

## Chefs

### FEATURED CHEF



### Mistress of spices - Vanie Padayachee (Fu.shi)

"Winter is all about comfort food, and one of the most comforting dishes I recently had the pleasure of enjoying was a mild, fragrant dish called *chicken molee* at Fu.Shi fusion cuisine @ The Upper Deck Lifestyle centre in Plettenberg Bay," writes Eat Out assistant editor, **Lisa van Aswegen**. Vanie Padayachee, executive chef at Fu.shi, shares her thoughts on comfort and spice – and all things nice – with Lisa.

**Lisa:** Why do you think people love curries so much - whether spicy or not?

**Vanie:** Well, I love curries for their flavour and not for their heat. For me, when the spices are heated whilst cooking, they release their beautiful aromas.

**Lisa:** What is your favourite curry - at the restaurant and at home?

**Vanie:** At work it's the chicken molee which you enjoyed. It's flavoured with turmeric, lemongrass and coconut cream. It's mild and very flavourful. And then of course there's the Thai green curry. When I'm at home, it's spaghetti bolognese, "Indian style". The mince is a mince curry, with spices and vegetables

**Lisa:** What does the term 'comfort food' mean to you?

**Vanie:** Yummy food. Food that reminds me of my childhood. Food that I've had a taste in my mind for a long time, but which I don't get to eat often –that makes it even more special when I do have a plate of my favourite comfort food.

**Lisa:** What is your ultimate comfort food?

**Vanie:** Dad's vegetable breyani & dhal curry – so yummy. Or if I'm at work, it's vegetable noodle stir fry.

**Lisa:** For me, your chicken Molee dish was so perfect - happiness in a bowl with that beautiful yellow colour and warm and soothing aromatic taste. Do you think of both the look and the taste of a dish when working on your menu?

**Vanie:** I thought of the dish when we had the big rains in November last year and I just wanted to bring some light and cheerfulness to Plettenberg Bay, as it was a sad time when much was washed away here. Yes, it is a flavourful curry, typical of our fusion food. It's not spicy and when you smell it, it doesn't kill your taste buds. It lingers on after you have finished your meal.

**Lisa:** What spices could you not live without?

**Vanie:** Coriander, lemongrass, mint. I've found I am using a lot of sage now, which has many healing properties, these are my favorite herbs. Spices are turmeric, cardamom, star anise and cloves.

**Lisa:** Do you think different spice preferences say different things about chefs? What do your favourite spices say about you?

**Vanie:** Yes I do, my spices are full of flavour and the cloves add spiciness, without giving burning heat as chili does. We have star anise crème brûlée for curry nights and cardamom panna cotta on the Fu.Shi menu - it's all about flavour. I love taking classic French dishes like this and giving them a fusion twist.



For those of you who can't make it to Plett soon to taste Vanie's wonderful food, we convinced her to share the recipe of chicken molee – savour and enjoy:

**Chicken molee with steamed lemongrass infused jasmine rice**



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- Anything hot and hearty

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4 X chicken breast skinned and boneless cut into 6 pieces each  
 25gr cake flour  
 100ml olive oil

**Method:**

Place the flour and chicken pieces into a bowl and toss/coat well  
 Heat a heavy bottom sauce pan  
 Add in the olive oil  
 Sauté the chicken pieces until light brown in color, remove from pan and set aside

**Molee sauce**

1 medium onion finely chopped  
 1tsp ground ginger  
 1tsp ground garlic  
 1 small chili finely chopped  
 1tsp black mustard seeds  
 1tsp cumin seeds whole  
 1tsp coriander seeds whole  
 1 stick lemon grass bruised/smashed with a meat mallet  
 50ml olive oil  
 200ml coconut milk/cream  
 100gr coconut powder  
 1tsp turmeric powder  
 Salt  
 Pepper  
 2tsp chopped coriander fresh  
 2tsp chopped mint fresh

**Method:**

Heat a heavy bottom pot  
 Add in the olive oil  
 Add in the seeds, onion, ginger, garlic, lemon grass and chili, sauté until the onion is golden brown  
 Add in the turmeric, coconut mil/cream and the sautéed chicken pieces  
 Reduce heat and season to taste  
 When the chicken is almost cooked ± 20minutes add in the coconut powder and turn heat off  
 Add in the chopped mint and coriander  
 Cover with the pot lid and allow standing for 30minutes before eating

**Lemongrass infused jasmine rice**

Cook rice as per instructions in the packet adding 1 stick of lemon grass to 1 cup rice

**Plating**

Place a the Molee and the steamed jasmine rice into two deep bowls  
 Place a coriander spring onto the rice for garnish  
*Serves 4*

The molee sauce can be made days before it is required and can be frozen in smaller portions, heated gently when required

*Images: Pete Unsworth*

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