

# COLOURFUL IMAGINATION

*Not content with having successful restaurants and best-selling cookbooks to his name, Vivek Singh is brightening up the City too*

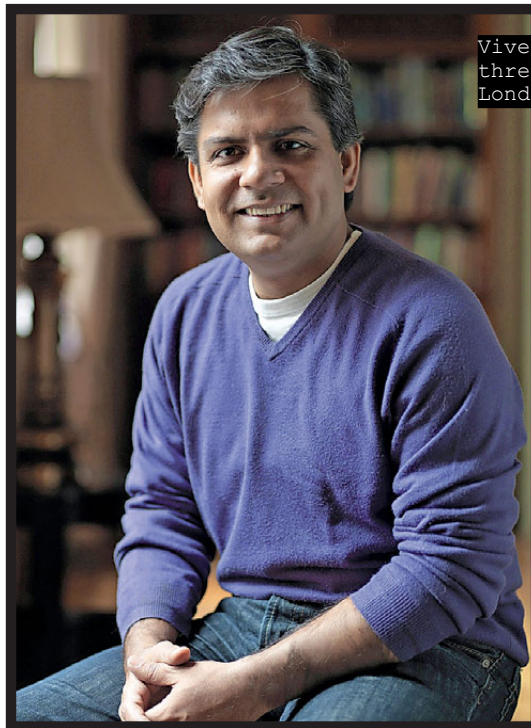
Words MARK KEBBLE

If you picked the right time to visit Cinnamon Kitchen – Vivek Singh's hugely successful restaurant on

Devonshire Square – last year, you would have been greeted with the rather random sight of City suits swamped in colourful powder and with silly grins spread across their face. The reason? The House of Holi, a purpose-built party pod.

'Holi is one of my favourite festivals of all time,' says the acclaimed chef, a delight to talk to. 'Diwali has become pretty mainstream here, but Holi is still relatively low key.' Hence why he came up with The House of Holi.

It's a small, but intriguing insight into the mind of one of Britain's best-known Indian chefs. Chatting to him, you get the sense that he is always thinking ahead, about what he could open up next to a grateful London audience. It mirrors his approach when he first came to the UK with the desire to do something new. 'I knew London had lots of Indian restaurants and loved its curry,'



Vivek Singh has three successful London restaurants



Lassi paneer cori, an example of how Vivek twists traditional classics

he remembers back to 2000, 'but it was interesting for me that if you looked at the really great Indian chefs and restaurants, I could count them on my hands. Largely what was being served up was pretty unimaginative. I could see a real opportunity.'

That opportunity evolved into The Cinnamon Club, launched in 2001 to widespread acclaim. It was seven years later that Vivek's cooking came a little closer to North Londoners with the opening of The Cinnamon Kitchen. 'The Cinnamon Club is about pushing the boat out in a grand

dining room, with a rather serious ambience – and that's partly due to the building being the former Westminster Library,' he looks at the differences between the two. 'Over almost seven years of serving 80,000 people a year, you wouldn't believe the number of times we were asked if you had to be a member to come in, or if children were welcome. I wanted it to be more accessible, more welcoming, something that would reflect the sensibilities of "New India" – not just in the food, but in the atmosphere.'

The colourful House of Holi





Tandoori chicken  
pizza**Online**

Find out how Marco Pierre White inspired Vivek Singh's career at [theresident.co.uk](http://theresident.co.uk)



Another seven years on and that desire to entertain hasn't diminished in the slightest, particularly if my recent visit to The Cinnamon Kitchen was anything to go by. The food was universally excellent – from the stir-fried shrimps in a delightfully tangy apricot glaze to the smoked saddle of Kentish lamb, which had just the right amount of spice, even through to an astonishing side dish in the form of the smoked aubergine crush – the staff friendly, and the buzz thrilling to be part of.

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Cinnamon Soho opened in 2012, but it's not just through restaurants that Vivek wants to break down barriers. He has five cookbooks to his name, with the latest – *Spice at Home* – hitting the best sellers' list before the end of 2014. 'It's the first book that's not about the restaurant or a specific subject matter, but about how it's possible to include spice in any form for people to cook at home,' Vivek explains. 'It's more about enjoyment and making cooking an experience. It's my favourite book I have written so far.'

Vivek believes there's room for 'three or four more' restaurants in London based on The Cinnamon Kitchen approach. For now, it's all about Holi, with a special five-course menu – featuring such delights as chargrilled sprouting broccoli with almonds and rose petals, and Kentish lamb 'pasanda' with rock moss and allspice – running alongside the pop-up party pod from 5-14 March. Vivek, for one, can't wait. 'Holi is one festival that's not religious at all. It celebrates friendships and has that element of fun,' he says with glee. 'Just don't wear your best clothes...' The House of Holi takes place at Cinnamon Kitchen, 9 Devonshire Square EC2M 4YL; 020 7626 5000; [cinnamon-kitchen.com](http://cinnamon-kitchen.com)