

INSIDE LOOK at Smoke Music Cafe



*In conversation
 with
 Khandakar Omar
 Farhan &
 Kayes Siddiqui*

What inspired you to become a restaurateur? Where did it all begin?

When the construction of this building was on-going, one of my little brother in my friend circle who is currently a famous architect, came to me saying how he loved the positioning and roof of the building and how it could be turned into a great restaurant. We saw that there weren't many places for people from all walks of life sitting down and having a good meal, whilst getting the view of the city. There were a handful of place, which were mostly reserved towards the rich & the corporates. We wanted to construct a place where people from all ages and groups come and enjoy themselves with great food. That's when Kayes Bhai and his brothers, one of his brothers being a celebrity chef from Finland, came and said that they would give me full kitchen support & developed the entire menu and recipe from



scratch. We started to assemble a Multi-Cuisine menu where you will find Mexican, Italian & Western Style food. Music plays a big part in our ambiance as well, since we are passionate about music ourselves. That's why you see a lot of Great musicians from the late 70's in our Menu as well.



What challenges did you face initially?

We have a menu that is built up with a variety of different cuisines. Initially, Finding Vegetables were not a problem, but the spices were a different story. Mexican & Italian food are very much build with a pallet of different spices such as rosemary, Cajun spice, thyme and cheeses like mozzarella, cheddar, parmesan were not available in our country. So we had to outsource them from outside our country, which was a bit of a hassle. We always had to bring in inventory of spices for 2-3 months, which was a bit of a risk itself. Nevertheless, the situation is great now, we are easily being able to procure these items, which was not possible 10 years back. If we talk about meat, Bengal Meat is the main source for us nowadays and they are exceptional.



We know you have other interesting businesses as well, how do you manage all together and what drives you?

It's all because of our love & passion towards food. We came in with conclusion that since we have entered in the Service Industry, we have to satisfy the people who comes through those doors expecting great service. From the very beginning, we wanted to focus on creating a well-tuned and cohesive team, which will help us make our services even greater and stupendous towards our guests. Another core element in our mind was that whatever we will do, we'll do with love & affection towards our customers. And food industry is such a place, that if you do not make the food with love &



care, people will generally not like it. We always wanted our guests to feel like the money & time they spent here was worth it. We also focused on making sure the customers that comes through doors become repeated customers and spread the word of our restaurants throughout their circles.

What are the steps you have taken for your restaurants to adopt to the new normal?

We have the safety of our guests and employees in mind whilst running our restaurant. We are following the necessary guidelines that have been provided by the Government. We have spread out our seating arrangement, to maintain the social distancing guidelines that has been provided. Our employees & we are very careful about maintaining these guideline in every step of the way, while handling food or communicating with our customers. We also encourage our customers to follow and maintain the guidelines as well, for their safety & ours.

We have seen a lot of people trying their hands in different cuisine during the lockdown. Any advice for the aspiring Chefs/home cooks of Dhaka?

We really admire the ingenuity amongst all the aspiring



home chefs. Especially now, because they are making use of the time that is available to them and self-teaching themselves various cuisines. Just make your food with love. It's the secret ingredient that makes everything great. Also, take the opportunities that are coming your way with passion and energy. Surely, passion and hark work will definitely be worth it.



What surprise may Dhaka expect from you in future? Any upcoming new project?

We didn't have much Fish food in our menu. So, we are going to unveil a wide range of dishes related to food. We are incorporating fish into our menu to make it more diverse and refined. We are also looking into establishing a culinary institution that will help chefs gain valuable and essential skills for those who don't have the opportunity to go to culinary schools. That would help them in establishing their own restaurants and run them smoothly.

*The interview was taken by Foysal Mahmud Niloy.
 Photo: SK ENAMUL HAQ*