

## From Far East to Far Out

Former pilot-to-be and acclaimed San Francisco chef Ruta Kahate fuses Indian and Anglo influences for Lea and Perrins' Art of Flavor program.

By Eyal Goldshmid

**San Francisco, Calif.** – Like many chefs, Ruta Kahate's introduction to food and cooking came at an early age.

Her father was with India's Ministry of Finance and traveled much for his work, frequently taking his family along. On these trips, Ruta and her family ventured into the "four corners of India" and gained much insight into the country's foods and traditions, including firsthand cooking lessons in the kitchens of everyone from five-star chefs to grandmothers.

However, unlike many culinary artists, Kahate's first love wasn't cooking, but flying.

"I've always done different things in life," she says, "and growing up I noticed there were no woman pilots in India, and I was fascinated with pilots and flying at the time, so I decided to become the first female pilot in India. In India, if you're doing very well in school, like I was, no one says go and become a chef. So I considered cooking as a hobby, it was always in the background."

Kahate pursued her dream of flying throughout her schooling years, the majority of which were in Bombay. To aid in her learning, she also earned a Bachelor's in Economics from a university in India and then, in 1991, enrolled in a flight school in Haywood, Calif., just outside San Francisco.

However, by that time, her passion for flight began to wane and she realized she needed a change. "Somewhere along the process I got disgruntled with it," she says. "Then my husband pointed out that I am always cooking. He said, 'Why not just follow my dream?' I credit him with the initial push."

That moment of change occurred in 1994. Soon after, Kahate threw herself completely into the Bay Area's restaurant scene, first in the kitchen of a high-volume eatery and then into a modest, strict kitchen of an acclaimed French restaurant in San Mateo. She hasn't looked back since.

"I have no professional training," she says, "but I've been cooking since I was eleven. Very early on, my parents decided we were going to learn how to cook, my brother and I. We always had cooks growing up, and I would watch them and learn. Then, once I joined the restaurant world, I learned skills on a day-to-day basis. It's a tough world, and if you can't cut it, you get kicked out quickly."

Kahate has been cooking professionally for nearly 11 years now, has garnered several local, regional and national accolades along the way and has been written about in countless media sources, including *The San Francisco Chronicle* and *Fine Living*.

“I’m in a very happy place right now,” she says. “I’m running my own cooking school, which I run out of my own kitchen, and I teach at stores like Sur La Table. I also run culinary tours of India, and when we travel I make sure we have cooking demos from everyone from five-star chefs to grandmothers. I’m writing a cookbook this year, signed up by Chronicle Books, and I do some freelance writing on the side. I’m excited because my initial idea was to do three things with food: Write about it, travel and cook. I’m very close to doing that.”

In addition to those accomplishments, Lea & Perrins recently named Ruta Kahate as a Feature Flavor Artist for its Art of Flavor program. The program was established as a means to enable food professionals to explore the various dimensions of flavor development, with an emphasis on ethnic cuisine.

For the honor, Kahate wrote an essay on Indian cooking for the program’s Web site and created three unique recipes, all of which use Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce as a noted ingredient: a gingery chicken mulligatawny soup; a sautéed shrimp appetizer; and a pork tenderloin entrée. As expected, each recipe incorporates Kahate’s instinctive mix of Indian and Anglo traditions.

“I feel like it’s my duty to inform people on the different qualities of Indian cuisine,” she says of her efforts. “I think I’ve done that with these recipes. I think they reflect a part of Indian cuisine most people do not know. It’s not all curries. We eat meat and have soups that eat like a meal.”

Worth noting: Her use of Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce, a typically Western ingredient, posed little challenge. “Any community that’s been touched by the colonists uses it,” she says, “and my inspiration for the Art of Flavor recipes stems specifically from a group of Indians called Anglo Indians, a small community that has both colonial and Indian traditions. Also, Worcestershire Sauce originated in India. There’s a story on how Lord Saunders brought the sauce over to England and had Lea & Perrins make a duplicate of it. Everyone knows that it comes from sauces developed in India.”

Mrs. Kahate expects her efforts for Lea & Perrins and Art of Flavor will connect well with her fellow chefs. “In the culinary world, Indian food is the next hot thing,” she says. “It’s very topical, very much in the scene. Every food related magazine has a little something on Indian cooking or travel.”

For more information on Lea and Perrins’ Art of Flavor program, please visit [www.ArtofFlavor.com](http://www.ArtofFlavor.com).

For more information on chef Ruta Kahate, please visit [www.RutaRuta.com](http://www.RutaRuta.com).