



La Loca Maria Mumbai

Solely Chef-driven Restaurant

By Sharmila Chand

'La Loca Maria' was born, with 'la loca' translating to 'the crazy'. Few crazy sessions and the co-owners, Chef Manuel Oliveira Seller and Mickee Tuljapurkar realised that they wanted to add a strong positive feminine energy to the space. Chef Manuel decided to go back to his roots with his real inspiration – Maria, his mother. The living embodiment of all things bold, unconventional and confident, she was the first woman in her town to start her own restaurant. She did not choose to abide by societal norms – it was quite rare for a woman to walk into a bar and get herself a drink back in the day. Her inimitable zest for life and self-confidence means that she is an eternal muse for Chef Manuel, and the interiors of the restaurant have been modeled after this pulsating energy that his mother radiates. The final result is a creative collaboration with local street artists, with Za Works bringing the murals of the eponymous Maria to life on the walls. Leaving ladylike conventions by the wayside, you'll find her sitting with her legs uncrossed, sipping on sangria in between bites of a wholesome burger.

The founders wish for every visitor that walks into La Loca Maria to resonate with Maria's confident persona and her

independent identity. The founders have also left their personal stamp on the place by inculcating a painting of their pet dog, Max on the walls. This spirit of simplicity is celebrated in full force in the kitchen that occupies half the size of the restaurant, so people can see the food on their plates being made before their eyes. The dim lights spotlights and candles on the table at night ensures that the restaurant radiates a cozy and intimate vibe, and this is further elevated by the soothing instrumental music with Spanish and American country tunes that play in the background.



Mickee Tuljapurkar

Food

Being the brainchild of esteemed Chef Manuel Oliveira Seller, this warm and vivacious 24-seater restaurant, tucked in Bandra, Mumbai, offers a touch of the alluring Spanish culture – manifested through the delicious burgers and tapas it offers its patrons. Instead of opting for a stereotypical Spanish name, the founders cast their sights on a creative iteration of the much-touted cuisine. Having decided that the name of the restaurant had to symbolise Manuel's passion for food and his cultural heritage, they decided to throw in a punchline for maximum effect.

Spanish classics are thoughtfully re-imagined to tease and tempt the palates of the city's foodie folk. The local produce finds a champion in Chef Manuel, with Spanish-influenced cuisine crafted from locally grown vegetables. Chef Manuel's imaginative exploration of comfort foods means that the main courses extend beyond classic Spanish staples to house a joyous mix of his personal recipes and Mediterranean food.

Veg Signature Dishes:

Mushroom Croquette – Crispy from outside and tender from inside, it melts in your mouth with garlic aioli. It's an absolute

“ I strongly believe that the USP of La Loca Maria is the fact that it is a chef-driven restaurant solely. The versatility of the place allows me the freedom to experiment with my imaginative capabilities and creative sensibilities to create unique amalgamations of textures and flavours and offer these to my patrons ”

Chef Manuel Oliveira Seller, Co-owner La Loca Maria

treat for everyone.

Beetroot Hummus – A vibrant and colorful red gold hummus with parsley and smoked paprika that complete to bring out the flavours, served with crispy pita bread as a combination.

Pesto Linguine - Fresh handmade pasta covered with fresh basil pesto flavour by using pest pine nuts. It's a light and soothing dish with a portion that's just about right for a light meal.

Veg Classic Mushroom Burger - A packed patty of mushroom flavoured in soft bread brioche with a blend of spicy eggless mayo, parmesan chilli fries, tomato, lettuce and caramelized onion with no added sugar which makes it a delightful meal.

Warm Chevre Salad – An alluring mixture of soft and subtle goat cheese which is caramelized on the top with a touch of honey and thyme. Adding just the right amount of Lollo Rosso and rocket leaves with iceberg to get a tinge of crunchiness appealingly dressed with mustard honey vinaigrette.

Non-Veg Signature Dishes:

BFF Carpaccio - A soft texture and finely sliced tenderloin prepared with marinated truffle vinaigrette and then finely garnished with green leaves, rocket leaves, parmesan and croutons.



Charred Octopus – It is home food for Chef Manuel - specifically famous in the North of Spain. A very tender meat in a crispy skin/coat aligned with potatoes, spicy mayo and tomatoes that relish the smoky flavour by dint of the Spanish smoked paprika.

Pork Belly – An extremely slow and patient process that takes upto 5 hours to be cooked. It is to be marinated 12 hours prior to being cooked in the oil to get a tangy sweet chilli Asian flavour to the dish. In order to balance out the flavours, it is garnished with a sweet potato puree, jalapenos, scallions, chilli oil, fried crispy onions and grated parmesan.

Lobster Ravioli in Lobster Bisque and Roasted Apple Puree – A homemade ravioli cooked in a whole lobster. The meat of the lobster is used for the filling which is used in the shell for the bisque. It takes a total of 3 hours cooking time. This recipe has been mastered for 10 years and hence the unique flavour of the lobster is the key. It is then cooked with roasted apple puree with cherry vinegar as this is perfect seafood combination to opt for. Additionally it is garnished with crispy basil leaves and basil oil. The bisque is finally finished off with lime juice which elucidates the Peruvian element of the dish and gives a sour punch.

