

CULINARY CRUISE



Chef Picasso

Have you heard of a chef who is called Picasso – named after the celebrated artist? They say the plate is his canvas and his cooking is an art

Five spice tart with gulab jamun and mix berry kompott

RADHIKA RAJAMANI

Chef Olaf Niemeier aka Chef Picasso has deservedly got that title for his unique style of artistic dishes. It's rare to find a chef who is at home making traditional German food as well as idli, dosa, sambhar, parathas besides fusion food which is his forte. One may argue that being a chef it's not an exceptional trait to cook different

three decades in cooking. Chef Niemeier is a super champion who has worked in various hotels across the world where he picked up traditional culinary skills. For a child who never showed interest in cooking he surprised his parents by announcing he would be a chef after he worked in a restaurant in the last year of school. While his mother laughed at his new found interest Niemeier pursued it seriously and took a three-year course.

my food gave me this name. He told me your food is colourful, you do crazy things and there is no name to your cuisine. So he said why not call it cuisine Picasso? You use the old style of cooking and make it modern and crazy. So, I am known as Chef Picasso. In India someone called me high priest of fusion cuisine!" One has to see the mixing and matching which goes on. Chef Niemeier is at

Art for the palate

types of food. But, Chef Olaf Niemeier from Hamburg, Germany, loves spices and chatpata Indian food and has learnt to make it the traditional way. Yet, as he is a chef, he is ingenious and has so much to offer for the palate in terms of taste, flavours and fusion that he adds a twist to his food. Like he uses Asian spices in European cooking and churns out a Jalebi lemon mousse and a gulab jamun cake with elan! As the friendly, chatty and warm Chef Niemeier begins talking at Fusion 9, a popular Hyderabad restaurant where he has come on popular demand for the second time, one realises that he is a mine of information on cooking!

With more than

Later Niemeier honed his skills and travelled abroad and worked in hotels in places like London, New York, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, Boston before he returned to Germany. These travelling stints helped him to pick up the traditional cuisines and he began learning about spices. "First one must know how spices are – mild, sweet, sharp etc. You must do homework on what you can do with them." So, his journey with spices continues even today – one which is laced with interesting flavours. "I use a lot of Asian spices in my dishes," he says. "My favourite spices are curry leaves, chat masala, garam masala, sesame seeds, cinnamon sticks and tamarind."

"Food should be handled with care like a woman," he says. And slowly he created his signature food – fusion food which is what he is famous for today. Not only does he blend cuisines, flavours and spices but presents it artistically which also fetched him the name of Chef Picasso and other epithets. "An American food writer who was fond

his creative best while doing his trademark cuisine. "Picasso was crazy with colours and I find harmony between spices and meat/vegetables. I take traditional food and put in Asian spices." So the twist is intriguing, interesting and inviting to eat.

Besides fusion cuisine, Chef Niemeier is also adept in making chutneys the Indian way. "My chutneys like mango curry leaves chutney, tomato chutney with black sesame seeds, garlic chutney are sold on my web shop and picked up by friends." His product line includes spices too.

He is a German by birth but loves Asian food – Chinese, Japanese and Indian. "When I was in Delhi I used to have aloo paratha and dal makhni every day! I love to eat street food too." He even had gol gappas which most of us shy away from because of the hygiene factor. He likes Indian food the way it is – not with toned down spices and chillies. "I make idli, dosa, parathas at home for friends also." Like a European Chef Niemeier likes meat, "but I don't like to eat fish though I cook it." Ask him about

his comfort food pat comes the reply "I like anything - good steak, good curry, sweet and sour pork – anything with meat in it." And he has sampled the ubiquitous Hyderabad biryani and haleem and he liked it. His mind is already ticking on how to give a twist to the haleem!



Pork vindaloo with spicy lemon sesame rice