to come to the boil. Add the lamb stock, reduce the heat and simmer, uncovered, for about 30 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the sweetcorn is creamy and soft and the sauce has thickened.
- Add the ginger, fresh coriander and the remaining sweetcorn kernels, pour in a little more lamb stock or water, if required, and continue simmering over a low heat for 10 minutes. Check the seasoning and finish by squeezing in the lemon juice.

Main picture: Singh's lamb and sweetcorn curry; inset: Vivek Singh, executive chef of the Cinnamon Group of restaurants

tiful Scottish salmon, the best in the world. In India, fish and mustard is a popular combination, while the Scandinavians also use a lot of dill.

So we made a salmon with mustard and dill that's cooked at a fierce heat in a tandoor. It's charred on the outside but juicy on the inside. We're just joining the dots between differ-

ent cuisines to make the best out of the produce we have.

The most common mistake people make when they're making curry at home is thinking they have to make them really spicy. That couldn't be further from the truth. They also start cooking without having all the ingredients so they end up adding

the wrong things and it's not the same.

People try a recipe for the first time and expect it to work. Cooking curry well requires practice. It's like Bruce Lee - he practised one move 100 times when everyone else was only doing it 10 times so he could get it right and be the master.

Abandon your prejudices and think pink this summer

It's high summer and that can only mean one thing: death by rosé. At the barbecues and on the patios of England, pink wine is being served by the gallon. We all smile politely and neglect to tell our hosts that most of it is barely drinkable.

Like others I have always been a rosé sceptic. While it may look pretty in the glass, the fact is many of the pink wines I've tasted over the years have been downright nasty, and not even a sunny day and a piece of chargrilled meat could convince me otherwise. Even when it's drinkable, it tends to be neither Arthur nor Martha. It lacks the finesse and elegance of a Chablis for



example, or the body and complexity of a Claret. It's a shame, really, since there's evidence rosé was the first wine ever made and it was drunk by the ancient Greeks as they warred and philosophised.

On Monday however, accompanied by my usual tasting homies, we tackled a set of rosé wines that went

some way to challenging - if not entirely shattering - our prejudices.

There were a few disasters. The Ogio Pinot Grigio from Italy (Tesco £5.99) was condemned as "nasty, bland and sour", while a Vina Albali was dubbed "rough medicine".

But there were a series of pleasing discoveries. The first was the sheer variety of rosé on offer from the nation's vintners - from the traditional southern French wines, through the rest of Europe and onto the New World. No grape type, it seems, is too proud to go pink.

The second was that there are some great rosé wines out there - if you are prepared to pay a little extra. Three stood out.

The first is the Cune Rioja Roful (hints of its red Rioja cousin plus a pleasing freshness). Second, there's the Les Pins Couchés Rosé 2013 from Jean-Luc Colombo (£9.99 Partridges of Sloane St) which is the quintessential summer wine - light and inoffensive, but with a satisfying tang from the Syrah grape skins.

But my favourite by far was the Sancerre, Joseph Mellot Rose 2013 (£16.99 Famous Wines). Call me a heathen but I wasn't even aware they produced rosé in Sancerre. But this was a lovely wine with complexity and length, a Pinot Noir would you believe, which had lightness and body at the same time.

If you are a bit flash though, there

is really only one pink wine for you and that is Chateau Miraval (£18.00 Lay & Wheeler). This wine is famous because of its owners, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, who bought the estate in 2008. Not content with sunbathing on the terrace, they set about creating a special rosé by working with the renowned vigneron Marc Perrin. It is now regularly voted one of the world's top wines. It is delicious, combining the freshness of summer with fruit and intensity you rarely find in a white wine. Stocks of Miraval are short so you need to move sharpish to secure your supply. Make sure you do; this wine should be right at the top of your summer "to do" list.