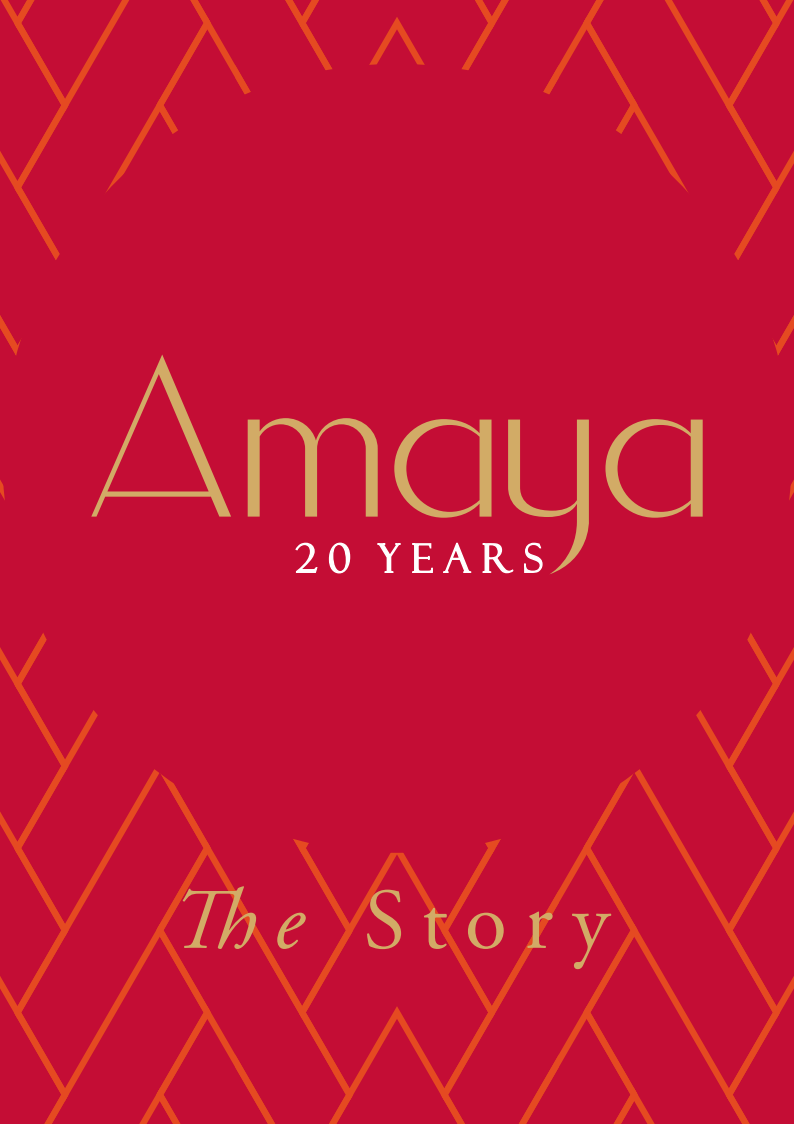




Amaya

20 YEARS

The Story



Part of MW Eat portfolio of the 3 best Indian restaurant in London:

Amaya - in Belgravia / Knightsbridge

Chutney Mary - in St. James's

Veeraswamy - in Piccadilly, Regent Street

Amaya brought a new dimension to the way Indian food was perceived in London and the way Indian food is presented throughout the world.

Awarded with a Michelin Star in 2006, which it has retained ever since

THE CULINARY HISTORY OF AMAYA 20 Years – 2005 to 2025

by Camellia Panjabi

Amaya opened in 2005, in the Halkin Arcade, in a site that was once the warehouse of Osborne & Little, the famous furnishing fabric store. The Arcade is accessible from 3 streets – Lowndes Street, Kinnerton Street and Motcomb Street. In 2004 followed an entire upgrade of Motcomb Street, with buildings beautified, new shops set up, and an upmarket new Waitrose, the then developers invited the owners of Chutney Mary and Veeraswamy to create an innovative new Indian restaurant to express the spirit of regeneration in this premises. And even agreed to a one year rent free period to enable the promoters to do deep thinking and research to create a unique restaurant.

The promoters - Ranjit Mathrani, Namita Panjabi and Camellia Panjabi - decided that the appeal of Indian restaurants in Britain so far had been down to the popularity of curries, and while in India there were few well-known tandoori cooking-based restaurants which were famous in India, the tandoori and curry fare in Britain was restricted largely to chicken and limited seafood or vegetables.

However, in India beyond tandoors, there existed other popular street food methods of barbeque – the skillet or griddle, known as the “tawa” and the coal barbeque known as the “sigree”. This was prevalent on streets in many parts of India, with each region known for different specialities for example, Lucknow’s famous kebab specialities, did not involve the tandoor at all. Its most famous dish – the ultra-soft galouti kebab of beef or mutton was made on a very large thick alloy tawa/griddle. While other kebabs such as the seekh kebabs were largely made on “sigrees” or coal barbeques.

In Delhi and Punjab, the large round griddle was famous for potato patties (also tikki), crisped potato with sour a sweet and hot flavour known as karare aloo chaat. And of course, the use of the tandoor or clay oven for cooking, the ever popular tandoori chicken, chicken tikka and paneer tikka. Bangalore is famous for the beef seekh kebabs, Bombay for tawa specialities such as “baida” roti (egg coated minced pancake) and the vegetarian pau bhaji (sauteed vegetables) served with a soft bun, with corn on the cob cooked on coal barbeque during the monsoon. The dosa is a griddled speciality – in south India it is served not only with a traditional potato filling, but in speciality outlets along with a largely variety including seafood, and various kinds of meats.

What was missing therefore in London was a restaurant that served all 3 kinds of grilling, with a wide choice of ingredients beyond just chicken and lamb, to include a variety of seafood as well as large number of grilled vegetables. The challenge was not just to draw upon the existing dishes and replicate them, but to use the techniques to break new ground, creating enticing complex flavours with exciting new marinades using also ingredients local to Britain – and its seasons – a range of seafood, such as oysters and scallops, vegetables like broccoli, asparagus, brussel sprouts and local goat’s cheese.

