

Spices and Seasons: Simple, Sustainable Indian Flavors

Rinku Bhattacharya

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Many accomplished, adventurous cooks live with an irksome blind spot in their culinary repertoire: Indian cooking. Likely, the Indophobes are perfectionist leaning and take issue with the subtle, intuitive, freewheeling nature of Indian cooks and how they prepare and store an enigmatic collection of ground spices in blends, rubs, and pastes and talk lovingly of mothers and grandmothers who nurtured their love of cooking from the ripe age of two.

Intimidating, indeed, but not reason enough to eschew a whole subcontinent of cooking forever—no one's being forced to open a restaurant in Calcutta. So, if you happen to fall into the fraidycat camp, take a belly breath and seek guidance from a source like the new *Spices & Seasons*, by the playful, astute Rinku Bhattacharya, a former financial services professional currently living in the Hudson River Valley.

Adamantly committed to playing up the similarities between Indian cooking and more Western culinary sensibilities, Rinku stresses local and seasonal. She simplifies an essential spice kit down to just seven ingredients that form the base of many of the recipes in her book: cilantro, coriander, cumin, red cayenne, garlic, ginger, and turmeric. Then she jumps right in with several easy, enticing appetizers like Radish and Scallion Fritters, Split Pea and Red Onion Crispy Cakes, and delicate salmon kebabs accented with saffron and almond.

Between chapters, Rinku drops in two-page breakouts, offering quick intensives on the Indian approach to working with herbs, alternative and whole spices, souring agents, beans and lentils, stir-frying secrets, and other unique aspects of Indian cuisine. Throughout the book, her recipes come alive with bright vegetables and intriguing combinations: Creamy Mint Chicken Curry, Shrimp in a Mango Basil Sauce, Super Simple Fish Curry, with but ten minutes of prep time. In all, she offers 150 inspired recipes, each accompanied by superb color photographs and warm paragraph-long introductions.

MATT SUTHERLAND (Summer 2014)

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