

## Maneet Chauhan

Executive chef

Vermilion

10 W. Hubbard St., Chicago

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Maybe it's because they are both Indian that Maneet Chauhan and Vermilion owner Rohini Dey are hosting an elaborate celebration of Diwali, India's widely celebrated festival of lights and the New Year.

Or perhaps it's because Chauhan and Dey feel a special connection to this festival, when the Indian goddesses Kali and Lakshmi reign supreme, that they go all out for this weeklong celebration. Vermilion, open not quite a year, already is "reigning supreme" on the Chicago restaurant scene. It recently made Chicago magazine's list of top 20 restaurants in the city; nationally it was Esquire's restaurant of the month for May and the July Wine Enthusiast called it the

## Chef du jour

*A visit with area chefs*

best new restaurant in the country. "It gives me goose pimples," says Chauhan, who worked with Dey to create the contemporary Indian and Latin American fusion menu.

As she prepared for this week's festival of special foods, desserts, cocktails and music, Chauhan paused to reflect on her career to date.

### What are you most proud of?

Coming from India, being a chef and a female is not a very happening thing. People would come and ask me why my parents weren't getting me married or why I wasn't going to become a doctor or engineer. A lot of people would humor me and say "this is just a hobby, you won't make it, in two years you'll be married."

**How did you react?** I think it made me really, really stronger. I

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MARK BLACK/DAILY HERALD

**At Vermilion in Chicago, chef Maneet Chauhan prepares an intriguing menu, blending flavors from India and Latin America.**

said, "OK, I'll show you!"

**Where do you get that drive?** My parents and my sister. They told me, "Do whatever you want as long as you are the best at it."

**What is it like to be a female executive chef?** My kitchen is highly estrogen ruled. My pastry

chef and my junior sous chef are females. It is so much fun.

**What has been your most rewarding experience?** Opening Vermilion, especially in terms of all the accolades we have gotten. It has

See **CHEF** on **PAGE 6**