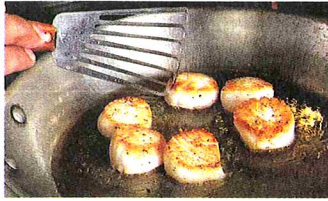


The New York Times

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2011

INSIDE

Dining



SUZANNE D'CHILLO/THE NEW YORK TIMES

FEED ME

3

A star chef switches cuisines.

An Indian Star Switches Cuisines

FOR the men in hard hats wielding drills, yelling into their phones or at one another, the hubbub was business as usual. But for the man with the wordless expression of joy and anticipation—the kind of face you see on Christmas morning or at a sonogram reading—this was something different.

Floyd Cardoz, the chef of *Tabla*, the Indian fusion restaurant that established him as a culinary star in New York in 1998 and closed last year, did not see just another construction site. Standing before his still-wrapped custom-built kitchen equipment (a wood-burning grill, a live coal grill and oven, a plancha with four heat zones), he already envisioned the North End Grill, his new restaurant in Battery Park City, as it will be when it opens next month.

An American-style bar and grill with an emphasis on seafood may not seem like the logical next step for a chef famous for inspired pairings of American ingredients with Indian flavors (his addictive naan stuffed with chile, Cheddar cheese, R.L.P.). But Mr. Cardoz, 51, has been eager to try something new.

"After eating in Spain and South America, I felt the attraction to cooking on wood and charcoal," he said. "It's hard to cook over fire, but I'm intent not to use only heat high to cook. I want to show different heats can be used for different things." He looked lovingly at the plancha: "Seared scallops flipped on the same spot were perfect. You don't normally see that. You'd have to move it to a hotter area."

He also wants to indulge his love of single-malt whiskies, which will be featured prominently at the bar. He led me past that raw space, on to the dining counter that seats 12, facing the open kitchen. Its floor was covered in paper, a small square exposed.

"Is that slate?" he asked, worriedly. "That's going to be slippery." He sought out the foreman. "We have accidents, man," he said. The foreman got on the phone. "The slate's not honed," he reported. "Don't worry. We have an amazing tile guy."

Mr. Cardoz seemed only slightly mollified. "You have to be here all the time," he fretted. "The other day I discovered that the table in the fish cooler is six inches lower than it should be."

Being a perfectionist is the job description for any serious chef, though Mr. Cardoz's commitment to his chosen profession was especially hard-won. He grew up in Bombay, now Mumbai ("I hate the new name," he said), the fourth of six children. His father worked as an art director in advertising, and the family employed a cook. "I wanted to be a doctor," Mr. Cardoz said, "and I was getting my master's in biochemistry, thinking I'd do medical research. I always liked to eat, and when I'd go camping with my friends, I was in charge of food. That was not common. Indian males didn't do that."

The book that changed his life was Arthur Hailey's "Hotel." "I was fascinated by that whole business," he said.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SUZANNE D'CHILLO/THE NEW YORK TIMES

TRIAL RUN Floyd Cardoz, above, sears scallops for his sea scallops with cauliflower two ways, right, to be served at his new downtown restaurant, the North End Grill.

"In India the best restaurants were in the five-star hotels, and we would go occasionally for a meal. I wanted the glamour of being that guy in charge." He smiled. "My dad was not too happy. But my mom said, 'I'll support you.'"

He enrolled in a hotel management college in Bombay and during a kitchen rotation discovered his aptitude for cooking. "My sauces tasted better than anyone else's," he said. "I loved the physical nature of it, prepping, seeing how things change from simple to complex. I worked as a chef trainee at the Taj Mahal International Hotel in Bombay in the early '80s. For me, after my education, the kitchen was a culture shock. Cooking was just another menial job people did in India."

He was accepted to the Cornell School of Hotel Administration, but could not afford the tuition. Instead he attended Les Roches, a hotel management and culinary school in Bluche, Switzerland, where he also cooked French and Italian food at local restaurants. He came to New York for his brother's wedding in 1988. "I was walking by Le Bernardin, the Quilted Giraffe, and I thought, 'This could be something.'"

But in spite of his European training, the only job he could get was at the Indian Café on Broadway at 108th Street. "Part of me wanting to do North End Grill now is about that, too," he said pointedly.

