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# Chef Ritu Dalmia

## The Indo-Italian Diva



Le K2 Palace, Courchevel is heaven on earth. The dramatic entrance to the lobby. It's world-class dining at the 2-Michelin starred Kintessence. The urdu inscription of Sarkara which means sugar.

# A Pastry Place

## Where Sugar Meets Snow

A Michelin-Starred French pastry chef offers sage and simple advice on all things sweet plus a few of his secret recipes. Visit the the French Alps to see the magic

Text: Fareeda Kanga



Le K2 Palace puts you in another fantasy frame, much like a Game of Thrones setting

It's impossible not to fall in love with the powdery paradise of Courchevel in the French Alps, more precisely in Les 3 Vallées, where the upscale resorts, beloved by skiers and endless snow come together to create a veritable winter wonderland unlike any other!

Surprisingly, Courchevel was the first resort to have been built from "scratch" in 1946 on previously untouched terrain in the post-war years to jump start the economy and who would have guessed its popularity would have soared to such heights!

If you are a skiing enthusiast you will be mesmerised as the ski slopes are everywhere. Yes, you can literally jump off your breakfast table and dive onto a slope.

However, we were pleased to find out that Courchevel is a gastronomic paradise with the largest amount of Michelin stars in France outside of Paris. Wow! That's really something given that this place is a small village that has grown into a township of sorts.

It's equally difficult to select a hotel or a luxury retreat as the choices are mind-boggling, but I think I have chosen wisely. I'm inclined to believe that the K2 group of hotels offer something unique with both Le K2 Alpitour and Le K2 Palace rising the bar in terms of eclectic style, architecture and understated opulence.

The K2 Palace can best be described as a "luxury hotel village" comprising of 30 rooms and suites as well as seven chalets. It benefits due to its privileged location, being

rocked, a beer-grapefruit shaker joins forces with a heart of lamb's lettuce, the grapefruit tickles the beetroot, and lemon balances with parsley.

The *English* menu has the famous spicy chocolate – a mélange of creamy chocolate and leaf of pure 75% Cuba chocolate, Sri Lanka cinnamon-ice-cream, and veil of cocoa, chocolate crunch, lime like a condiment, soft cherry with mulled wine and more.

All creations are classified so that their tasting, like a menu, can be done in a chronology taking into account the power of the tastes. "You can't eat rum or three deserts. The game of textures allows to go far in the flavours while maintaining lightness and freshness," says Sébastien.

What is his secret for success?

"The trick is to work with the choicest ingredients to create desserts that look and taste exceptional, be it at home or in a restaurant. I drew inspiration from many things including a childhood spent on the island of La Réunion where the scent of pineapples and the geranium distilleries proved inspirational for some of my creations in latter years"

Can the home chef master pastry-making or is it only restaurant worthy?

Yes, suggest the experts. Although some techniques require a specialist you can make a host of desserts such as *madeira*, mousse, éclair, *dolciati* just as easily with a little training and care.

both near the centre of Courchevel 1850; yet still retaining a high level of privacy and having ski-in, ski-out access.

As we step into the lobby of K2 Palace, the awe-inspiring interiors influenced by the hotel's predilection towards its name 'K2' – inspired by the mighty Himalayan mountain range – is evident. The Alpine woodwork juxtaposed with bronze elements and a bold red colour evoke a strong East-meets-West vibe.

However, our mission is not to be 'just perfect' on the slopes but to sample the creative culinary deserts and meet the legendary Chef Sébastien Vaution, the K2 Collections pastry chef.

France is the destination for haute pâtisserie. Here, one samples desserts so decadent and artistic that they should be placed in *The Louvre* as national treasures!

Pastry chef Sébastien Vaution on the pride of French gastronomy for their innovative, styled creations, and a tour of their kitchens is a treat for the eyes as well as the tastebuds.

From *petit choux* to *petit sucre* to *crème pâtissière*, many of the world's most loved goodies incorporate techniques and basics that are French in origin, and who better than this culinary genius to shed light on the same!

