



... with Chef Maneet Chauhan

In fact, Rohini Dey's Vermillion restaurants in Chicago and New York have received great accolades in the American press. They have also been featured in *O, The Oprah Winfrey Magazine*; *Fortune*; *FSB*; *Business Week*; *Esquire*; *Crain's Chicago Business* and *The Chicago Tribune*, among others. She offers a confluence of the heady tastes of India and Brazil. To put it in her own words, "It is the melding of Indian and Latin Indian cuisines and a selection of untamed Indian regional fare—Heat, Tapas, signature entrees, hedonistic desserts, boutique Latin and global wines and herb and spice cocktails." On the deck are tangy *pani puri* Margaritas, duck Vindalo Arepas, the artichoke *pakor*as, or the very popular Lobster Portuguese. I am told this inventive fusion of Indian and Latin American cuisines is really hot on the rock. The Lobster Portuguese was ranked as one of the best dishes in the US by *USA Today*.

Rohini comes from a very different background. A former management consultant for McKinsey & Co, she had also worked at the World Bank in Washington DC where she managed projects in foreign

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investment policy and infrastructure privatisation. "My parents and in-laws were horrified when they learnt that I was heading for this," she laughs. "They wanted me to do what all decent educated girls did...just stick to what I was doing. And, why not? There's no industry which has a worse rap. 90 per cent of ventures fail in this industry. Definitely, it's not a hot-shot corporate choice of career. You're not going to be a *Fortune* 500 CEO, for sure. So, nobody understood the desire and people still question my sanity," she adds. But Rohini had her goals etched. "I left McKinsey knowing that I wanted to do something else, but it seemed a little far fetched to go directly from consulting to the restaurant business. But the more I explored the restaurant possibility, the more I became convinced that this was doable," she says.

Rohini always had a passion for food. A self diagnosed, 'eating out junkie', she combined her passion with her entrepreneurial acumen to change the concept of Indian food in USA. But it was not just a heart over head venture. Rohini did see an untapped market. She did her own three-month feasibility study, along with extensive investigation. Initially, she visited all the Indian restaurants in and around Chicago and discovered that all the restaurants had eight predictable flavours. There were one or two upscale restaurants which served food that bordered on being more French than Indian.

"What I saw was appalling," she says. "The typical Indian restaurant had been so poorly done in the US, with its representations of elephants and the sitar. These were cheap, all-you-can-eat buffets, most of which are as bad as they are tacky and it just embarrassed me. They never captured the urban, contemporary India. I wanted to show the Americans what authentic Indian cooking was all about," she asserts.

She evaluated over 70 different locations for the restaurant and went on a nation wide search for a chef. "I interviewed more than 40 chefs