Historically there has been a diffidence by British consumers to order seafood in Indian restaurants (besides frozen prawns), because of a lack of confidence about freshness and quality. On a wider issue there was also the doubt whether meats were freshly made, but pre-cooked and kept. The challenge in this posh location was to create a completely open kitchen so diners could see for themselves that all ingredients were not only fresh but actually cooked to order!

There was no restaurant with a completely open kitchen in London. Hence there was no expertise to design one either. Of course, there was the additional problem of heat and smells emanating from the open kitchen into the restaurant, especially since every dish is either spiced, or spices and garlic and chillies are added whilst cooking leading to aromas wafting about.

The services of expert kitchen designers was sought from the Far East. An elaborate system of ventilation and air and smell extraction computerised systems were created in London by engineers. It was specified to the interior designer that the cooking on the grills should be visible to diners when they were sitting down.

Fortunately, the site had a 50-foot-wide span, and it was possible to house all 3 forms of grills in this open kitchen in a straight line. Tandoors in those days were only made of clay without a heat proof cladding – which would have exuded great heat. So special beautifully stainless steel encased tandoors were imported from Australia.

It was concluded that with grilled food, diners would want to combine it with a choice of flavourful salads. Thus, an open salad bar with Asian inspired salads was also created.

No Indian meal is considered complete without a taste of curry. Since most of the cooking space was utilised for grills on display only, a small range of curries changing frequently were included on the menu. It was also decided to showcase a variety of flavours biryanis, entirely newly created by our chefs – both non-vegetarians and vegetarian, which also change with the seasons.

The one year rent free period was used by Namita and Camellia to travel all over India, to get inspired by the range of specialities, look for the right talent, source the right grilling materials including barbeque rods of various thickness to create Amaya's own range of unique grills. The kitchen was got ready and experimented and created the menu over a 4-month period.

Thus was born Amaya – the India grill! And to complete the story, a selection of cocktails tinged with spice, herbs and botanicals was created to go with the food, and a specially created wine list to match the cuisine.

Word had spread, surprisingly the Michelin inspector came in on the opening night, and Amaya was awarded a Michelin Star in 2006 the following year, which it has retained since.

Also, in 2005, Amaya was nominated as the Best Restaurant in London, by the Tio Pepe Restaurant Awards Committee comprising the top restaurant critics of London chaired by the renowned critic, Fay Maschler.

Amaya had a profound effect on Indian restaurants worldwide, as its style of food presentation inspired by Japanese food styling, with vibrant colours, interesting garnishes and neat morselisation of Indian food, suitable for sharing had great appeal. This set off the wave of modern Indian restaurants and contemporisation of serving of Indian food.

And of course, open kitchen restaurants began to appear in Britain and indeed elsewhere. Amaya's cuisine has evolved continuously over these 20 years – going beyond the ingredients it started off with to include non-vegetarian ingredients items not hitherto paired with Indian cuisines, for example, pheasant, quail, griddled beef, venison and duck. Its own collection of kebabs and grilled foods and salads with the most flavourful marinades and accompanying chutneys, were also created.

THE ESSENCE OF AMAYA

by James Hansen, ex-Deputy Editor, Eater London

Like its siblings, Chutney Mary and Veeraswamy, Amaya shares the dual identity of institution and pioneer. Over 20 years in the cusp of Knightsbridge and Belgravia, 19 of them with a Michelin star, it has become a fixture of cutting-edge London dining. But it is also one of the most important restaurants in the history of Modern Indian cooking around the world. This spirit of invention, trailblazing, and difference must not be forgotten.

Amaya's particular position puts it at the heart of one of the stranger contradictions of restaurant culture: newness is often prized above all, even if that newness could not have existed without the work of chefs and restaurateurs long before it. Glance across any of the most feted Indian restaurant openings in London over the last fifteen years, and grilling will be a fixture of the menu.

The tandoor, tawa, and sigree have become not just essential to developing dishes and laying out menus, but cornerstones of Indian restaurant design and theatre, with many kitchens built around the dance of smoke and fire. But it was Amaya, in 2005, that first put those fixtures of Indian culinary technique centre stage. The dining room became a theatre, with the chefs on the stage, a model which is now near fundamental to modern high-end restaurant design across London.

Just as Chutney Mary anticipated the now inescapable interest in regional specificity, not just in Indian cuisine but cuisines all over the world, Amaya anticipated the desire for this style of cooking and presentation: small, morsel portions allowing diners to try as many regional and technical nuances as possible.

While the cuisine is revolutionary in its conception, it still pays homage to numerous roots and classical dishes in regional Indian cuisine, from the Lucknowi Dori Kebab, the Delhi sweet potato chaat, and the Hyderabadi biryani to Kerala or Goan seafood curries. Their point of difference comes from clever touches, like seasonally changing biryanis.

This sense of inventive fun, rooted in solid technique, carries over to Amaya's cocktails, whose technicolour array of fruits, spices, and botanicals has again been adopted by many predecessors. There are subtle nods to Indian ingredients that accent classic cocktails, an "Indian-inspired" approach to mixology that has since been adopted across the city.

Through this widespread adoption of its ideals, Amaya has stood the test of time, remaining one of the most important Indian restaurants in the world. While restaurants are so often favoured for being shiny and new, there is often no better place to visit than the original. Amaya, like its siblings, is a reminder that often, to understand why something has become trendy or fashionable, it is necessary to learn the history and fundamentals behind the new arrivals.

This is what makes Amaya's continued inventiveness and unwillingness to stand still so remarkable: a blend of consolidation and innovation that marks it out as one of the most important Indian restaurants in London's history.

INTERIORS & AMBIENCE

Amaya breaks all perceived traditional conceptions. Its open-grill kitchen and a vibrant on-view salad bar, are the backdrops to the scintillating setting in one of London's most fashionably unconventional Michelin-starred restaurants.



PRIVATE DINING ROOM



The private dining room seats up to 14 guests.



