

Interview Emily Shardlow-Price  
Portrait Mike English

# Spice sensation

With her cookbook *Indian Kitchen*, Maunika Gowardhan has started to gain a reputation as a leading voice on Indian cuisine. Here, she conjures up thoughts of early food memories, what Diwali means to her and how she eats at home

**What is your earliest food-related memory?**

Catching the bus into Mumbai with my mum to visit the fish market when I was four or five. First we'd stop at the bakery for bun maska (sweet buttery bread buns) that we'd dip in chai. Then we'd go to the markets – such an eye-opener for me. It was a good trip if we left with prawns and a wonderful one if pomfret was on the menu.

**How would you describe your style of cooking?**

When I was growing up there were no supermarkets, so we cooked and ate what was in season and available. That's how I cook now; not because seasonal and local are such buzzwords, but because that's what I've always known. I also like to think that my food is accessible and

authentic. I want as many people as possible to appreciate and enjoy the diversity of Indian cuisine.

**Who or what inspired your love of food?**

My mum and dad, undoubtedly. Experiences like going to the fish market and watching my mum expertly haggle for the best produce available

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then later turn it into amazing curries that we'd all eat sitting on the floor.

**Which spices and ingredients do you tend to have at home?**

Basic items like ginger, garlic, chilli and turmeric. I'll often have a tomato curry base in the freezer, so I know a meal is never far away if I'm really busy in the week. I always make sure I have canned beans and pulses too.

**Which dishes do you most associate with Diwali?**

We'd always have lamb biryani, which was elaborately prepared in a wonderfully drawn-out process that could last a day or so. It was such a celebratory dish and an absolute joy to eat. My mother also made a fabulous fish curry with coconut and chilli.

**How did you celebrate Diwali when you were growing up?**

It was an amazing time; the build-up to the festivities would begin a few weeks before and there'd be card games, crackers and gifts. Houses would be filled with an array of sweets and snacks and people would drop by and then stay for hours. I didn't have a care in the world.

**If you've got some time, what do you cook?**

I'm so lucky with my job because I adore cooking. For me there's nothing better than waking up on a Saturday with the whole day stretched out ahead, knowing that I can spend it in the kitchen. Of course in the week I rely on speedy easy meals, but at the weekend I really relish taking my time.

**What's your favourite recipe or dish?**

To be honest, at home it's rare that I cook the same recipe twice – there are just too many to try. Having said that, I do have a real soft spot for both my grandma's crab curry and a slow-cooked, spiced leg of lamb.

**Can you tell us your plans for the next few months?**

There's so much going on at the moment and I love it. I've been working on re-launching my website which I'm pleased with. I have a couple of new projects coming up and I'm also going to be travelling to India to meet clients and hopefully stopping in Dubai for a few days too.

*To read more about Maunika, visit her website [maunikagowardhan.co.uk](http://maunikagowardhan.co.uk)*