This talented chef has taken his passion for pastry one step further by launching an exclusive gourmet restaurant, *Sarkara* dedicated entirely to the art of pâtisserie. 'Sarkara' means a grain of sugar in Urdu and

Vaution suggests working with noble ingredients such as good quality chocolate, fresh fruits, and being patient when creating elaborate treats.

At *Sarkara*, he works his wizardry with chocolate (he is a chocolate specialist) and offers some sage advice, "Chocolate needs to be handled with care. If you don't master melting, tempering and temperature management techniques, your dessert won't look good, it will be mottled with white and the texture will be incorrect. But work with it correctly and it will be crisp, crunchy and just as it should be!"

What do you find so special about chocolate? we ask him.

"The aroma and complexity of dark chocolate bow me over, whilst milk and lighter caramelised versions are perfect for biscuits, and less intense treats. It's such a versatile ingredient. I prepare sauces, creams, crumbles and even webs of art."

Just like in wine-making the quality of the vine determines the end result so too does the variety of the cacao tree, the soil and the bean play a big role in the final product.

And last, some trade secrets and technicalities.

Vaution has a soft corner for Malheur's Madagascar and Ecuador chocolate as he wanted to achieve a good blend of acidity and taste. "Tasted in isolation, it has a fresh, fruity appeal. Its very moistish," signs off Chef Sébastien Vaution.

it offers a unique opportunity to discover the deserts of a 4-star Michelin chef *pâtissier*.

As the first of its kind, *Sarkara*, like any 'first' in its field HAS to live up to the hype it has generated in order to be a success in a small ski town that already boasts of eight Michelin-starred restaurants!

Now that can be quite a challenge, but not for Vaution who ably steers the pastry kitchens at this extraordinary property – a jewel in *The Leading Hotels Of*

### The World crown.

Vaution has worked with some of the biggies in the world of French pâtisserie and cuisine, notably Pierre Hermé and Pierre Gagnaire.

As the executive pastry chef for the K2 Collections establishments, which include three hotels in Courchevel as well as the Pearl Chalets in Val d'Isère, in the French Alps, he has his hands full, overseeing not just *Sarkara* but all the other confectionery requirements at the other K2 hotels in

Courchevel. Because he understands flavours and the chemistry of combining, he is a wizard at his job.

Vaution puts his four stars to good use every afternoon from 14:00 to 16:30, as *Sarkara* occupies the main floor of *Kintessence*, double-star table of the K2 Palace which opens only in the evening. Around 20 seats in an intimate and cosy space, with a stone fireplace, and exceptional views of the mountains as guests dine on his

delectable treats.

We are skeptical about sampling an all dessert menu but our fears are put to rest.

The *Sarkara* menu has been developed around three themes – *Le Réseau* featuring revisited classics such as the *Flaming Bread* with cashew nuts, the *Cabbage Profiterole*, the *Victoria Pineapple*, or the associated *Nut Soufflé* to *White Truffle*.

Then the *The Garden*, where celery joins vanilla and meringue, pears tossed with



Fine-dine Sarkara is the place to experience Michelin-starred desserts



Co-director Jean Alain Bacon discusses the menu with Chef Sébastien Vaution

### Chocolate Log

**Ingredients**  
120 g half-salted butter  
50 ml rum  
12 eggs  
1 prewashed used vanilla pod  
440 g whipped cream  
75 g marzipan  
250 g castor sugar  
75 g flour

120 g almond powder  
45 g cocoa powder  
435 g Guanaja 70% chocolate

**Method**  
**For biscuit**  
Blend the marzipan with 6 egg yolks. Whisk the 6 egg whites with 95 g sugar. Mix, add 35 g melted chocolate then 20 g cocoa powder. Spread the biscuit and cook for 8 minutes at 180° C.

**For soaking**  
Make a syrup with 150 g water and 100 g sugar. Add the vanilla and rum. Using a wide brush, soak the biscuit with hot syrup.