TIO PEPE AWARD
AS THE BEST RESTAURANT IN LONDON 2006
CARLTON ITV AWARDS

Award Winners

TIO PEPE ITV
LONDON
RESTAURANT
OF THE YEAR

SUCCESS
STORY

Amaya



Halkin Arcade
Motcomb Street, London, SW1



020 7823 1166



Karunesh Khanna



Masala World
(Namita Panjabi and
Ranjit Mathrani)



Charcoal-grilled grouper
with mustard, chilli and
peanut marinade

Scallops in their shells
with coriander sauce



AMAYA'S arrival on the London restaurant scene has had, in a remarkably short period of time, a profound effect on the image of Indian cooking in this country. The popular perception of creamy, calorific dishes, served in safe if uninspiring surroundings has been swept away as Amaya has rewritten the rule-book with its paired-down grilled food. Portions are delivered quick-fire for sharing and prepared theatrically in front of the diner, seated in the most sophisticated of interiors. Amaya has proved that Indian food need not be heavy, oily or greasy, and that Indian restaurants can be trendy. Forget starched table cloths, Amaya is elegant, sleek, marbled and beautifully finished. And so it should be, having cost a cool £1.5 million to create.

Of course if any duo were capable of reinventing Britain's most popular cuisine, it is the Panjabi sisters, the geniuses behind some of the UK's most respected Indian restaurants, including Chutney Mary which has now been running 15 years.

The sisters' aim for the 99-seat Amaya was to expose British diners to an ancient style of Indian cooking, but one that has not been properly realised in this country, until now. The basis for the food is three styles of grill – the sigri, tawa and tandoor – which are used, depending on the base ingredient, to create some of the world's most magnificent kebabs.

Who would have thought an Indian grill would become London's top restaurant and in only a matter of months after opening?

THE SHORTLIST 2005

THE FOX	London Gastropub of the Year – page 17
THE GORING	British Restaurant of the Year – page 18
RACINE	French Restaurant of the Year – page 19
PASSIONE	Italian Restaurant of the Year – page 20
RASOIVINEET BHATIA	Indian Restaurant of the Year – page 21
ROKA	Oriental Restaurant of the Year – page 22
LE GAVROCHE	Outstanding Front of House – page 23
FISHWORKS	Fish Restaurant of the Year – page 24
ENOTECATURI	Most Exceptional Restaurant Wine List – page 26

JUDGES – 2005

The judging panel for the Tio Pepe ITV London Restaurant Awards includes some of the top palates on the planet

Fay Maschler MBE (Chairman)

Fay Maschler has been restaurant critic of the *Evening Standard* since time began or, to put it another way, 1972. She has published restaurant guides, cookery books, including *Eating In* (Bloomsbury) for adults and *Cooking is a Game You Can Eat* (Penguin) for children, and has won various awards for her writing, including the British Press Award's Critic of The Year and the Glenfiddich Trophy. This year she was awarded an MBE for services to journalism. She lives in London and Greece with her husband, the writer and painter Reg Gadeny.



Left to right: Matthew Norman, Tim Atkin, Fay Maschler, Jay Rayner, Tracey MacLeod and Charles Campion

"THE REMARKABLE COOKING AT RASOI VINEET BHATIA, COMBINED WITH THE SMARTLY UNDERSTATED SURROUNDINGS AND THE CAREFULLY BALANCED SERVICE, SETS A BENCHMARK BY WHICH ALL INDIAN RESTAURANTS OF AMBITION IN THE CAPITAL MUST NOW BE JUDGED" – JAY RAYNER

Matthew Norman

Matthew Norman has written about restaurants for 10 years, first covering cheap meals for the *Evening Standard*, and, for the last five years, as restaurant critic for *The Sunday Telegraph Magazine*. He also writes the Diary column in *The Guardian*, a weekly current affairs piece for *The Daily Mirror* and both a sports column and a parliamentary sketch for the *Evening Standard*.

Charles Campion

Charles Campion writes about restaurants and food for the *Evening Standard* and various other magazines and newspapers in the UK and abroad, including *The Times of*

India. He also writes the Guide to London Restaurants for the publisher Rough Guides which is on its seventh edition. He was Glenfiddich Restaurant Writer of the Year in 1997.

Tracey MacLeod

Tracey MacLeod has been writing about restaurants for *The Independent* since 1997. Her background is in television; she worked on the production teams of Food and Drink, Wogan, Network 7 and The Six O'Clock Show, and for many years she was a presenter and producer of BBC2's long-running arts strand The Late Show. She currently hosts a radio show on BBC 6 Music, and was 2004's Glenfiddich Restaurant Writer of the Year.

Jay Rayner

Jay Rayner is an award-winning journalist, writer and broadcaster. His writing has covered everything from terrorism to politics, fashion to body-building. He has been *The Observer's* restaurant critic for five years and in 2001 was named Restaurant Critic of the Year in the Glenfiddich Food and Drink Awards. His novel, *The Apologist*, about a restaurant critic who decides to apologise for everything he's ever done wrong, was published last year.

Terry Durack

One of Australia's best known food writers, Durack relocated to London in 2001,

joining *The Independent on Sunday* as a restaurant critic. He writes regularly about travel, food, wine and restaurants for a number of publications in Britain, the US and Australia and has written six books including *Noodle*, *Hunger* and *Allegro al Dente*. He is married to Jill Dupleix, cookery writer for *The Times*.