Gambas Al Ajillo - Beautifully cooked prawns with rich flavours of smoky garlic, and mildly spicy chillies. The Gambas is authentic too it's flavours and simply melts in your mouth.

Signature Desserts

The signature dessert at the restaurant is the "La Loca Tiramisu" as it instantly wins over a lot of hearts and smiles. Even though Chef Manuel uses the standard ingredients of a tiramisu, he chooses to extend his creativity to add a twist to the dessert. He does this, by making it extremely light and airy, and also adds a scoop of coffee ice cream to it to make it innovatively flavourful! Adding the coffee meringue and ice cream allows the patron to experience a range of diverse textures while eating the tiramisu.

Signature Drink

The "Spicy Watermelon" mocktail is a unique yet classic drink, because it brings together two contrasting flavours altogether. The watermelon juice brings to the table a healthy sweet flavour, however soda and jalapeno are added to throw in a refreshing spicy punch that help clean one's palette.



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Know the Chef

Chef Manuel Oliveira Seller

Born in the UNESCO heritage town of Toledo in Spain, Chef Manuel's earliest childhood memories stem from his mother's restaurant where he got his first glimpse of the various techniques of cooking. His passion for the craft inspired him to start cooking at the age of merely fourteen, and he helped out at the family restaurant on weekends, where he often served Spanish home-cooked food.

He furthered his passion by enrolling at a culinary school in Toledo where he received hands-on knowledge of Spanish cuisine as well as unique techniques of making cheese, sauces and breads. Upon graduating with a certificate of diploma, he was recruited at a Michelin-star restaurant and ever since then, over the course of his career, he has worked as Chef De Cuisine at several illustrious hotels around the world, including 55&5th The Grill at the St. Regis, Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi and as Chef De Cuisine at Le Cirque and Café Belge at The Ritz-Carlton in Dubai. In Mumbai, he started off as Chef De Cuisine at Arola Bar & Restaurant, JW Marriott, Mumbai, and has now finally achieved his lifelong dream of opening up his own restaurant - La Loca Maria.

By exploring classic flavours, and adapting to the diverse cultures and energies of the world around him, Chef Manuel has established his signature style of cooking. He chooses to focus predominantly on the rich textures of the produce in his dishes which is rare to see. Having worked in some of the most revered kitchens at an international level, his precision and attention to detail have been further honed with a consistency in the flavours of each dish that is plated.

He credits India, and its nuanced culture, as playing a significant role in opening up his palette as it was here where he learned to play around with and infuse different flavours, textures and spices into his own passion foods.

La Loca Maria provides Chef Manuel with a unique platform. As a chef-driven restaurant, the versatility of the place presents him with the freedom to play around with his own imagination and serve comfort foods that are exceptionally plated and presented. From the preparation of ingredients to the style of cooking, the restaurant is a living testimony to his Spanish heritage and his own personal creativity. As time passes, he hopes to delight patrons with delicious amalgamations of Mediterranean cuisine with Spanish influences.

A brief talk with Chef:

Your philosophy on food?

My philosophy on food finds its basis on an extremely crucial factor - the freshness of the produce. For me, respecting and staying true to the original, clean flavours of every element of the dish is of utmost significance. Creating amalgamations of textures, spices and flavours is good; however one must always retain a part, no matter how small, of the original flavours to ensure its authenticity.

Your favorite cuisine?

Apart from the Spanish cuisine, my favourite cuisines are Japanese and Peruvian, for the sole reason being the authenticity of the clean flavours that are infused into the food dishes.

Your role model?

My mother has played a significant role.

Your favorite spice?

My all time favourite spice is black pepper. It is an essential in almost every dish that I make. It effortlessly enhances the flavours of my dishes.

Your hot selling dish?

The 2 hottest selling dishes at La Loca Maria are the BFF Carpaccio and Gambas Al Ajillo.

Lessons learnt in the kitchen?

Rather than lessons, I would say I have learnt a lot of principles and values in the kitchen. Working in the kitchen has made me understand and learn the value of patience and discipline as attributes and qualities. More importantly I have learnt how to take on and further delegate responsibilities to my team members. Efficient communication, taking inputs from others basis their perspectives, and experimenting are some of the other key learnings that I have taken away from spending time in the kitchen.

What are you passionate about?

Other than the food I cook, I am extremely passionate about bikes. I am a complete bike enthusiast, and have had a diverse collection of bikes back in the day.

If it was your last meal on earth, what would you choose?

Being one of the most difficult questions I have ever had to answer, I would say my last meal on earth would be my mother's home cooked Cocido. It is essentially a Spanish stew that is made of chickpeas, chicken, beef, pork and green vegetables. I love it for its authenticity and clean flavours!