Two years later he met Gray Kunz, who was at the Peninsula hotel, where Mr. Cardoz's brother worked as a room-service manager. When Mr. Kunz opened Lespinasse, he hired Mr. Cardoz as a salad cook. "It was a large pay cut," he recalled. "But I kept an open mind,



learning everything I could." Within three years he became the sous-chef, then chef de cuisine.

His path to *Tabla* was karmic. "At Lespinasse, there was a cook charged with making a consommé and he was failing miserably," Mr. Cardoz recalled. As the rest of the staff razzed him, Mr. Cardoz offered his help. The man never forgot it. "When Gramercy Tavern opened, he went there as sous-chef," Mr. Cardoz said. "He heard that Danny Meyer wanted to do Indian food and recommended me."

As *Tabla* was, North End Grill is owned by Mr. Meyer's Union Square Hospitality Group, where Mr. Cardoz is a partner. Mr. Cardoz said he was debating whether to put upna on his new menu. This is the dish that clinched his win on "Top Chef Masters" last spring, for which he earned \$100,000. He donated the money to the Young Scientist Cancer Research Fund at the Mount Si-

nai School of Medicine in memory of his father, who died of cancer without seeing Mr. Cardoz's success.

On the show, the chefs were told to cook a dish that evoked childhood memories; in his hands, upna, an Indian semolina equivalent of Italian polenta, became the triumphant Wild Mushroom Upma Polenta With Kokum and Coconut Milk. Customers will no doubt be clamoring to try it at North End Grill, along with their perfectly seared scallops.

Mr. Cardoz understands that. While being able to use any spice or none at all feels freeing to him, chefs, like artists, learn, grow and risk while remaining grounded in their own formative experiences. When he cooked recently at a fund-raising event, Mr. Cardoz told me, amused, his sous-chef stopped into Foods of India in Murray Hill to pick up his ingredients. The order was labeled "New *Tabla*." Close enough.

SEA SCALLOPS WITH CIDER GLAZE AND CAULIFLOWER TWO WAYS

Adapted from Floyd Cardoz,
North End Grill, Manhattan
Time: 45 minutes

For the glaze:

- 3 cups fresh apple cider
- 1 teaspoon minced shallots
- 1 teaspoon minced ginger
- 1/2 inch piece dried pasilla or chipotle chile pepper
- 3 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- Salt and black pepper

For the purée:

- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 2 tablespoons sliced shallots
- 1 teaspoon minced ginger
- 3 cups stalks and stems from cauliflower and broccoli
- 2 cups chicken or vegetable stock
- 1/2 teaspoon Aleppo pepper flakes or hot red pepper flakes
- Salt and black pepper

For the cauliflower:

- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 3 cups cauliflower, cut into 1 1/2-inch florets
- 3 cups Romanesco broccoli, purple cauliflower or other broccoli, cut into 1 1/2-inch florets
- 1 cup thinly sliced red onion
- 1 teaspoon minced ginger
- 1 small sprig rosemary
- 2 sprigs thyme
- Salt and black pepper

For the scallops:

- 20 large sea scallops
- 1/4 cup canola oil
- Salt and black pepper.

1. For the glaze: In a large saucepan, combine the apple cider, shallots, ginger, chile pepper and vinegar. Place over high heat until reduced to about 1/2 cup, about 15 minutes. Remove from heat, discard the chile, and season with salt and pepper. Set aside and keep warm.

2. For the purée: Place a large saucepan over moderate heat. Add the canola oil and the cumin, and heat until shimmering. Add the shallots and ginger, and cook for 1 minute. Add the cauliflower trimmings and chicken stock. Bring to a boil and cover. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 5 minutes. Add Aleppo pepper and season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer the trimmings to a food processor with about 1/2 the liquid. Process until smooth, adding liquid from the saucepan as needed to make a thick but pourable purée. Set aside and keep warm.

3. For the roasted cauliflower: Place a medium skillet over moderate heat. Add the canola oil and the cauliflower and Romanesco broccoli. Stir, uncovered, until coated with oil, about 1 minute. Cover and continue to cook until beginning to soften, 4 to 5 minutes. Add the onion, ginger, rosemary and thyme. Stir, cover and cook for another 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste, and set aside.

4. For the scallops: Pat scallops dry with a towel. Heat a skillet over high heat; when hot, turn heat off and add oil. After a moment, add the scallops and return to high heat. Cook until well seared on each side, about 3 minutes a side.

5. Place some purée on one side of each of 4 plates. Top with the roasted cauliflower and broccoli. Place scallops on the other side. Drizzle with glaze.

Yield: 4 servings.