"FISHWORKS IS ALL ABOUT IMPECCABLY FRESH FISH SIMPLY COOKED, CASUALLY SERVED – A THE REAL BLESSING – SENSIBLY PRICED. I'M HOOKED"
– TERRY DURACK

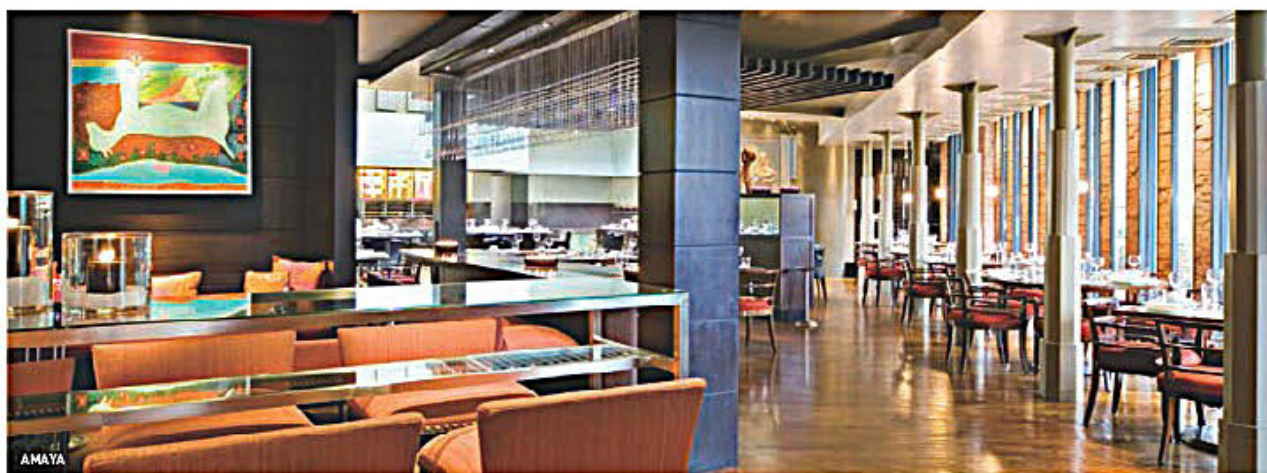
Tim Atkin MW

Tim Atkin is the wine correspondent for *The Observer*, author of books such as *Chardonnay* and *Vins de Pays d'Oc* and winner of many awards ranging from the Glenfiddich Drink Writer Award (in 1988, 1990, 1993 and 2004) to the Wine Guild of the United Kingdom's Wine Columnist of the Year (in 1991, 1992, 1994 and 1996). He is a former editor of *Harpers*, a UK wine trade magazine, and he co-authored *Grapevine* for several years. He has also presented the wine series, *Grape Expectations*, on the Carlton Food Network.

ELITE TRAVELLER -
MAGAZINE ONLY FOR OWNERS OF PRIVATE JETS
Top 100 Best Restaurants in the World -
Amaya is one of them

ELITE
TRAVELLER

TOP 100



39 AMAYA

Head Chef: Karunesh Khanna

VIP contact : Kanwal Singh

Phone: +44 (0)20 7823 1166

Email: amaya@realindianfood.com

Address: Halkin Arcade, Motcomb Street, Knightsbridge, London, SW 1X 8JT, UK

Website: www.amaya.biz

Cuisine: Indian Grill

Signature dishes: Flash grilled scallops; Grilled oyster; Chicken parcels in lettuce; Pepper chicken tikka; Venison kebab; Grilled lamb chops with ginger and lime; Tandoori duck; Whole lobster makhani; Charcoal grilled aubergine

Reinventing the perception of Indian food in Britain, Amaya presents a sophisticated Indian dining experience with their glamorous setting and excellent kebabs. Refined yet casual, the tasting menu provides a convivial meal to be shared and enjoyed. Whether the unusual curries or the complex marinades, the authenticity of the dishes set Amaya apart, mixing royal recipes from Maharaja Palaces with favorites from the humble Indian street stall.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
THE 10 BEST OF EVERYTHING
Ten Best Irresistible Restaurants
Amaya is rated number one

TEN BEST IRRESISTIBLE RESTAURANTS

1. AMAYA

Halkin Arcade, 19 Motcomb Street, London
Tel: 44-(0)-20-7823-1166, www.amaya.bi
Amaya—created by Ranjit Mathrani, Namita Panjabi, and Camellia Panjabi, the owners of Chutney Mary and Veeraswamy—grills the most delicious Indian food in the world, seasoned with subtle marinades prepared in an open kitchen. Award-winning for good reason, there is absolutely no better dining experience in London. Tasteful decor matches the fabulous food.

NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC

Nathaniel Lande & Andrew Lande

THE 10 BEST OF EVERYTHING



Third
Edition

AN ULTIMATE GUIDE FOR TRAVELERS

Amaya is so good it's off the scale, says **Matthew Norman****AMAYA****Score 11/10****Eat** Almost everything, but above all grouper and lamb chops**Take** Who do you really, really love?**Book** This very instant (ivy-style wait for tables inevitable)**Price of dinner for one** £49 (with coffee and half a bottle of house wine)**Address** Halkin Arcade, Motcomb Street, Knightsbridge, London SW1 (020-7823 1166)

Those of you chained by the bonds of holy wedlock to a spouse who disdains your passion for football may be familiar with the exchange that graced our sitting-room, once again, a few Saturdays ago. Entering the room during a post-match interview, my wife took instant umbrage when a player said he had given '110 per cent'.

'That's plain stupid,' she observed. 'How can anything be 110 per cent?' Over 13 years, I have often tried to answer this question, sometimes by reference to the inflation rate in 1930s Germany, at others by positing that the cliché doesn't require a strictly analytical approach, but always without success. So my sincere thanks to Amaya for – as anyone who limps to the end of this review will find – finally cracking the conundrum.

First up, this astounding restaurant, tucked away in a Knightsbridge arcade, and owned by the people behind the long-established posh Indians Chutney Mary and Veeraswamy, looks wonderful. The decor is peppered with cute touches (an ultra-modern chandelier, a vast

skylight and statues of ethnic deities), and uses so much dark wood it gives an idea of what it must be like to be a *cohiba especial* and live inside a cigar humidor. It smells even better than that princely Havana, the exquisite scent of grilling meat and clay-baked bread mingling with freshly crushed Indian spices.

One side of the room is devoted to the men creating this heavenly aroma, who stand in front of the charcoal grills, and three huge, silver-lined tandoori ovens shaped like the kind of acid-filled vats into which men with white cats always hoped to immerse 007.

