



ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

Sunil Bastola is the executive chef at Bollywood Bistro in Fairfax, where he brings a Nepalese twist to Indian fare.

# Bollywood at the table

By Alexandra Greeley  
Special to The Washington Examiner

**A** chef born and raised in the town of Chitwan, Nepal? As exotic as his roots and upbringing may sound, Sunil Bastola, executive chef of Fairfax's contemporary Indian restaurant, Bollywood Bistro, is as Americanized as any other D.C. chef. Just appreciate the restaurant's setting, for one — flashy film clips adorn the mango-colored walls, eclipsing any Raj-era trappings of most local Indian eateries.

But Bastola can bring to his modern-day cooking a traditional Indian — even Nepalese — mind-set that few of his colleagues can muster: For example, a Goan lobster dish glazed with tamarind and a broiled Atlantic salmon served with a mango sauce. Then consider the Nepalese fare: goat boti, adraki jhinga (ginger-infused jumbo shrimp curry) and mustard chicken soup (fresh green mustard leaves and diced chicken cooked with homemade chicken broth).

As colorful as all this food is, Bastola says he only started cooking professionally in 2001, when he moved to the United States from Nepal. But he also admits that cooking has been nearly a lifelong passion.

"I was interested in cooking when I was 7 or 8 years old at home," he says. "I don't know what inspired me to make tasty food for my family. I guess the influences came from my mom and my grandmother. I looked at them and then copied them."

Home-schooled in cooking, Bastola admits that he did not receive any academic culinary training. He did have many cookbooks that he studied, learning how to prepare and to present Indian cuisine. However, now all his cookbooks are gone. "Our home burned down and I lost all my books," he says.

Bastola may have lost all his cook-

## What is your comfort food?

When I am tired or stressed, I want to eat lentils. They are a good source of protein and energy. And I like them with rice.

## What is your cooking philosophy?

I love when I want to cook for my staff, if they say, "That is the best food I've ever had," then it works. People should be happy after eating my food.

## Which is your favorite restaurant?

Chipotle, because it is fast and

easy. I love that. For fine dining, the Japanese seafood restaurant, Sakura, in Germantown.

## Where is your favorite place in the world?

I haven't been there yet, but the base of Mt. Everest, that would be my dream place to go.

## What do you do in your leisure time?

If I am in the mood, I cook for my family. Otherwise, I go out and visit friends or browse the internet for new recipes.

## IF YOU GO Bollywood Bistro

» **Where:** 3955 Chain Bridge Road, Fairfax  
» **Info:** 703-271-0031  
» **Hours:** Lunch, Mon.-Fri., 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Sat.-Sun., noon to 3 p.m.; Dinner, Mon.-Thurs., 5 to 10 p.m., Sat. until 10:30 p.m., Sun. until 9:30 p.m.

books, but clearly he has not lost his understanding of, and zeal for, bringing Indian and Nepalese foods and flavors to D.C. Explaining that the spicing in the two cuisines is similar, he focuses on interlacing them with dishes that contemporary audiences crave.

"I want to serve what people today really want," he says. "That really is fusion cooking, yet I want to keep the traditional flavors. We have a small menu of traditional flavors in contemporary recipes. You must use the basic spices to create good cooking."

His family may have been the source of his initial inspiration, but the grown-

up Bastola looks everywhere and at many different food presentations to help generate his ideas.

"I think, 'I want to do that, but better,'" he says. "The food must look good before it goes into the mouth." As a result, Bastola can point to such signature dishes as the aam palak chat (mango and spinach chat, with green mango and crispy spinach with a tamarind dressing), not what anyone could call a commonplace Indian menu item.

Despite his smooth integration of traditional flavors into contemporary cooking, Bastola never shuns his mom's advice. "My mom loves our tandoori chicken," he says, "and sometimes she will give me tips on traditional spices and seasonings." Even better, Bastola can recount some home-cooked meals from childhood, and tap into his mother's repertoire and kitchen memories for new takes on his menu items.

