

Planning Nirvana



Planning nirvana

[JENNIFER BAIN](#)

INNER CHEF

WHO: Amardeep (Tony) Singh, owner of Nirvana:
The Flavors Of India,

35 Brunel Rd. (east of Hurontario St.),
Mississauga, 905-501-5500.

BORN: Bombay, India, 1953.



SELECT C.V.: Raised in Bombay, Singh studied accounting, hospitality and hotel management in India and in America at Cornell University. He is married with three children, and is managing director, proprietor or operations director of his family's various companies in India. Singh opened the 6,700-square-foot restaurant Nirvana on Jan. 1 with Canadian partner Sukhi Singh to showcase Indian food, art, fashion and culture.

WHY TORONTO: "During the last 10 years, every time I came to Toronto, when I had yearning for my home food, I could not find it here. My Canadian partner convinced me to open a restaurant. It was a challenge, and a commitment you make toward food. My forté is start-ups, the creation of projects and training people."

FAMILY TIES: Singh is the third generation of the Pritam family, which has run hotels and restaurants in India for 67 years.

NAMING NIRVANA: "Nirvana in Hindi means salvation, and the feeling of satiation you get when you eat a good meal is like salvation. Nirvana is a known name to North Americans. In India, everybody, even cab drivers, know Pritam. Here nobody knows

Planning Nirvana

Pritam, so Nirvana is a better choice."

ON INDIAN FOOD: "India has 20 states, each with at least two styles of cooking. What's popular here in Toronto is north Indian food, but the regional foods of India are what should be made popular. Our menu is totally diversified. We are trying to show India as it actually is."

ON NIRVANA'S OPULENCE: "We are trying to do something for a discerning palate, and to put our guest in an artistic setting. We show art from private collections, and some of it is for sale. We pay more money on insurance bills than anything else."

ON DESIGNING NIRVANA'S MENU: "It's at the back of your mind. It's always there — you just have to push a button and it comes through."

ON BUFFETS: "I feel very strongly that if you're going to go to a restaurant, you are going to be served. If a customer calls asking about if Nirvana has a buffet, I say, 'I'm sorry, but you come here and we'll make the buffet for you on your table.'"

ON CHEFS: "I have five chefs who came from Pritam as a company transfer. HRDC (Human Resources Development Canada, which authorizes work permits) said I only needed one chef, but I said, 'Look, I'm bringing a whole new culture to the city. I need five chefs to do that.' I took my menu to HRDC and showed how the specialist of page one and two cannot be the specialist of page four and five."

SIGNATURE DISHES: Roomali Roti (thin, soft and folded as a kerchief), Machli Jalpari (a whole, marinated fish slow-cooked in the clay oven), Kesari Thandai (a frappé-like drink with nuts, melon seeds and black pepper), Jhinga Malabar (jumbo prawns in grainy, saffron sauce) and, for homemade, rose-flavoured Gulabi Jamun (dessert balls).

ON COOKING: "I treat cooking as a therapy. I feel that when you're cooking, you're able to forget the trouble that's on your mind. I look like a gregarious person and sound like one, but I'm actually an introvert. I spend so much time with people that it's a relief to be alone — and I use cooking as an escape."

COOKING PERSONALITY: "I would say my cooking personality is overpowering. You should be able to overpower the aroma of foods and subdue them into a plate."

FAVOURITE FOOD: "I love all types of food, but if you ask me as to what my preference is, my favourite is fish.

One, it cooks very easily. Two, it's always available fresh. Three, it's healthy.

In India, I like pomfret. Here, I like a lovely, grilled salmon steak, done medium-rare, just

Planning Nirvana

pan-seared in a little olive oil with fresh basil. Then, when you eat it, a squeeze of lemon and maybe some fresh ground pepper."

MOTTO: "Find something that you love doing, then find someone to pay you to do it."

READING LIST: "I'm reading *The Art Of War* right now."

UPCOMING: Nirvana is planning a Feb. 28 fashion show featuring Indian fashion designer Neeta Lulla.

DREAM: "One day, if I have time, I'd like to write a thesis on food."