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# Kitchen Confidential

They've created the *desi* versions of the stylish Buddha Bar and trendy Maxim's of the West. A chef, a film-maker, an engineer and an entrepreneur – together, they have successfully upgraded the country's dining scene. Anish Trivedi in conversation with India's leading restaurateurs

**ROHIT KHATTAR – HABITAT WORLD (NEW DELHI), CHOR BIZARRE (NEW DELHI, LONDON)**

"I am not Wolfgang Puck," says Rohit Khattar. "I'm more a Terry Conran. I create places people want to go to. I understand marketing. Not meat."

He's being modest. Rohit has been training in his grandfather's hotels since he was a teenager. He found the time to get his degree in hotel management as well. And, like a number of the other restaurateurs I talked to, he's spent time in every part of a place. From kitchens to greeting customers. And he's worked in enough

of them to know what keeps people coming back.

Rohit's first venture was in a hotel he inherited. The Broadway on Delhi's Asaf Ali Road. The hotel today is what it's always been. A modest, mid-priced place. Not the kind that would attract the glitterati. By a long shot. But tucked in a corner is Chor Bizarre. A restaurant whose Kashmiri cuisine is a recognition of Rohit's roots. Since 1990, Chor Bizarre has been a bit of a destination. The sort of place to which tourists and magazines go to click their cameras. And the food is still every bit as good.

Seven years later he took that idea to

London. At a time when every Briton ate curry, but no one dined on it. In the past five years Chor Bizarre, London has taken everything from chefs to supper theatre to England. And has made itself a part of the local culture. An eccentric part perhaps. But an accepted one.

Rohit also runs Habitat World in Delhi's India Habitat Centre. The place is a politician's paradise, and over the hour we spend over lunch there, we nod to half a dozen of them. Despite its proximity to the corridors of power, Habitat World has some of the best dining experiences in Delhi. Some of these are restricted to members only. Including Oriental Octopus, the pan-Asian place we're in. But there is the food court, Eatopia, which is open to everyone. And it seems like everyone's there. At lunch, it's packed with college kids, bankers and *behnjis*. Knocking back *dosas* and doughnuts.

Keep it cheap, Rohit tells me. Keep it clean. And keep it convenient. Fine dining has its place. But he'd rather make dining out fun. Like Chor Bizarre, the walls of the Habitat Centre are covered with things that Rohit has collected over the years. Including a Beatles Gold Disc. And a signed photograph of Jawaharlal Nehru playing cricket. He's a pack rat, he says. He can't throw anything out. And when he gets enough of it collected, he opens a new restaurant to put it in.

I ask him what happens next. Another Chor Bizarre? Another 30, he says, almost serious. He's hoping to have that many places under his belt in the next few years. Each one different. Each one standing out as a destination in itself. And with any luck, each one full.

Photographer Ashish Chawla; Senior Fashion Stylist Amber Tikari  
Location courtesy The All American Diner, at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. Inquiries, (011) 4682222 ext 3162/65

