



# Reza's edge



Reza with The Library  
co-owner Jo Sineld



## Flamboyant TV chef Reza Mahammad cooks up an aromatic storm for a Franschhoek lunch

By HILARY PRENDINI TOFFOLI Photographs by BRUCE TUCK Recipes by REZA MAHAMMAD

**R**eza Mahammad, colourful star of TV shows like *Delhi Belly* and *Coconut Coast*, is as entertaining in the flesh as on screen and as passionate about what he's cooking.

"Get a whiff of this, my dear!" he commands with his trademark engaging dimpled grin as I approach the open plan kitchen where he's preparing a three course meal for 10. He holds out a dish of basmati rice, fragrant with cardamom, cinnamon, fennel and ground dried rose petals. Buried among the saffron-infused mounds are the gleaming dried cherries and cranberries that give the dish its name: jewelled rice. "If that doesn't look deliciously bejewelled, my name's not Reza!" he announces.

We're in the upstairs entertaining area of The Library, one of the newest self-catering guest houses in Franschhoek. Like its sister venue

next door, Explorers Club, it doubles as an airy congenial space for private dinners, as well as cooking demos.

Reza has just been in India shooting his next TV series *Reza's Royal Feasts* with Rajasthani princesses and palace chefs. He's mad about Rajasthani cuisine. "There are wonderful Mogul and Hindu influences. I love the richness and colour. And the cuisine changes every 20 kilometres."

Back in London, where he was born to Indian parents, his brother Azam is holding the fort at the family restaurant, The Star of India, which Reza took over at the age of 16 when his father died. "The restaurant is on two floors, does 90 covers and still has a painted ceiling like the Sistine Chapel. But the decor is a lot more contemporary now."

Today's lunch guests have been gathered by co-owner of The

Library, Jo Sineld, himself a keen cook. They're sipping Graham Beck Brut as they stand around the kitchen counter watching Reza simultaneously cook and talk. Fast and furious. A whirling dervish in denims, sandals and red-and-white apron, turning out delicately tantalising dishes with the same irresistibly cheeky flair as he exhibits on his popular TV shows.

"I love having people around me while I cook," he says. "I can do it because I'm very focused on what I do."

Despite the view of the Franschhoek mountains through the open stoep doors, it's the scene at the stove that entrances his fans. "When Jo told me Reza was coming to town I was determined not to miss him," one of them says. She and Reza discover they both have houses in France. Hers is in the Cote d'Azur village where Johnny





Jo Sin eld



Adam Pike



Lisa Pike



Abi James and Robert Benard



## ENTERTAINER

Depp lives while Reza's is in the Cognac region.

"We bought the house four months ago," he explains. "The previous owners used to produce cognac. We're renovating it for the cookery retreat we're setting up for summer. Cookery students will love it."

He holds out a piece of Franschoek salmon trout for me to taste. "I've 'Reza-rised' it. It took six hours." A sublime deep smoky flavour emerges through the gingery-garlicky-mustardy-chilli-honey marinade. "Does it tickle your fancy, my dear?"

He happily describes the process: "After marinating you put the fish in a roasting pan with a space in the centre where you place a little foil basket with two red-hot pieces of charcoal. Sprinkle them with ghee and spices. NOT oil. Oil gives a petrol taste. Cover with foil and leave overnight. You can smoke vegetables like that too. They do a lot of smoking in Rajasthan." He grins. "Did you enjoy it? Yes, I like it when people say 'Mmm'. Cooking is all about the 'Mmm' and the 'Aah'."

The guests are at the table, mmming and aahing over Reza's stuffed quails by the time he starts getting stuck into his semolina

halva dessert. "This is a quick way of making a cake without baking, and it's going to be done under your very eyes," he tells me gleefully. "It is a very Ottoman dish with a lovely nutty flavour, not cloyingly sweet like most Indian desserts."

