

Food for thought: Founders of The Dandy Collection share why now is the best time to open up a new restaurant



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While we may not be out of the woods with the pandemic just yet, the F&B scene proves that it's not all doom and gloom, with the opening of several new restaurants and casual dining outlets in the past month. The newest kid on the block is Firangi Superstar, a modern Indian restaurant conceived as a foreigner's love letter to India.

Founded by restaurateurs Rohit Roopchand, 41, and Michael Goodman, 49, of The Dandy Collection, the Firangi ("foreign" in Hindi) takes the diner on an over-the-top cinematic journey with its thematic interiors dating back to the aristocratic days of colonial India.

“The design of the space was done, like our other venues, as a collaboration between The Dandy Collection and Piya Thamcharyawat and her team at EDG Design. The Dandy team comes up with the concept and the direction, and then Piya has an incredible way of bringing it to life,” says Goodman, who is the company’s chief visionary officer.

Before making an entrance, you’re greeted by a train carriage-like exterior, showcasing a Bengal tiger mural — the work of local visual artist TraseOne (Sufian Hamri). Glass windows line the façade which look into the 93-seater restaurant that pays homage to the wonder and mystique of India. On the heavily-printed walls, you’ll find everything from framed photos of Indian soldiers to sketches of iconic landmarks and regal elephants, plus vintage props like peacock feathers, leather trunks and antique rifles.

The restaurant offers a collection of short stories apparent within four distinct spaces. The Officer’s Club is the well-stocked bar; the Old Railway Room is the private dining space; while the Elephant Palace and Jungle Lodge are the main dining halls — all purposefully designed to lend an air of exuberance and escapism while you tuck into a delightful array of sweet and savoury Indian delights.



The Firangi Superstar restaurant is conceived as a foreigner’s love letter to India



The Officer's Club has an adjoining lounge area



The Old Railway Room is the private dining space

Taking cues from real life, from Bombay to Rajasthan, from Chennai to Kashmir, Firangi Superstar pieces together textures, materials, décor and furnishings to create experiences akin to being on a film set. In fact, it's very easy to imagine this venue playing host to numerous costume parties, themed nights or even murder mystery book readings!

"There are so many little personal details scattered around hidden in the vignettes of this project. The most obvious feature is the four different paces and how they both work together and separately. The use of colour as a way to define zones is typically unique to the way film sets operate and I found that a lot of fun to explore," shares Goodman.

In the kitchen, head chef Thiru Gunasakaran (former executive sous chef of Spago by Wolfgang Puck) reworks classic Indian dishes with a modern approach while still infusing a cornucopia of aromatic spices that the cuisine is known for. You can expect both small and big plates consisting of mostly vegetarian eats with quirky names like Holi Cow, Beirut Bhatura, This Is Not Aloo Gobi, Prata Waffle, Salvador Thali, and Indian Saddle (a succulent lamb porterhouse).

The cocktails, vetted by bar manager Benedict Poh, are extensive, explorative and playful, infused with familiar flavours common in Indian cuisine. For example, the Fenugreek Manhattan — not for the faint hearted — features fenugreek-infused Vermouth, bourbon, molasses and ghee-washed Cognac (yes, you heard right). If the heart desires something else, a programme of G&Ts, mocktails, beers, vino, whiskeys, spirits and liqueurs, and if necessary as it always is, chai tea, is at the ready.

Like all the other dining outlets by the Dandy Collection, Firangi Superstar is located within the Chinatown and Tanjong Pagar area, not too far from its sister restaurants, Neon Pigeon and Fat Prince. "We like the accessibility of the location, its proximity to the CBD, as well as it being a place people enjoy going out to in the evenings for drinks and food," says Roopchand.

Holi Cow



Salvador Thali



This Is Not Aloo Gobi

Two to dine

Before they were business partners, Goodman and Roopchand were already established in the F&B scene.

Born in India and raised in Nigeria, Roopchand went to boarding schools in India and the UK, university in Boston, and then New York to work for a multi-billion dollar hedge fund company. He relocated to Hong Kong to open a restaurant with his brother called Fatty Crab, which is now part of F&B collective, 8 Createtive, that owns and operates numerous bars and restaurants in Hong Kong, including The Pontiac, one of Asia's 50 Best Bars.

Born in New York but quintessentially Californian, Goodman trained in French cuisine at the International Culinary Center in New York and began his epicurean career working at a restaurant called Moomba, owned by Oliver Stone and Lawrence Fishburne. In the course of his career, he has been in everything from Michelin-starred kitchens to Kevin Costner's restaurant in Santa Barbara, to the uber luxurious Amandari in Bali.

After being a chef for more than a decade, he left the kitchen to take on a creative directorial role at EDG Design, a creative consultancy focusing on F&B branding, strategy and design. "For me, watching [the process] from ideation to opening is so rewarding. It's exciting to see things that we've imagined as a team come to life," he says on creating new dining concepts. "After leaving my chef career behind, I knew Asia was the place for me to sharpen my design skills. The design culture here is so rich that I really just wanted to be a part of that."

The two met through a mutual friend in Hong Kong around the time Goodman and another partner were starting The Dandy Collection in Singapore. "The F&B scene in Singapore has length and breadth to it. It's so diverse right from the hawker stalls offering a wide variety of cuisines, to the casual restaurants, to the high-end Michelin-starred ones. One can have an exceptional meal at any one of these, making Singaporeans and those of us living here very food-focused," says Roopchand on why he chose to join Goodman.

Together, the formidable duo bring together a wide range of expertise and experience in F&B, design and culture from all the cities they've lived in. Their belief lies in using their passion and diversity to their advantage, in creating ideas beyond the ordinary and introducing international, modern and unique elements to Singapore, while meeting the values and tastes of the local scene.

Currently, they own and operate Fat Prince specialising in Middle Eastern cuisine, Neon Pigeon for modern Japanese, and Firangi Superstar serving up modern Indian — all in settings that are fun, tongue-in-cheek and drink-forward, too.

"Our approach has always been to see where the gaps in the market exist and to have a go at plugging them. All our brands are completely unique in terms of their genre. They have the same value of giving our guests a completely unique experience that they can emotionally connect with," says Roopchand.



Thriving in pandemic times

It has been a year of change for The Dandy Collection — they closed one of their restaurants, Summerlong due to leasing issues, and relocate Neon Pigeon to a bigger

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During the “circuit breaker” profits were also non-existent. “It was about how minimal we could keep our losses. Thankfully, the government provided a lot of assistance with the Jobs Support Scheme, rebates on rental, and discounts on delivery fees during times of heightened restrictions,” says Roopchand.

To support the dining community, the guys partnered the Lo & Behold and Don Ho Group to create a centralised platform called the Dine In Movement, which consolidates all the best restaurants available for diners to order takeout via their respective delivery platforms and sites. The collective even published a cookbook with recipes contributed by the chefs from the various restaurants and donated the proceeds to the Willing Hearts Foundation.

“We are fortunate to be in a very inclusive and collaborative F&B industry in Singapore. From banding together with fellow restaurants and bars to come up with new unique offerings, to industry nights and specials, we are all about community and building that together,” Roopchand relates.

Since coming out of the “circuit breaker” last year, they have witnessed a solid bounce-back for businesses, especially in the F&B sector. The pair agree that there’s no better time than now to open new dining concepts. “With borders closed and the population of Singapore being landlocked, and eating being one of the favourite pastimes, we have definitely seen a boom in the F&B space. We feel this is a great time to open a restaurant that transports people to places they would love to travel to in the form of food, drink and experience,” shares Roopchand.

Goodman strongly feels that it is imperative for restaurants to take advantage of this time

