

LIVING

The Darjeeling Limited Inspired Color-Saturated Interiors at the New Bombay Bread Bar

FEBRUARY 27, 2018 2:56 PM
by NOOR BRARA



When Mumbai-born chef Floyd Cardoz proposed opening an Indian restaurant to Danny Meyer in 1998, the restaurateur excitedly obliged. *Tabla*, Meyer's sole non-Western eatery to date, was a hit for many years before its closing in 2012. The restaurant's upper deck, which served up a more austere ambiance and multi-course fare, failed, in the end, to turn out a crowd sizable enough to secure its place in the brutally competitive world of New York dining. But the lower, more informal level of the space—known as *The Bread Bar*—made a lasting impression.

After *Tabla*'s shuttering, Cardoz moved briefly to Meyer's seafood-focused *North End Grill*, where he infused his love of world flavors subtly into lobster salads, hearty stews, and oyster emulsions; fully dedicated to his craft, he would often go on fishing trips near Groton, Connecticut, and once spoke to the *Wall Street Journal* about the value of a chef growing or catching his ingredients by his own hand: "You learn not to waste as much," he shared. "Your appreciation of that food increases exponentially."

It wasn't long before Cardoz exited the Meyer Group to realize the dream he had long envisioned since leaving *Tabla*: to create a casual, fun and colorful space where guests could enjoy Indian food the way he had growing up in Mumbai, stopping for a bread-based treat on the street between classes or having a quick bite at a nearby cafe. His dream place would feature the essentials alongside a glorified snack menu, packed with after-school-style nibbles that one wouldn't find at New York's otherwise more formal Indian restaurants. When he opened Paowalla—in Hindi, “bread seller”—in 2016 on the corner of Spring and Sullivan, it was another attempt at formal dining that fell flat, and it wasn't long before he was drawing up new plans to try again.



Today, The Bombay Bread Bar, proudly displaying a dazzling new turquoise facade, opens in place of Paowalla, featuring the original Bread Bar's greatest hits as well as a slew of punchy new items on the menu, like the cheddar bacon kulcha (a naan-like bread, but softer and much more delicious). If the former title morphing into its new identity sounds abrupt, that's because it is—Cardoz planned, conceived, and recreated its second coming in just a month.

“Floyd had all these amazing ideas and the team kind of came together to make it all happen,” notes the restaurant's PR head Katy Foley. “He sat down with [restauranteur] Will Guidara and they tossed around a bunch of concepts. Floyd envisioned something with a lot of color, that paid tribute to both India's history and more modern culture, and Will suggested he reach out to Kris Moran, a member of Wes Anderson's creative team, who conceived the sets for *The Darjeeling Limited*, and to Maria Qamar, a young Canadian pop artist on Instagram who creates artwork for the Desi millennial set.”

In a matter of just a week, Moran and her team breathed new life into the previously forlorn-looking space, drawing on her time working on *The Darjeeling Limited*, as well as Cardoz's beloved memories of his homeland, to hone its new aesthetic. A wall of marigold flowers—oft associated with weddings and celebrations—greet each guest when they enter, beckoning the way into what is seemingly a two-room design.

The opening dining area features small tables sporting red-and-white-stripe oilcloth settings, a nostalgic detail from Cardoz's childhood spent eating out with friends and family in 1980's Mumbai. The bar is set against a vintage-looking moss green wallpaper with a pale pink lotus print; a similar paper mirrors it in the second room, achieving a charming kaleidoscopic effect. "All these images came from paintings on murals in India," notes Moran. "But we kind of had to vertically play them out because our reference image was only 2 feet by 2 feet."

To the left, a gentle teal wall recalls the color scheme of Anderson's famous film as well as an idea that fascinated Moran in her quest to encompass a bit of every part of India: "We painted it in a kind of a rougher way to bring in a little bit of 'exterior India'," she says. "What would a tin wall in this color, for example, look like after 40 years of being in the the beating sun?" On the adjacent wall, a portrait of Shah Jahan, the emperor who brought about the zenith of Mughal architecture with his Taj Mahal, peeks out.



It is with this consideration of detail that guests will encounter the intimacy of Cardoz's India with a touch of Anderson's influence—from a roaring tiger motif painted over the wood-burning bread oven to the scarlet back wall that features Qamar's arresting floor-to-ceiling mural of a Roy Lichtenstein-style Indian couple, the space is a veritable feast for the eyes. "It's funny because when the team asked me to create a mood board for the mural, I actually had scenes from *The Darjeeling Limited* among my reference photos before knowing Kris was helming the project," says Qamar. "I love that movie, and ambiance is a huge part of going out to eat, for me, so I was really excited when I found out that Bombay Bread Bar was putting so much energy into its design."

Such is indeed the case for Moran, who managed to pull off the entire operation in the allotted week's time, and for whom the devil is in the tiniest of final touches. A few days before the restaurant's opening, she is finishing up her last bits of artistry by decoupageing vintage Indian matchbox art to the walls of the bathroom. The project's process, which she describes as both fast and furious, was well worth the final outcome. "It may not make sense on paper," she laughs of her decor's many, seemingly disparate references. "But I think, like all good art, it comes alive all together. The best part about doing this was that no one was afraid to try everything."