Amazingly, he does the whole thing in a frying pan. Le Creuset of course. Butter and semolina, somehow stirred till golden brown while he's chopping up pistachios. "I normally use pine nuts, but they're expensive here." He adds saffron-infused milk and everything bubbles up. "You have to be fast. It behaves almost like polenta. Now you pat it into a cake tin. There! Turn it out and serve hot or cold or warm. This time I'm surrounding it with poached pears in saffron."

His second dessert is 10 cardamom panna cottas he made the day before and is serving with berries and a rose coulis containing Dada's rose syrup made in Pietermaritzburg. "Lemon or lime juice removes the syrup's cloying flavour and I'm infusing it with basil leaves." He holds out a red spoonful. "So how does it taste now, my dear?"

Perfect, Reza.

**The Library in Franschoek is for hire as a venue and a self-catering house for six guests. Visit [www.explorersclub.co.za](http://www.explorersclub.co.za).**



### Gilded stuffed quails with a creamy sauce

Serves 10 **A LITTLE EFFORT** 40 mins plus extra for refrigeration

#### STUFFING

120g minced chicken breast  
15ml (1 tbsp) garlic/ginger paste  
2 green chillies, finely chopped  
15ml (1 tbsp) raisins  
15ml (1 tbsp) dried cherries, chopped  
15ml (1 tbsp) cashew nuts, roasted and chopped  
15ml (1 tbsp) pistachio nuts, roasted and chopped  
15ml (1 tbsp) fresh coriander stalks, finely chopped  
2,5ml (½ tsp) ground cardamom  
2,5ml (½ tsp) ground cinnamon  
1 star anise, finely ground  
5ml (1 tsp) ground garam masala  
salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
4 quail eggs, boiled and shelled

#### QUAILS

salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
4 boned quails, reserving the bones for the sauce  
60ml (¼ cup) butter, melted and seasoned with a pinch of red chilli powder and a pinch of ground

garam masala

#### SAUCE

60ml (¼ cup) oil  
4 green cardamom pods  
2 x 3cm pieces of cassia bark or cinnamon sticks  
4 cloves  
5ml (1 tsp) cumin seeds  
2 bay leaves  
1 star anise  
2 shallots, finely sliced  
1 green chilli, finely chopped  
reserved quail bones  
2,5ml (½ tsp) ground cinnamon  
2,5ml (½ tsp) ground cardamom  
30ml (2 tbsp) tomato purée, diluted with 30ml (2 tbsp) water  
15ml (1 tbsp) fresh coriander stalks, chopped  
190ml (¾ cup) fresh cream  
2,5ml (½ tsp) ground garam masala

**1** For the stuffing, place all the ingredients in a mixing bowl, except for the quail eggs, and mix thoroughly. Divide into 4 balls.  
**2** Wrap the stuffing around each quail egg as if making Scotch eggs and set aside.  
**3** Season the quails and place the stuffed eggs in the cavity of the boned quails. Wrap the legs over the filling, turn over,

tuck everything in and shape it nice and tight. Cover the quail with foil and refrigerate to firm up, about 1 hour.  
**4** For the sauce heat the oil in a pan over a medium to high heat and add all the whole spices. Once they begin to sizzle and splutter and their aroma is released, add the shallots and lightly sprinkle with some salt. Sauté until golden brown, then add the chilli. Continue to stir-fry for a few seconds, then add the quail bones along with the ground spices and continue to stir-fry, for a further 2–3 minutes.  
**5** Add the tomato purée and the coriander. Continue to stir-fry for a further minute, then add enough water to cover the bones. Bring to the boil and simmer until reduced by half.  
**6** Strain the sauce through a fine sieve into a separate pan and add the cream and garam masala. Adjust the seasoning. Reheat gently when ready to serve. Preheat the oven to 200°C.  
**7** Take the quail out of the refrigerator and baste with the butter. Bake until cooked through, about 15–20 minutes. Baste the quail halfway through the cooking process. Once cooked, allow to rest for a few minutes.  
**8** To serve, spoon the sauce onto a deep platter and place the quail on top. Garnish with either gold or silver leaf.