The service was impeccable, notably from a sharp-suited manager who took the time to explain the 'concept'. Concepts, generally, are as welcome in restaurants as rats, but this one is admirably simple. You can, if you wish, complete the main part of the meal with a curry or biryani (the one at the next table, served inside a scooped-out paratha, looked glorious), but really it's about 'grazing' – sharing small amounts of as many grilled or tandoor-baked dishes as you can manage.

And what dishes. We had no idea Indian cooking could be this way. Let's deal with the tiny quibble now, by suggesting that the flavour of mussels is too delicate to survive peri-peri sauce (£8)... And with that said and done, the gushing begins with spiced clam cakes (£8 for four), grilled on an iron skillet, which tingled the tongue. From the charcoal grill, meanwhile, came the following: a jumbo tiger prawn (£14.50) the size of a baby lobster, flavoured with lime, chilli and herbs, so fresh and sweet that my only complaint with the menu spiel about it being 'flown fresh from the Arabian sea' was why it didn't add 'in a military jet at Mach 5'; adorable punjabi chicken wing lollipops (six for £4.50), dusted with cinnamon and glazed with tamarind; and four lamb chops (£17.50), with ginger, lime and coriander, of such unbelievable meltiness and savour that it verged on the indecent.

Close on their tail, from the tandoor, arrived two more all-time greats. My only regret about the lamb shanks in masala with a mild chilli kick (£14) – slightly gooey at the edges where the marinade had caramelised – was being too shy to ask if I could take the remnants home to finish sucking out the marrow. As for the fish tikka (£13.50), there were gasps as the first hit of fat chunks of grouper served in a fenugreek leaf hit our tongues. 'I'm shocked,' said our friend. 'I'm honestly shocked. It's one of the finest things ever.' The vegetable side dishes – a mushroom salad with mixed leaves, mango and pomegranate (£9.50); spicy, slow-grilled aubergines (£6.50); spinach cake stuffed with figs (£6.50); and a medley of five types of lentil (£3) – were magnificent too.

So were the breads (£4.50 for a basket of three kinds), and long before we had completed this feast for the gods we were trying to work out how soon we could come back. (Our friend took his wife the next evening, and spent the meal texting me increasingly hysterical paeans of praise.)

As we waddled to the door, I asked my wife how many points out of ten she would give Amaya. 'Eleven,' she said.

'But that's 110 ten per cent,' I replied. 'And surely that's impossible?'

'Oh, for God's sake,' she spat back sweetly. 'Don't be such a bloody pedant.' ●

'Concepts' in restaurants are generally as welcome as rats, but this one is admirably simple

GOING OUT | RESTAURANTS

New take on the chic kebab

FAY MASCHLER | EVENING STANDARD
10 APRIL 2012

Boris Becker fathered a child in a cupboard at Nobu. Russell Crowe got into a stand-up fight at Zuma. But what happened at The Cinnamon Club? Andy Gilchrist, leader of the Fire Brigades Union, spent more on food and wines for himself and his three or four (accounts differ) male colleagues than was thought seemly.

The current fashion for chic oriental - read intrinsically unfattening - restaurant food, which has seen the further openings of Tsunami, Ubon, Sumosan, Hakkasan, Roka, Umu and Ozu, to name a few, has so far failed to embrace Indian cuisine.

This is perhaps because the British have a folk memory of curry and rice, whereas modern Japanese food, and also sophisticated Hong-Kong Chinese cooking, used to be more or less a closed book.

Sisters Camellia and Namita Panjabi are aiming to change all that with the launch of Amaya. Situated in a shopping arcade in Belgravia, the bountifully decorated new restaurant is set to alter perceptions - and also calorie counts - of eating Indian.

The main thrust of the menu is grilled food, to which end an open kitchen at the far end of the restaurant displays tandoor clay ovens clad in beaten metal, charcoal grills and the flat iron griddles called tawa. A decidedly Western image of healthiness is a glazed display cabinet of salads and raw vegetables.

Never eat salads, raw vegetables or unpeeled fruit when you go to India is what we are told at our mother's knee.

Received wisdom of this kind makes first courses such as minced chicken lettuce parcels and warm mushroom salad seem slightly awkward in the overall context and, although the mushroom salad with its spirited choice of leaves and delicious mango dressing was good, the rendition of bang-bang chicken was more of a whimper.

Where Amaya truly excels is the preparation and cooking of kebabs, a word that is stretched to encompass meat, fish and vegetables. The Panjabi sisters research recipes meticulously, travelling the length and breadth of India to find the little chap on the Lucknow street famous for his wares as well as the chef whose family has handed down recipes from the Maharajah's palace.

An example of the latter is dori kebab, minced lamb ground so finely it resembles foie gras and requires nothing so vulgar as chewing. Presented on a skewer and tied with string, the intriguingly seasoned velvety meat flops open when the string is pulled. Listed only on the evening menu, it is one dish not to miss (and to ask for at lunchtime).

Other "kebabs" I can recommend are the small lamb shanks cooked in the tandoor; hamour in pandan leaf, which is spotted grouper in a mustard-and-chilli marinade - this may come to rival Nobu's black cod; Nizami chicken shikampur, a Hyderabad royal kebab that miraculously encloses a cool raita inside the patty of hot, chopped, spiced chicken; scallops served in their shell in the style of Chinese restaurants but in place of black bean sauce a delicate broth coloured and flavoured with fresh coriander; vibrant, chewy, spiced clam cakes; the half-duck which is presented on the bone, and juicy, rather than as a seared magret.

The menu advises that after sharing a variety of kebabs it is traditional to choose a curry and a biryani. Green korma curry with vegetable koftas provides a soothing sauce in which to let down the rice from a biryani and, when mixed with the delectable pomegranate raita, reminds you just how utterly gratifying Indian food can be.

Thankfully Amaya, which looks to conquer new territory, including the ladies who lunch, has kept that fact intact. The ladies who lunch will welcome desserts such as pomegranate granita and the three refreshers which include a coconut jelly as well as fruit sorbets.

