



Le Cordon Bleu: Currying favour with discerning diners

Talking intelligently about food can take an amusing, even comical turn, as Le Cordon Bleu proved by sponsoring The Great Curry Debate, a delicious new type of informed foodie discussion presented during Tasting Australia 2010 in Adelaide.

As part of Le Cordon Bleu's considerable sponsorship support for Tasting Australia, The Great Curry Debate helped to spice up a light-hearted but factual and engaging discussion about ethnic food styles. Held at The Spice Kitchen Indian Restaurant at suburban Leabrook, the debate featured such panellists as Tasting Australia director Ian Parmenter and Australian Senator Nick Xenophon pitted against the studied culinary arguments of Le Cordon Bleu manager of educational leadership Roger Haden and rising young classically trained Adelaide chef Rebecca Stubbs.

Their task was to argue the question of whether Indian food is a limited cuisine that has become the mainstay of suburban takeaways, or a highly complex, diverse and sophisticated culinary art that rivals the great French and Chinese cuisines. It was a classic case of reason, research and considered scholarly conclusions pitted against raw, heated passion – especially from devoted regular customers of The Spice Kitchen, awarded Australia's Best Indian Restaurant in 2009 by the Australian Restaurant and Catering Association.

Le Cordon Bleu's Roger Haden presented the compelling argument that while Indian food certainly has an outstanding history and sweeping regional diversity, the repertoire of Indian dishes has remained rooted in rustic traditions. By comparison, Roger said that only a great cuisine evolves over time, with French cuisine having outstanding culinary leaders such as Auguste Escoffier, Paul Bocuse and the Le Cordon Bleu training academies successfully refining and reinterpreting their culture's fundamental cuisine elements.

Ian Parmenter countered this view by saying that Indian food's ancient origins place it as one of the world's benchmark cuisines and noted its continually escalating appeal – and influence – across cultures throughout the world. While he acknowledged that much Indian restaurant food in Western countries has evolved from Colonial interpretation of their dishes, Parmenter explained that the true food found in the regions of India at major feasts and cultural banquet celebrations is infinitely more complex, skilfully constructed and lavish in its integration of ingredients.



Rebecca Stubbs capably defended the esteemed status of French culinary tradition, drawing a bead on the artistry of French cuisine, its refined techniques and extravagant ingredients embraced to continually steer the changing flavour of new dining excitement. While acknowledging the popular appeal of Indian food's bold, rustic style, she declared that French culinary complexity puts it on a pedestal far above the neighbourhood curry house. "There are no French takeaway shops other than bakeries," she quipped.

Such lively discussion provided ample food for thought over dinner, as the assembled audience kept discussing the merits of arguments while savouring the flavours of delicious banquet food from the Spice Kitchen that veered into unexpected territory, with owner/chef Ragini Dey deliberately choosing more mildly spiced, exotic dishes to show the diversity of authentic Indian cuisine.

Le Cordon Bleu's Asia Pacific Vice President Rodger Griffiths was delighted for Le Cordon Bleu to be involved in such an engaging discussion – and digestion – of culinary expertise that attracted a packed restaurant of happy diners. He was especially encouraged that a large audience was prepared to make up their own mind about a serious culinary question as they explored one culture's ancient cooking traditions and recipes in the context of today's dining market. "Don't be surprised if Le Cordon Bleu becomes involved with more culinary events, where learning, enjoyment and fun with food become the essential ingredients," he said.