



Dishing up for Dalai Lama

Vikas Hotwani

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The fact that his son Chris was suffering from diabetes at the tender age of five changed his perceptions towards food for good. Today, the American celebrity chef Michel Nischan is credited with having penned books on organic food that have been bestsellers at the Wall Street Journal and The New York Times. Having served a host of influential people including the Dalai Lama, Michel is one of the most well-known names today in the genre of organic food.

"I first tried becoming a professional musician. I started cooking in restaurants, so that I could eat while pursuing my music career. I caught on very quickly and eventually abandoned my music career to become a chef," remembers Michel.

While he may have brought organic cuisine in the limelight, Michel doesn't miss any opportunity to bust popular myths on the same; one of them being the fact that organic food goes heavy on the pocket. "Most people do not realise how much taxpayer money goes into supporting the present agricultural model via subsidies. If subsidies are removed, conventionally raised meats and produce would be of the same price or even more expensive than organic," he explains.

Coming back to his clientele list, how was it serving the great Dalai Lama? "I served His Holiness and it was a life-altering experience. To meet someone so holy yet so human, generous and humorous was humbling. The most important aspect of his teachings, to me, is how compassion can be reflected in every aspect of our lives and work," Michel adds.

With affiliations all round the world—from Manhattan to South Asia (the latest one being the Pure restaurant in Mumbai)— Michel claims his mother played a pivotal role in his cooking expertise. "My mother and grandmother cooked for 12 members in the family. So, it was natural for me to develop an interest in cooking," he smiles.

What would he say to the fact that men make for the most successful chefs? "That's because the industry, till date, makes it too difficult for women. The enormous demands of the restaurant business do not allow the absence to raise children. Also, because the chef's personality is so integral to the restaurant; a constant presence is required. Our industry might be so much more advanced if we had greater women involvement. Look in the villages — they are the best cooks in most cases," he ends.