Set menus help ameliorate Belgravia pricing and also provide a balanced route through the plethora of dishes. Service, well led by Premen Mohan, is a bit tentative and flustered at the moment, but that will doubtless settle down. Matthew Jukes has composed a lively wine list, with much available by the glass, which goes head to head with spicing and usually emerges triumphant.

*Amaya, Halkin Arcade, off Motcomb Street, SW1.
(020 7823 1166).*

TOP 20 RESTAURANTS BY JAY RAYNER 2013 - THE OBSERVER

The 20 best restaurants: part four

The final part of Jay Rayner's choice

- In the Observer on Sunday: 20 great recipes to celebrate 10 years of the Observer Food Monthly Awards
- [Vote in the OFM Awards](#)



Jay Rayner

The Observer, Sunday 28 April 2013

 [Jump to comments \(58\)](#)

5: Amaya, London



Amaya's scallops. Photograph: Adrian Franklin

The notion of the big-ticket Indian restaurant has never quite worked in Britain. Partly it's our own expectations. There are literally thousands of cheap curry houses in the UK. As a result we find it hard to get our heads around paying serious wedge for curries, whose names we recognise from those budget joints. And then there's the [restaurants](#)

themselves. In reaching for ideas of luxe, the kick and fire of the food, the very thing we come for, gets blanded out; it feels like a desperate echo of itself. Sure, you get a better quality of tablecloth. You get more waiters and better lighting, but the rest of it, drawn from the international hotel sector in India where most of the [chefs](#) at the top end train, feels corporate, one long exercise in blah.

Amaya, in Belgravia, is an exception. From the moment it opened in 2005, it was clearly something different. Sure, it was night-time shiny. The lights twinkled. The seats were comfortable. But the food still retained its power. Of course, it's Belgravia expensive. But there's no reason why we should be less willing to pay big numbers for Indian food, than say French or Japanese, other than cultural snobbery.

At the heart of the restaurant and the food is an open kitchen with super-heated tandoor ovens and flaming grills. Come here, then, for smokey kebabs, chargrilled seafood, for glorious breads, great chutneys and pickles and some especially good sealed pot biryanis.

Amaya, Halkin Arcade, Motcomb Street, London SW1. 020 7823 1166; [amaya.biz](#). Meal for two £140

REVIEWS IN RESTAURANT GUIDES

Restaurant Reservations Food & Wines Private Dining Location & Useful Info Gifts Contact us



A shimmering contemporary space, which integrates India through pink sandstone panels, rosewood tables and hanging glass crystals

WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

We continue to impress the critics along with our customers and are grateful for the feedback that brings with it high praise, as well as great reward for our talented chefs and obliging staff.

SUNDAY TIMES, MATTHEW NORMAN

"Score 11/10. This astounding restaurant looks wonderful. It smells even better than princely Havana, the exquisite scent of grilling meat and clay-baked bread mingling with freshly cut Indian spices. The service is impeccable. Concept, generally, as welcome in restaurants as rats, but this one is admirably simple. Really it's about 'grazing' - sharing small amounts of as many grilled or tandoor-baked dishes as you can manage. And what dishes. We had no idea Indian cooking could be this way. Long before we had completed this feast of gods we were trying to work out how soon we could come back."

ELITE TRAVELLER

Amaya featured in Elite Traveller 50 World's Top Restaurants (Elite is a magazine distributed for private jets around the world).

"Reinventing the perception of Indian food in Britain, Amaya presents a sophisticated Indian dining experience with their glamorous setting and excellent kebabs. Refined yet casual, the tasting menu provides a convivial meal to be shared and enjoyed. Whether the unusual curries or the complex marinades, the authenticity of the dishes set Amaya apart, mixing royal recipes from Maharaja Palaces with favourite from the humble Indian street stall"

TIME OUT, GUY DIAMOND

"Indian food expert Camellia Panjabi, co-owner with sister Namita and her husband Ranjit Mathrani of this chic grill restaurant and bar, spent the best part of a year researching and preparing to

launch what remains an extremely exciting restaurant. With their other restaurant Chutney Mary, the three had already been chipping away at the British perceptions of Indian cooking (in most cases derived from our late-night predilection for curry house) for several years, but Amaya immediately set new standards of quality, authenticity and culinary invention, and did so with great style."

JASPER GERARD, THE TELEGRAPH

"Amaya, a fantastic, funky Knightsbridge establishment where you might eat delectable lobster or crab streaked with the subtlest curry sauce. In the unlikely event that you've ever wondered what a restaurant critic does on his day off, you now know: he eats at Amaya. Hell, I'd dine from its dustbin."

HARDENS LONDON RESTAURANTS GUIDE

"Style and flair' abound at this 'simply outstanding' nouvelle Indian - one of London's best-tucked-away in Belgravia; many of its 'innovative', 'light' and 'flavourful' tapas style dishes come from a central grill."

THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Ranked as No.1 in the National Geographic Ten Best Irresistible Restaurants in the world

"Amaya - created by Ranjit Mathrani, Namita Panjabi and Camellia Panjabi, the owners of Chutney Mary and Veeraswamy - grills the most delicious Indian food in the world, seasoned with subtle marinades prepared in an open kitchen. Award-winning for good reason, there is absolutely no

better dining experience in London. Tasteful décor matches the fabulous food."

GOOD FOOD GUIDE

"Amaya occupies a desirable slice of Belgravia real estate and is a hugely ambitious affair: sleek, slinky and with a penchant for glamour. Locals flock to sample the wares in its vast, triangular dining area - a riotous mix of bold colours, vibrant murals and polished metal. The 'theatre kitchen' delivers a raft of tapas-style tasting plates from tandoori oven, sigri grill and tawa skillet, with dishes arriving in waves when they are ready."

