



# India Ink



Notes on the World's Largest Democracy

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## Wedding Cakes in NYC With an Indian Touch

By SHIVANI VORA



Courtesy of Surbhi Sahni/1000 Words Studios

A cake with the peacock feather design painted on it, designed by cake designer Surbhi Sahni.

One of the highlights of planning my wedding a decade ago was choosing the cake. I had attended countless weddings where I felt that this standard dessert was an afterthought in both design and taste: the inside was usually a dry yellow while the exterior was a coat of sickly sweet buttercream with an uninspired design. I was determined to have a decadent sweet ending that would be memorable in taste and presentation and would indulge my love for chocolate.

Since my wedding was a traditional Hindu event, I wanted it to look Indian, but at the time, notable Indian cake designers seemed rare (at least in the New York City area). So I turned to Sylvia Weinstock, a well-known cake creator, who came up with a three-layer design with gold and pink hues to match my lengha and fulfilled my chocolate fantasy with an incredibly moist fudge interior.

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A decade later, as the services for Indian weddings have increased significantly in the United States, several talented cake designers are showcasing work inspired by India. Here are three in the New York City area who are turning the wedding cake into a centerpiece event instead of a forgotten side-show.

### Surbhi Sahni, [Bittersweet NYC:](#)

The only one of the trio with a professional culinary background, Ms. Sahni,

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INDIA'S WAY

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From the rise of a new



37, got her training at the Sheraton Hotel Management School in India. She then moved to New York City where she received a master's degree from New York University in food anthropology before working in pastry at notable Manhattan restaurants like Picholine. She also worked in several high-end Indian eateries, including the Michelin-starred Tulsi, where she still runs the dessert program (the head chef, Hemant Mathur, is her husband).

She started Bittersweet NYC two years ago in part to work on special event cakes, and she has since become a coveted hire for Indian and non-Indian weddings.

Her creations stand out for their flavors. "One of my favorite snacks growing up was fruit chaat, so I've always thought that spices work really well with sweets. And I try to bring a spice undertone into the cakes I make," she said. Her nonstandard fillings include green cardamom pistachio cake with chai buttercream and a pineapple cake with black peppercorn and mascarpone cream filling.



Courtesy of Surbhi Sahni  
A cake inspired by the tie and dye pattern, a traditional method of printing on textiles in Rajasthan, designed by cake designer Surbhi Sahni.

She always tries to connect the cake's adornment to the wedding. For a peacock-themed wedding, for example, she came up with a five-tiered cake decked with hand-painted peacock feathers and thin strips of blue ribbon. She particularly enjoys bringing in elements of the bride's jewelry, recently making a chocolate cake with a re-creation of the bride's pearl, emerald and amethyst pendant. Ms. Sahni also does vegan and eggless variations. Prices start at \$500.



Courtesy of Matt Cohen

Cakes inspired by the traditional henna tattoos patterns, designed by cake designer Sandhya Patangay.

### Sandhya Patangay, [Crème-Delicious](#):

Growing up in Mumbai, Ms. Patangay, 40, learned the art of henna painting, and a decade ago she started a henna company serving the tri-state area. Institutions like the Museum of Natural History hired her to teach henna workshops, and when attendees saw the intricacy of her designs, they told her she would make a skilled cake decorator.

She practiced adorning a few cakes with her henna patterns. "I sent the pictures to a few food bloggers, and before I knew it, I was inundated with requests from people wanting to buy the cakes," she said.

She started Crème Delicious a year ago and has quickly built a name for herself for her minute henna masterpieces. "From a cultural standpoint, cakes are not a vital part of Indian weddings, and I thought I needed to try to reach a broader audience, which is why I focused on the smaller size," she said.

private sector—and the billionaires that sustain and exploit it—to the beginning of a vast national identity database, articles in this series examine the messy and maddening road to progress in India.



Ruth Fremson/The New York Times

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She makes cakes in two shapes, a heart and a square, and five flavors — chocolate, green tea, pink champagne, red velvet and vanilla. Larger, multi-tiered cakes can also be ordered. Prices start at \$25 for one individual cake, and a minimum order of four is required.



Courtesy of Parul Patel/Jay Seth Photo

A wedding cake in the shape of Taj Mahal designed by cake designer Parul Patel.

### Parul Patel, [The Cake Designer](#):

As a strict vegetarian who didn't eat eggs, Parul Patel, 41, was frustrated by the lack of good options when it came to eggless cakes. She worked as a Morgan Stanley financial adviser, but she enjoyed baking as a hobby. She turned her weekend pastime into her main gig around her son's second birthday five years ago, when she visited an Indian vegetarian bakery and asked them to make a Thomas the Train cake without eggs for his party.

"The owner looked at me blankly and said he would have no idea how to do something like that," she said. She ended up baking it herself, and the positive feedback she received from family and friends encouraged her to go into business.

Today, she and her team of three work out of a 2,000-square-foot kitchen in Millington, New Jersey, and her business has expanded to include special-event and wedding cakes. Examples of her recent work include a three-tiered affair coated in orange fondant and decorated with a henna pattern, minute sugared diamonds that look like mirrors, edible gold beads and glitter.

Besides the basic offerings like vanilla buttercream and chocolate mousse, filling options include gajar ka halwa, cardamom and pistachio, mango mousse and saffron and almond.

Though she expected her clientele to be mostly Indians who avoided eggs, Ms. Patel said that more than half are non-vegetarians and non-Indians. She can also make vegan cakes. Prices start at \$250.

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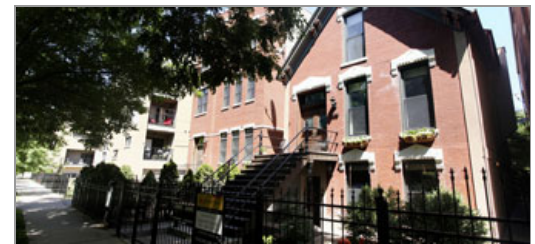
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