

It takes a special kind of restaurant – one that has only the deepest faith in its chefs' abilities – to put the kitchen front and centre of the dining space.

At Amaya, Belgravia's authentic Indian grill restaurant, the food is not only immaculately presented, but cooked in plain view of its guests.

The stainless steel surface in front of me is dotted with whizzing pans and blazing

fire. Giant ruby red prawns and lime green chicken cutlets sit on gleaming skewers by coal-charred barbecues, clay ovens and a large metal griddle called a tawa. Behind the trio of chefs are bulbous glass jars with chillies and herbs swimming in yellow and orange liquid.

"There's no such thing as Indian food," Amaya's co-founder Namita Panjabi tells me. "There's Maharashtrian food; there's

Gujarati food; there's Bengali food. Each state has its own cuisine. So what we're really talking about is the diversity of the different cuisines of India."

To prove her point Namita draws a map of India on her notepad. A culinary tour ensues from south to north. Amaya's oysters, she explains, are derived from Goa where traditionally they'd be pan-fried and served with local bread. The scallops, meanwhile, are served the Kerala way: seasoned with fresh turmeric and coconut. The green chicken tikka, which I was eyeing up earlier, is a nod to Mumbai, and last but not least is the rogan josh, a Kashmiri favourite.

These dishes are served in elegant white sharing platters and paired with fine wines in a style befitting Amaya's chic decor. My surroundings – which Namita says were carefully curated to reflect the essence of "modern India" – are clad in chiselled Agra pink sandstone with handcrafted rosewood furniture. Tucked away downstairs is a private dining room that seats 14 people.

"India is actually a very elegant, chic country, [although] it tends to be over-decorated," Namita says. "We said, 'Let's do an interpretation of what we think modern India is.'"

A vibrant painting dominates the otherwise pared back main dining area. It's by the Indian artist Babu Xavier who was commissioned by Namita to paint something for the restaurant. Xavier chose a monsoon-ridden Kerala as his muse.

Finally we get to the food: the scallops are buttery and tender, the lamb delicately marinated, the spices mingling in sauces that strike the perfect harmony between sweet and salty. In fact, the yellow sauce for the oysters is so delicious that you want to drink it like a soup. "The magic of the grills is in the marinade," Namita says.

If this is magic then it's the kind that keeps you in on the secret. As I leave, Amaya's chefs are whipping up another feast and there's a guest knocking on the door eager to partake in the show.

Spice of life

Launched in 2004, Amaya has entranced diners and critics alike with its regional dishes served in chic modern surroundings. We go behind the scenes to discover what makes this much-loved local restaurant tick

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