

18 BRUNCH DATE

"I Love The Honesty Of Indian Food"

Masterchef's chubby chef Gary talks judging, eating, being nice, and living it up in his hometown

by Antoine Lewis

EVERYBODY LOVES Gary. One of three permanent judges on *Masterchef Australia* and *Junior Masterchef*, the chubby chef has endeared himself to viewers across India with his happy laugh, tactfully worded advice and gentle encouragement to struggling contestants. He reminds us of that kindly uncle we all love. Off-screen, chef Gary Mehigan is just as nice. He's written a number of cookbooks and runs the award-winning restaurant Fenix in Melbourne. In Mumbai recently at the invitation of Tourism Victoria, we caught up with Mehigan at the Grand Hyatt, Mumbai for a quick chat over tea and biscuits

Chefs are notorious for being unfriendly and rude. How did you turn out to be such a nice guy?

Times have changed. There's no room for [Gordon] Ramsay and [Marco Pierre] White behaving the way they do. When I worked in London nearly 30 years ago, that was how chefs were perceived: very aggressive, very competitive. Today, if you behave badly, you won't be able to retain your staff; you won't be able to build a reputation. And this is especially true in Australia.

Over the years I've become a better manager. The way I manage my staff is exactly the way I deal with the contestants on the show. Always present the negative, but follow it with a positive.

*Do Indian contestants bring anything different to *Masterchef Australia*?*

They do. Indian food in Australia is very under represented and I think



Photo: VIDYA SUBRAMANIAN

the Indians in Australia know that. Rishi Desai (from the current season) is very creative. He wants to turn Indian food upside down. I don't want him to turn it upside

down too much because I love the tradition, I love the honesty and the flavours of some of the dishes.

Masterchef or Junior Masterchef: which is more fun to host?

I really enjoyed *Junior Masterchef*. What the audience never knew is that the kids made us

laugh so much, we used to go home with sore cheeks! What's nice about it is that they're doing it because they love it. There are no ulterior motives, no book deals, no prizes. The adults are different. It's about strategy, about the play

you're making. You're never quite sure what the motivations are.

Take us through your Melbourne. Where should an Indian visitor go?

Go eat breakfast because it's the essential Melbourne experience. Go to Seven Seeds in Brunswick. I go to the places that do great eggs; creative stuff like huevos rancheros with a little salsa and fresh herbs.

Go to Footscray, where the Vietnamese community live, for great spring rolls; Sydney Road for North African and Lebanese; Gary's Quality Meats and Claringbold's Seafoods at Prahran Market. At Prahran, you'll have to stop yourself from buying everything: free-range eggs, beautiful fruits and vegetables, prosciuttos and hams. There's a little shop called Sweet Greek run by a beautiful woman who makes lovely pastries like bougatsa (semolina custard, cheese, or minced meat lay-

ered with phyllo pastry) and spanakopita (spinach pie).

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BITE SIZE

Ever wanted to steal one of Matt Preston's cravats?

Never. Only one man can wear a suit that looks like a tablecloth and get away with it.

One Indian dish you can't cook.

Dosa. I just can't do it.

One Indian you want to cook for.

Maybe Sachin Tendulkar. But also Pallavi Sharda, a Melbourne girl who's making it big in Bollywood.

One dish you can't resist.

A gooey chocolate cake, a little bit crisp on the outside with thick cream.

Why are you @crispycrackling on Twitter?

Because we're all obsessed with pork on the show!



Photo: SHUTTERSTOCK