ZAGAT

"Bringing a new dimension to Indian Cuisine is this fashionable Belgravia hot spot where a gleaming open kitchen turns out new-wave tapas-style dishes served in a cool contemporary setting; once you've secured a difficult-to-score reservation, prepare to be treated like a maharani"

AA RESTAURANT GUIDE

"Amaya certainly has a seductive style in spades. Located in Knightsbridge's glossy Halkin Arcade, it is as well-dressed as its customers: by day, light floods in through a glazed atrium roof; at night, textures of black granite, rosewood and leather are set against white walls splashed with bold modern artwork, plus there's the added culinary drama of chefs doing their thing in an impressive open kitchen"

For reservations, please [click here](#)

HARDEN'S GUIDE 2024

Amaya



Renowned contemporary Indian restaurant tucked-away in a modern Belgravia development

📍 Halkin Arcade, 19 Motcomb St, London, SW1X 8JT, ☎ 020 7823 1166 🌐 Website

🕒 Open today 12:30 to 2:30 PM and 6:00 to 10:30 PM

Harden's survey result

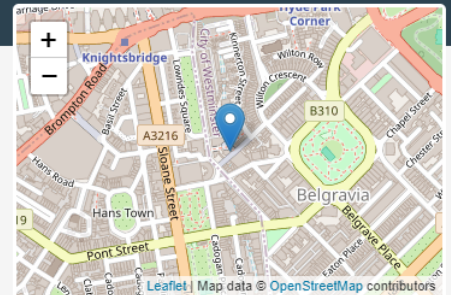
2024 2023 2022 2021

Summary

"Sophisticated flavours run through outstanding quality grill and tandoori dishes" – "beautiful" food from a "cleverly designed menu" using a wide variety of cooking techniques – at this Belgravia pioneer of Indian tapas (part of MW Eats, which owns Masala Zone, Chutney Mary, et al). With its stylish design, built around an open kitchen, it falls under the heading: "pricey but worth it".



* Based on a three course dinner, half a bottle of wine, coffee, cover charge, service and VAT.



Halkin Arcade, 19 Motcomb St, London, SW1X 8JT

☎ 020 7823 1166 ✉ Email 🌐 Website



MICHELIN GUIDE 2025



Amaya

Halkin Arcade, 19 Motcomb Street, London, SW1X 8JT, United Kingdom

£££ • Indian



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MICHELIN Guide's Point Of View



One MICHELIN Star: High quality cooking, worth a stop!

Unlike its contemporaries, this modern Indian restaurant delivers a dining experience where the emphasis is on different sized dishes designed for sharing; delivered as and when they are prepared from the tawa, tandoor and sigri grills. Its name loosely translates as 'without boundaries' and this is also reflected in the moodily lit open-plan layout and the theatre of the open kitchen which runs down one side.

Opt for the menu of 'Amaya Favourites' or the sharing dishes in two sizes; the bite-sized smaller portions allow you to try more dishes and the variety is impressive, with vegetarian dishes well represented. Staff are friendly, the atmosphere is lively and the vibrant, original cooking remains in the memory long after you've departed.

Featured in:

[The Best Indian Restaurants In London](#)



THE GOOD FOOD GUIDE 2025



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AMAYA BELGRAVIA, LONDON



RATING: VERY GOOD
INDIAN | RESTAURANT

OVERALL RATING: VERY GOOD

Uniqueness: Very Good

Deliciousness: Very Good

Warmth: Good

Strength of recommendation: Very Good

DINING INFORMATION:

Private dining room, Separate bar, Wheelchair access

Halkin Arcade, off Lowndes Street, Belgravia SW1X 8JT

020 7823 1166

[View opening times](#)

[Make a reservation](#)



£££

Part of the MW Eat group (Veeraswamy, Chutney Mary and the Masala Zone mini chain), this classy Belgravia grill restaurant tucked down a passage beside the Pan-technicon has been plying its trade since 2004. Swathes of polished dark wood and seductive lighting create a contemporary, luxurious feel to the generously spaced dining room, which is bookended by a smart bar area and an open-to-view kitchen with tandoor ovens and tawa grills in full view. Several notches above your average curry house, it continues to tease and satisfy, experimenting with herbs, spices and ketchups via a line-up of bijou grazing dishes. Smoky and spicy jumbo-sized ocean prawns, fired in the tandoor are succulent, fleshy and spiked with ginger and tomato, while seared scallops are pearly pucks of similar stature in puddles of fresh coriander and coconut sauce. Oysters, crumbed and grilled, sit plumply in coconut milk (from whole nuts cracked open in the kitchen) with ginger, turmeric and chilli. Meat receives similarly impressive treatment: a marinade of spices and cheese helps to point up a beautifully tender black-pepper chicken tikka (with chilli paneer, date and sesame), while subtle spicing gives heft to a pair of juicy tandoori lamb chops, accompanied by puffed-up naan bread, glistening with ghee and showered in truffle. For a short season, there could also be chicken biryani with wild garlic, cooked in its sealed pot and opened at table to wafts of herby, garlicky steam. A typical meal might kick off with crispy cabbage and noodle salad with nuts, pomegranate and grapes bound by a splash of balsamic vinegar, while desserts are given an Indian twist – perhaps a miniature lime tart sharing the plate with a blueberry compôte infused with anise and a wobbly limoncello jelly. Service, led by a gracious maître d', is quick and efficient. Contemporary cocktails mingle with a carefully assembled, spice-friendly wine list including almost two dozen selections by the glass (from £11).

GOOGLE AND TRIPADVISOR REVIEWS

Amazing food and brilliant service. This place is a gem.

Maw Maw on Google

3 June 2025

I ate here as part of a civil partnership celebration, so had a set menu of 5 small courses. Due to the speciality of the occasion, me and the rest of the group had lunch in the private dining room. Everything I had here was perfect, making for a fine dining experience that could not be better. This place will join the current group of 3 (now 4) of the best culinary experiences I've ever had in my life...

