

# A Perfect 10

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“I wonder whether you will be able to recommend a place where I could take my guests for dinner tomorrow.” Well this sort of request comes to us umpteen times - cocktails at the house and then dinner at a restaurant. But today's hostess would rather take her group out for dinner. Washing up after a party is so tedious, even with domestic help.

I could have suggested a restaurant, but this hostess had a unique situation. “My uncle is from the United States, my sister from Bangalore and my husband's boss is from Hong Kong,” she informed. There are multi-cuisine restaurants was my immediate thought, but then if one considers the fact that most restaurants, especially during this time, would be packed to the gills and their menu though multi-cuisine (sometimes I feel that they add items to the menu to take care of these sort of diners) the quality of the dinner would definitely suffer. And then out of the blue I remembered...for 15 people and above it would be just the thing.

I had experienced a unique place at a very special address where the chef had sat in consultation on a menu that was being planned for a varied crowd. “You tell me the cuisine,” he had stated, “I will make it for you.” And so to test his mettle we had worked on starters, a Hors d'oeuvre course and then the main course.

“Let's go global with the starters,” I had said. “I would recommend a mushroom and corn toast, continental for the foreigners, perhaps a fried specialty like jalapeno and cheese poppers,” I had agreed enthusiastically. Without that fried item we Indians would have our taste buds run dry. “And, of course, something from the Orient - oriental meatballs and a spicy and tangy jerk chicken.” He had looked at the menu and advised, “Fish is missing, let's have the fish fingers with Tartare sauce, a hot favourite.” I had raised my eyebrows slowly. The menu was actually being planned with an expert who knew his kitchen. How often do we foodies walk in and order a dish without knowing if the kitchen is capable of preparing it to perfection.

“And now we need to take them on a serene ride before they hit the mainstream,” he added, “food should be experimented with...a hostess should be able to get her guests to visualise what they are about to embark on...” he expounded as I listened avidly. This was exactly what a marketing manager would do before his clients embarked on a voyage...and this was to be a voyage of culinary delight. “So it will be the three bean with zesty mint, that is Mexican, Avocado mousse served in cornets, French,” he added looking at my raised eyebrows, “Vietnamese rice in paper rolls,” I smiled, I had got the country, “and a pomegranate laban - that is hung curd with pomegranate.” I whistled tunelessly...he was giving me the perfect balance and a lesson in global taste.

“Now let's get on to the main course,” he said looking at his written list. “let's get back to India. There is so much of culinary bounty that we have to let them experience it.” “But I have people from abroad too, who cannot have spicy food,” I had hastened to add. “Aha!” was his comment, “a whole fish on a grill. We will serve it off the bone just seasoned and we will have a choice of sauces...a mustard one from the West, a mint flavoured one from the North, a spicy one from Goa and a specialty from the South.”



I visualised my guests having a slice of that red snapper fish and dipping it into the sauce of their choice...Ummm. “Sounds great,” I had ventured.

He warmed up, “A pleasure interacting with someone who is able to bring out the creativity in the chef,” he said. I beamed.

“So we will continue with this theme. Chicken stew with appams, that's not very spicy, and of course a vegetarian one for those who do not like chicken. Now that's from the South. We have Mutton sukha from our very own region, chingri malai curry from Kolkatta and the palak and corn balti from the North...colour and taste, a perfect combination.” Now who would think of this when one is ordering a la carte from a menu...colour, taste and variety.

But I waited with bated breath to see the effect of this menu on my guests. This was no chicken-makhani-mutton-roganjosh playing-safe type of menu. But I was not disappointed. He was the Raj of the kitchen, aptly called chef Raj. My guests were ecstatic with delight. I had requested their feedback; they gave me a perfect 10.

But let me take you on to the last part, the desserts. Tiramisu with Kalhua chocolate mousse with Cointreau, date and walnut slice with brandy sauce and then our very own rabadi with fresh fruits. He had things for everyone. I had preened like the cat that licked the cream.

The place was 10 Calangute, the chef is called Raj, and the dinner was one to die for. “Yes,” was my response to my friend, “there is a food consultant for groups of 15 and more in a small designer restaurant along the Candolim-Taj Road. Take a little time to call him and discuss. Your lunch or dinner will be a perfect 10.”