



All Sorted at The Clearing House

It's always good when any city sees the opening of a new restaurant. And one as nice as *The Clearing House* is more than welcome

Text: **Farzana Contractor**

For starters, the name is rather delightful, in keeping with its neighbourhood. Which is the nostalgia-evoking dockyard of Bombay, the old world Ballard Estate, it's beautiful, heritage buildings, standing tall and stately. *The Clearing House* is the brainchild of



Rishad has every reason to smile



Where the sun shines in



Chef Nitin Kulkarni

Rishad Nathani, a *St. Mary's High School* boy, who went on to do his MBA from the *University of San Francisco* majoring in Marketing and Telecom. He did work with Nortel Networks in New York for a year or so, but something was compelling him to return to his homeland.

It was the *Under The Over* hangover. Let me explain. The famed chef, Rahul Akerkar is a relative, Rahul's dad and Rishad's mum are cousins. It so happens, when Rahul first cut his teeth in the restaurant business, at the eatery he started, *Under The Over*, at the Kemps Corner Flyover in the late 80s, it was young Rishad who assisted him, working through, helping in the business and admin departments. His salary, a handsome ₹2000!

As it happens, the world of hospitality had claimed another addict. Rishad was yearning to get back into that line. He put in his papers and returned to Bombay in the summer of 2002. A month later he was toiling away at *Indigo* which Rahul had launched in 1999 and was at the time one of the most popular and successful restaurants of Bombay. After he joined there, all new projects had Rishad's stamp. The catering unit, *Indigo* in Delhi, another in the suburbs, various *Indigo Delis* scattered all over the city.

When Indigo changed hands and Rahul moved on, so did Rishad. And all his experience, expertise, knowledge and

learning culminated in *The Clearing House*. This is his new passion, his very own restaurant co-partnered by people who believe in him, his long-time buddies, Sachin Shah and Siddharth Sheth.

But the biggest coup was getting Chef Nitin Kulkarni in the kitchen. Ex-Oberoi, ex-*Indigo*, Nitin Kulkarni is a remarkable chef who has been in the trade for 33 years. Used to working under big time stress, Nitin is on a new high at *The Clearing House*. "Really, after many, many years, I am working in a very relaxed manner. I am indulging in a creative menu, taking time to bring new nuances to ingredients, trying to match them in a sophisticated manner." Says the chef who has for years toiled unrelentlessly, sometimes cooking meals for numbers upwards of 1000 at catering events.

"What is good is, it's a new challenge for me now. I had never worked with Oriental ingredients and flavours in such a big way. Here I have an opportunity to create Asian dishes, very

popular these days, based on cuisines from Korea and Japan. For example, the *Edamame and Chestnut Dim Sum*, though Asian by origin, comes with a European style *Parmesan* and truffle broth. It is this culinary

freedom, with no restriction on cuisine or technique that allows me endless potential for change and evolution."

Of course English, American and a wee bit of Indian is also present in the menu. Chef Kulkarni, when he worked at The Oberoi was chef of *Café Royale* which was a fabulous, fabulous restaurant, serving traditional French food. Even today, diners will remember meals they ate there. I, for one. My favourite was the *Lobster Thermidor*, the taste of which still lingers in my mind. And what's great is chef has promised to actually create it at *The Clearing House*, sometime soon.

For now, we will settle for the splendid *Lobster Bisque*, which is served in a demitasse accompanying the *Mini Lobster Brioche*. But there is much else worthy of mention at this restaurant which is hip and happening judging by buzz about town. The menu is sensibly divided between small plates and large plates, which are the main course dishes. So groups of friends will enjoy ordering multiple starters while they



Quinoa Salad with Maple-roasted Pumpkin



The Foyer



Fettucine Genevese



Rare Beef Tenderloin Carpaccio



Kale Salad



Cookie Sandwich



Pastry Chef Husna Jumani who Rishad wooed away from her last job



Honey Flan

chat up over drinks, like they do in Spain, ordering *tapas*.

So what does really well? It has got to be; *Pumpkin Gnocchi* and the *Provençal Prawns and Barley Salad*. The other small plate highlights are the chilled *Carrot and Pumpkin Gazpacho*, *Beetroot Pot Stickers*, *Asparagus and Truffle Leeks On Butter Milk Biscuits*, *Kale Caesar* and the *Paprika Spiced Lamb Tacos*.

There are hearty salads such as the *Green Cucumber Noodles with Shaved Fennel*, the *Quinoa Salad with Maple Roasted Pumpkin* and the *Provençal Prawns and Barley Salad*, which are all excellent.

The large plates comprise comfort dishes such as the *Red Rice Risotto with Confit Root Vegetables*, *Goat Cheese Stuffed Eggplant with Zucchini Ribbons*, *Steamed Arabian Sea Bass in Soya Ginger Broth*, *Rare Yellowfin Tuna with Soba Noodles in Teriyaki Broth*, *Korean Barbecue Chicken in Soy Honey Glaze*, and the *Baby Lamb Bolognese with Conchigale Pasta*, these are all deeply satisfying.

As are the desserts. I could head on down here without occasion, just for a generous serve of the *Cheesecake* with lemon curd, Swiss meringue and blueberry *coulis*. Or if you want to watch your waistline, the *Chocolate Olive Oil Cake* with rum caramel, orange segments and Earl Grey ice-cream and the sugar-free, gluten-free *Honey Flan* with fresh figs, sour cherry and Balsamic reduction. But it's the *Cheesecake* for me!

Believe it or not, but in the four visits to this restaurant, I have had fun tasting and trying almost the entire menu!

If the food served at *The Clearing House* passes the test, in terms of décor and ambience it excels. This space used to house an ice factory. In fact, it was even operational when Rishad Nathani took over the place. The ice-making business has just shifted to the rear area. Says Rishad, who joined me at lunch, "There is so much romance attached to this place. I love it. I was fortunate to find it. The owners, Ruby and Zubeen Nallaseth have been most accommodative. Also the architects, Sameep Padora and Vami Koticha are very talented and I have been working with them for over a decade. They understand my sensibilities and translate my vision with substantial ease. So all in all, the

entire team worked well and in unison."

I have to say, the ambience could not be any better. High ceilings with polished, scalloped wood work, a tall grey stone wall, large glass doors. Which reminds me, *The Clearing House* is actually divided into two areas. As you enter, it's the lunchtime place, *The Chambers*. Tourquoise blue furnishings, brightened by natural light, chequered floor, very *jolie*. They also serve dinner here. But a few steps up leads you to the inner chamber which comes alive only at night. With a long bar on one side, café style tables and chairs in the centre, circular sofa style seating in the sides, this is where it is at. Weekends you will have to jostle for standing space at the bar! The décor here has cleverly incorporated all the trappings of the ice factory. Tall steel columns going from floor to ceiling, the ceiling itself is solid iron plates, which at one time was the floor of an iron tank. They have also left in place a huge 6" pipe from which water from the tank led to the machine which turned it into ice!

All in all, a perfect place to go for an evening out, *The Clearing House* gets my vote.

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Mini Lobster Brioche with Lobster Bisque



The Chambers