JoshuaTheTraveller on Trip Advisor

30 May 2025

Amaya is easily one of the best restaurants in London. Indian food done with flair, finesse, and a twist that keeps you coming back for more. I've had countless meals here and every time, it delivers. The burrata chaat is unexpectedly amazing ... the perfect fusion of creamy and tangy. The venison kebab is rich and bold, the Zafran chicken kebab perfectly spiced, the lamb seekh deeply flavourful, and the chicken biryani is just on another level. And the lobster is to die for.. . What I love most is how Amaya brings a modern, tapas style approach to Indian cuisine ... small plates, bold flavours, and beautifully presented dishes that allow you to try a bit of everything.

Delphine is a fantastic general manager, always gracious, attentive, and warm. The whole team reflects her style: friendly, professional, and genuinely passionate about what they do. As someone who has had the pleasure of trying all the best Indian restaurants in London, this is right up there!

A must visit spot that never misses!!

Achintya Chudasama on Google

28 May 2025

Such a great experience! Loved sitting by the open kitchen and watching them cook everything. Service and attention to detail was top notch. Food was incredible. Staff are impressive. I recommend trying new things here even if you think you don't like something because it will be the best cooked oyster or salmon....you've ever had. Thank you to the Amaya team for a wonderful evening!

Jamie Hewitt on Google

25 May 2025

One of the best meals of my life

Hilary Brown on Google

21 May 2025

Absolutely the best Indian food I have ever had. Excellent flavours presentation and service. Good value for money too.

Edwin Welch on Google

19 May 2025

Highest level Indian eatery anywhere, London, New York or Delhi. Quality of food excellent service high, setting beautiful.

OberstA on Trip Advisor

16 May 2025

Food was excellent, on par with the best Indian cuisine in London and some unique dishes.

We visited as a large group, and our waiter was patient, professional, knowledgeable, and made excellent recommendations. Service was prompt, and the wine list impressive: we enjoyed a very nice Champagne and an Argentinian Malbec that paired beautifully with the lamb chops. The sea bass cooked in coconut milk was delicious, and the burrata was a standout dish. I would definitely recommend both.

George on Google

17 May 2025

Back after 10 years to find that they keep the style and quality I had in my mind. This Michelin recommended restaurant serves Indian food in their own style. Worth the visit!

Eduardo Iribarren on Google

11 May 2025

Excellent Indian food with a very real vibe. Not snobby as you would expect a Michelin star restaurant, but casual. The cooks work the grill in front of the guests and everything is extremely fresh and mouth watering ... the very best grilled lamb we have ever eaten in our lives! The kebabs were delicious, light and airy and beautifully spicy...But that lamb. My goodness! The meat was succulent and juicy and fell off the bone, yet was still gnarly and charred from the fire. How they managed to slow cook, yet grill it I will never know, but that meat alone was worth five stars.

MsWithnail on Trip Advisor

14 May 2025

This Indian restaurant is a great choice for those seeking a refined dining experience, unlike many others that overuse sauce. The spices are expertly balanced, not overpowering the flavours. The service is excellent, making it my favourite Indian restaurant.

Joesy Fuda on Google

19 April 2025

Exceptional journey of tastes and flavours and textures

Gavin Scott on Google

25 January 2025

Dining at Amaya was nothing short of spectacular—an experience that blends culinary artistry, warm hospitality, and an atmosphere that feels both refined and effortlessly inviting. It's rare to find a Michelin-starred restaurant that delivers excellence without pretension, but Amaya does just that. From the moment we stepped in, the service was impeccable. Calisto, in particular, was outstanding—attentive, personable, and an absolute delight, elevating our experience with his warmth and professionalism. It's the kind of service that makes a meal feel even more special. And the food? Simply sublime. Each dish was an explosion of flavors, perfectly balanced and exquisitely presented. The delicate interplay of spices, the melt-in-your-mouth textures, and the sheer craftsmanship behind every plate made it a meal to remember. Amaya isn't just a restaurant—it's an experience. Understated yet exceptional, it stands out as London's finest Indian Michelin-starred destination.

Nida Basheer on Google

6 February 2025



AMAYA FACT SHEET

Background:

Opened in October 2004, where fashionable Knightsbridge meets elegant Belgravia, Amaya set the trend for a new wave of Indian Cuisine worldwide. It has a theatrical wide-open kitchen, where all grilled foods are barbecued and exotic salads and wok dishes are made to order. The first of its kind in London.

Ambience:

Clad in chiselled Agra pink sandstone with handcrafted rosewood furniture its stylish interior is crisp and mellow. With a glass roof and roof canvas awnings, Amaya has a light airy atmosphere at lunch-time. By dusk the atmosphere is seductive, and with moody lighting, the theatrical kitchen and colourful salad bar come into play with the naïve art adding vibrant colour.

Signature Dishes:

Seafood Platter of Grilled Oysters Scallops & Prawns, Black Pepper Chicken Tikka, Smoked Chilli Lamb Chops, Masala Lobster in Shell, Char-grilled Aubergine, Tandoori Foie Gras (Duck), Barbequed Stuffed Duck Legs, Griddles Sweet Potato Chaat, Wild Jumbo Madagascan Prawns, a variety of grilled and wok-stirred vegetables and Truffle Naan.

Besides a small selection of gourmet curries and biryanis, including vegetarian options, which change seasonally.

Awards:

Amaya won the Best Restaurant and the Best New Restaurant awards in London at the London Restaurant Awards in 2005 and a Michelin Star since 2006.

Special Lunch Offer throughout the Week

Large Lunch Platter (7 items) £32; Just Salads & Grills Platter (4 items) £32

Average price per head:

Lunch: approximately £55 to £70 per person

Dinner: from £90 per person

Wines & Drinks:

A well-curated wine list, compatible with our spiced cuisine.

An inventive cocktail list incorporating botanicals and spices.

Private Dining:

The Private Room seats up to 14. Table can expand from 8 up to 14.

Marketing Contact:

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Elana Kruger - marketing1@realindianfood.com

P.R. Agency:

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reservations@veeraswamy.com

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<https://www.amaya.biz/>

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Twitter: @theamaya_

Facebook: IndianFineDining

Instagram: Amaya.ldn

Owning Company:

MW Eat

Directors:

Ranjit Mathrani, Namita Panjabi, Camellia Panjabi



