

FROM MY PANTRY



Chef HUSSAIN SHAHZAD
on his favourite technique

MAKING POEE, THE STAPLE GOAN BREAD

LOST ART: Goa is the only region in India that makes a traditional leavened bread. It's called poee. But the original way of making this bread, an art form in itself - seems to be dying. The restaurant O Pedro was built on the idea of how we could bring to life this dying art form. This is why we built a wood-fired oven in the restaurant - the most authentic form of making this bread. We make our poee twice a day, and it's so popular that when people walk in asking for it, and we tell them that there's nothing fresh and they'll have to wait till the next batch is baked, they're willing to do so. In this age of no carb, gluten-free diets, it's quite something for people to love this bread so much.

LEARNING FROM THE BEST: I'm a Bohri Muslim from Chennai and I knew nothing about Goan poee in the beginning. Someone told me that there's a man in Ribandar, near Panjim, where a baker is still making poees everyday according to the traditional method. I was told to go there at 4 pm, armed with a chiplet of Amul butter, so that when the poees come out hot and fresh, I'm ready to eat them. I thought I would be the only idiot turning up outside a bakery at four in the afternoon with butter, but I was wrong. There were 25 others waiting in line already! After some persuasion, the baker agreed to teach me how to make poees. He had a very susegad (laid-back) approach to baking: he would place the dough in a large bathtub in his bakery and leave it to proof for three hours, and go take a nap. By the time he would wake up, the dough would be ready to go into the oven, and soon the customers and vendors on cycles would turn up to buy the fresh poees.



Hussain Shahzad (top) *Tejal Pandey;*
fresh Goan poees with assorted butters *Sanjay Ramchandran*

READY, FIRE, EAT: The wood-fired oven obviously doesn't have a mind of its own. We are the ones who control it, we decide how hot it should be, when the dough should go in, when it should come out. Unlike when using a technologically advanced oven, this requires you to constantly interact with the food that you're making, because you have to keep monitoring it. This is a more direct, hands-on way of making poee and this is something I enjoy. It's also such a basic, simple recipe, but that is what makes it more of a challenge. If you get it wrong, there's nothing that you can hide behind.

Hussain Shahzad, Executive Chef, O Pedro, Mumbai

AS TOLD TO POOJA PILLAI