As part-owner as well as executive chef, Bastola has an investment in every aspect of the daily running of Bollywood Bistro, from picking out china and cutlery to enhancing the ambiance. But chances are he displays his Nepalese passion most when behind the various cooking pots.

## The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg Wine insight starts with the best glasses

**I**f I have one major resolution for the New Year — other than the traditionally failed attempts to lose weight, learn a new language and stop speeding — it is the task of using the proper glass for the appropriate type of wine.

Now, lest you think that I am a snob, consider that different types of glassware for red, white and sparkling wines have been de rigueur for centuries, so it only makes sense that wine glass design has evolved over time to take advantage of specific styles of wine. The size and shape of the bowl, as well as the type of glass used in manufacturing, make a huge difference in extracting the true quality of wine.

For example, aromatic red wines require a large bowl that tapers down to a medium opening, giving the wine room to come into contact with air. As aromas move toward the tapered opening, the bouquet becomes more concentrated and nuances more discernible. White wines, on the other hand, feature a smaller bowl and use a thinner rim to take advantage of the more subtle nature of the style. Champagne flutes are long and slender in order to preserve the bubbles and show off the sparkling display.



But even beyond red and white wines, glassware can be further delineated based on the varietal. Pinot noir has a much different aroma or flavor profile than, say, cabernet sauvignon, therefore different styles of glassware have been developed to take advantage of and emphasize each wine's particular traits. If you don't believe me, try this simple experiment: Take a bottle of pinot noir and a bottle of cabernet sauvignon. Pour a little of the pinot noir in to a glass made specifically designed for pinot noir; a glass designed specifically for cabernet sauvignon, a regular water glass and a coffee mug. Repeat the process with the cabernet and see what happens. I love doing this at dinner parties where my guests don't know which wine I have poured into their glasses. They are always amazed when they tell me that they think that the pinot noir tastes better in the pinot glass and the cabernet sauvignon tastes better in the cabernet glass. I am happy to report that — to date — no one has selected the coffee cup as a preferred mode of consumption.

Regardless of the glass you choose, always smell it first. Too many special wine experiences have been spoiled

by accidental contact with residual soap left in the glass or other off-putting odors that get transmitted to the wine due to improper storage (i.e. glasses left in cardboard boxes or in kitchen cabinets alongside cooking spices). This goes for decanters as well.

In our house, the debate isn't over which glass to use for a specific varietal — we have as many varieties of glassware as we have varieties of wine — but rather whether to use a traditional stemmed glass or the new avant-garde stemless variety (i.e. the "O" series from Riedel). The bowls on the two sets of glassware are identical, the only thing missing, or not, is the long stem. I am a fan of stemless style since I am prone to snapping off a few of the delicate stems every time I wash them. While my spouse loves the ease of simply popping stemless glasses in the dishwasher, her main

complaint is that holding a stemless bowl in your hand can warm up a white wine more quickly than holding it by the stem. I countered that if she keeps making me wash the traditional glassware, they will all eventually become stemless. I contend that the stem has less to do with the enjoyment of the wine and more with aesthetics.

Riedel is the most well-known maker of high-end glassware. The company makes several levels of quality wine glasses, starting with the Ouverture series, a good beginner set, all the way up to the expensive Sommelier line, designed for discerning palates. The Vinum series is my favorite set of glasses. Even though this middle-of-the-road series is machine-made, it is a workhorse glass that can be enjoyed every day while providing enough quality to please picky palates. There are 16 styles to choose from, but my favorite styles are the versatile Bordeaux/Cabernet glass which can be used with most red wines, the Chablis/Chardonnay glass that can be used with most white wines and the Red Burgundy/Pinot Noir glasses that can be used with lighter, more delicate wines. The same styles are also available in the stemless "O" series.

Whether you prefer the elegant look of stems or the convenience of stemless, it is worth making a resolution to invest in quality glassware that will allow you to get the most enjoyment out of a particular wine. This is one resolution I look forward to keeping.