**For chocolate crumble**  
Work the butter, 55 g sugar and almond powder together. Add 75 g sifted flour and 25 g cocoa powder. Crumble onto a tray lined with greaseproof paper and

cook for 15 minutes approximately at 150° C.

**For chocolate cream filling**  
Boil 200 g cream. Pour onto 200 g melted chocolate and mix.

Place the log in the freezer for 20 minutes. Place the log on a grid over a rimmed plate. Ice with the chocolate cream. Place on a dish and trim the ends.

**To assemble**  
Make chocolate slivers by spreading chocolate on an iced tray. Place them on the

log with a few pieces of crumble. Sprinkle lightly with cocoa powder or icing sugar. Leave the log at room temperature 20 minutes before serving.

Enjoy with a spoon of winter fruit and the rest of the chocolate cream, simply warmed with a dash of cream.

You can also add chocolate cream with a chocolate leaf, Sri Lanka cinnamon ice-cream, chocolate crunch and topping, lime condiment and juicy cherries in mulled wine.



### Spicy Chocolate

**Ingredients**  
12 eggs  
2 cinnamon sticks  
150 g butter  
1 bay leaf  
250 g milk  
5 Sarawak black pepper grains  
125 g single cream  
1/2 vanilla pod  
360 g castor sugar  
1 star anise  
100 g icing sugar  
5 salt  
150 g 70% chocolate  
20 g flour  
45 g cocoa powder  
8 g white Balsamic vinegar  
750 ml red wine

**For cinnamon ice-cream**  
Boil 180 ml milk and 50 g cream. Incorporate the cinnamon and infuse for 15 minutes. Filter, then add an egg yolk and 45 g castor sugar and boil. Cool, then blend in an ice-cream maker.

**For chocolate meringue**  
Whisk 2 egg whites with 100 g sugar until stiff. Add 15° C for 25 minutes approximately.

**For cherries in mulled wine**  
Flambé the wine, then add the lime and orange cut into slices with the rest of the spices. Infuse for 15 minutes. Filter, then add the Morello and soft cherries. Simmer for around 1.5 hours. Leave in cooking wine until serving.

**For lime marmalade**  
Cut a slice of lime and poach in syrup. Cut a second slice into supremes. Chop the poached slice and add the zest, supremes and white Balsamic vinegar.

**For chocolate discs**  
Sprinkle a guitar sheet with cocoa powder. Cover with a thin layer of K2 chocolate, then cut into 5 cm discs.

**To assemble**  
Place a large spoonful of chocolate cream at the centre of the plate. Make a well in the centre with the back of the spoon. Add the cherries in mulled wine (drain slightly beforehand). Cover with the meringue.

Place a tsp of lime marmalade on top of the meringue, then a chocolate crumble macaron disc. Tap with a scoop of cinnamon ice-cream, then garnish with a chocolate crunch and chocolate disc. Add a drizzle of the cherry cooking juice around the dessert. Enjoy!

**For chocolate crunch**  
Mix the powdered ingredients (45 g icing sugar, 3 g flour, 10 g cocoa powder). Incorporate an egg white, then 45 g melted butter. Spread using a stencil. Cook for 7 minutes approximately at 170° C.

**For K2 chocolate cream**  
Mix the ingredients (75 g milk, 75 g single cream, 36 g castor sugar, 36 g egg yolks) and cook at 85° C. Pour the mixture over 54 g chocolate. Chill for 1 hour before use.

### Chocolate Mi-Cut

**Ingredients**  
165 g 66% chocolate  
150 g unsalted butter  
250 g eggs  
165 g castor sugar

70 g flour

**Method**  
Melt the chocolate and butter over a *bain marie* (double boiler). Whisk the sugar and eggs separately, then whisk into the chocolate mixture. Blend

well. Add the flour. Once the flour is well incorporated, beat with a spatula. Place 100 g portions in moulds lined with greaseproof paper or small ramekins. Cook at 200° C in a well-ventilated oven for around 8 minutes. Remove the moulds and paper and serve hot.

