

Love IN A JAR

Blend a generous measure of romance with a love of great food and a desire to showcase India's vibrant flavours, and you have Dolly Mumma – a range of ready-to-cook pastes based on family recipes handed down through generations. JES MAGILL discovers a heart-warming story likely to inspire your inner cook.

When people say “Yes” to adventure it often changes the course of their lives. That’s exactly what happened when 20-year-old Perzen Darukhanawalla flew out of Auckland, bound for Canada on a one year exchange programme in 2007. Rushad Patel did the same when he travelled from India at about the same time to study in Florida for a couple of years.

Through family connections, and as chance would have it, Perzen and Rushad met and romance flourished. Although separated by distance and circumstance they continued a long-distance relationship between India and New Zealand for five years while they established their careers.

Perzen returned home to Botany in 2008, and studied hospitality and marketing at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) before landing a graduate job with AUTs catering and events team.

Meanwhile, Rushad, now specialising in finance, eventually enticed the love his life back to India in 2011 where the couple promptly and happily married.

But, there was one problem for this Parsi couple – Perzen couldn’t cook.

“Living in New Zealand I had no idea about cooking and when I went back to India, I found myself living in an extended family where suddenly I was expected to!” she says. “Cooking, especially in a Parsi home, is the way to everyone’s heart. It’s a big deal; being able to impress someone is important.”

Perzen’s grandmother, Dolly Mumma and her famous curry legacy enters the story here. Growing up as a child in Mumbai and as the exalted first grandchild, Perzen visited Dolly Mumma every Saturday.



“She always made me a curry with the best ingredients including fresh curry leaf and coconut. When she asked me one day what I’d like to inherit from her, I said all I wanted was a great big pot of her curry so I could keep eating it forever.

“Because we moved to New Zealand, I wasn’t able to be as close to her in my later years. When she passed I was distraught that I had lost her curry recipe.”

However when Perzen’s mum was trawling through Dolly Mumma’s household items she found her mother’s diary with the curry recipe inside.

“For me, eventually replicating it was like having a piece of her back,” Perzen says.

On arriving in India in 2011 the ‘start-up’ scene was booming and it was in this area of making endless powerpoint presentations for an event agency that Perzen discovered a passion for writing.

“A year later I combined my writing skills with my newly-found enthusiasm for cooking and started Bawi Bride, a food blog

documenting lost Parsi recipes.”

Bawi Bride came about by drawing on the humorous side of being a newly-married Parsi bride who didn’t know her way around a kitchen, and Dolly Mumma’s curry recipe was one of Perzen’s first blog posts. Soon after came an offshoot of the blog, a catering business called Bawi Bride Kitchen.

Success followed hard work, with Perzen being named India’s Best Regional Food Blogger in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

In 2015 she quit her day job to focus on her burgeoning catering business. Then in 2019 she was presented with the Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award by the World Zoroastrian Chamber of Commerce, and by that time her story had been featured in more than 100 publications world-wide.

Fast forward to 2020 and Perzen and Rushad are now settled in New Zealand with their two young sons. Returning here last year, Perzen’s plan was to revive her communications career but her passion for food had other ideas. Instead, this enterprising

mumpreneur started two new business ventures inspired by those she’d established in India.

While launching any kind of business during pandemic lockdowns is less than ideal, in other ways it gave the couple the luxury of time to focus, plan and execute their start-ups solidly.

Perzen’s writing talent resurfaced with her podcast series launched in June. Called Kiwi Foodcast, it showcases the people behind New Zealand’s diverse food scene. Then, in October, following five months of development the couple launched the Dolly Mumma Starter Pack, which consists of three pastes – Coastal Curry, Indian Everyday and Ghee Tadka. Three new products are planned to hit the shelves next month.

“We started Dolly Mumma because we wanted people to taste the real India and, from a family perspective, create something inspired by our Indian heritage for our boys; something they could grow up with, savour and appreciate,” Perzen explains.

She is also keen to point out this range isn’t just about cooking Indian food. It is about exploring Indian flavours and discovering how home cooks can use these spices in their own everyday dishes; to help them be adventurous and move past the ‘lemon salt and pepper’ mindset.

“A customer wrote to us saying they’d added our paste to their roast vegetables. I would never have thought of that but that’s exactly what we want people do. We’re not prescribing what people should cook; this is about their journey.”

Perzen is still discovering possibilities with her own cooking.

Dolly Mumma

STARTER PACK:

COASTAL CURRY:

Simply add water and protein of choice. Ideal as a marinade for steamed fish, on veges, through stir-fries and in pasta.

INDIAN EVERYDAY:

Add an Indian twist to all your everyday cooking; add coconut milk to make a curry, use as a marinade, in stir-fries or to make mince. Think of it as an Indian pasta sauce.

GHEE TADKA:

A versatile, clarified butter mix, perfect for soups, stews, dahl and eggs all ways.

Order
Dolly Mumma
online (www.chooice.co.nz/store/dolly-mumma) or
join the #NoMoreButterChicken
movement by following @
dollymummanz on Instagram.
You can also tune into her
podcast Kiwi Foodcast on
www.kiwifoodcast.com



Perzen Patel

Photos Wayne Martin

“Recently, I realised I didn’t have blue cheese needed for a cauliflower blue cheese fettucine, so I used Ghee Tadka instead. It had never occurred to me to mix ghee, mustard and cumin into pasta but honestly, it was superb.”

While Dolly Mumma’s packaging is very cute, there’s a message behind the endearing image – the brand’s Instagram hotline account and unofficial tagline is #NoMoreButterChicken.

“Generally, people’s perception of Indian food is that it’s heavily spiced and laden with cream. But Indian food is actually quite light and flavourful. Adding cream and yoghurt is more the North Indian style of cooking,” she says.

“We don’t have anything against butter chicken but we are against the bad, orangey butter chicken which perpetuates the stereotype that all Indian food is heavy. Our message is, a curry made at home will be much more flavoursome than takeaways.”

In a similar way, some might think that Indian dishes aren’t suited to summer, but Perzen says, not so.

“Our Indian Everyday Paste makes for a great marinade and our superb Ghee Tadka can be used instead of lemon butter when cooking whole fish on the barbecue. The ghee acts in the same way as butter, and flavoured with a few spices, adds a new subtle flavour profile.”

Life is intriguing, the way it delivers on wishes in unexpected forms. Little did Perzen know that longing for a never-ending pot of curry would see her enter commercial production to achieve it.

Taking her own food journey to the next level means Dolly Mumma’s legacy is in very safe hands and Perzen couldn’t be happier.

“It’s an honour to connect people through food. To me, there’s nothing better.”

LAYERING FLAVOUR FOR BETTER TASTE:

DOLLY MUMMA TIPS:

- Dry roasting whole spices activates their flavour
- Ginger, garlic, onion and tomato form the base for most Indian food
- Using freshly ground ginger and garlic always improves flavour
- When using desiccated coconut, rehydrate it by adding boiling water
- Coconut milk gives a totally different taste and texture than coconut flesh and shouldn’t be used interchangeably
- Coconut milk is generally used in Keralan and East Coast curries while West Coast cuisine uses fresh coconut
- Indian shops stock a variety of dried, red chillies; Kashmiri chillies add colour, Bedki chillies add heat
- Adding ghee at the end of cooking a dish gives a delicious creamy flavour
- Ghee has a high smoking point and can be used to cook most Indian food
- Adding a squeeze of lemon to dishes at the end activates the spices
- Indian food always tastes better the next day, when the spices have settled