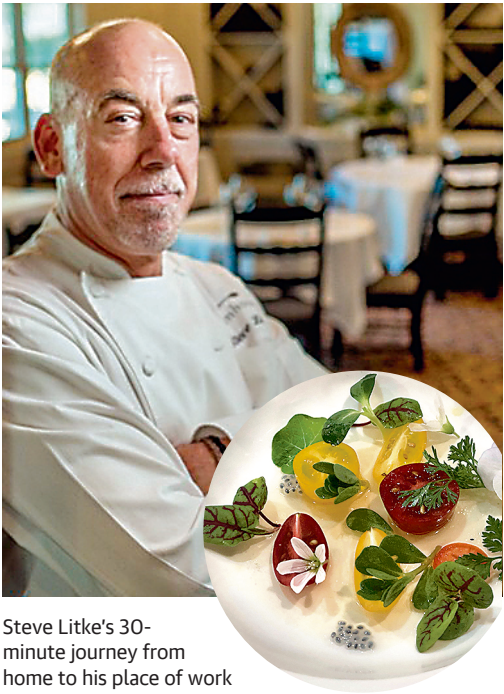


Farm fresh

Michelin-star chef Steve Litke's maiden trip to India



Steve Litke's 30-minute journey from home to his place of work at the Farmhouse Inn in Sonoma County, takes him a couple of hours. He'll stop on the way at various farms, chat with the farmers, pick up produce, before he gets in.

"Here, in California, I'm lucky to have some of the greatest produce. We have many micro-farms, so I have someone who just grows lettuce. I don't like vegetables to sit, so I go on a daily basis and pick up the day's ingredients," says the Michelin-star executive chef, who does not operate with a freezer.

He'll be in Delhi and Mumbai soon, cooking a sit-down dinner that'll exhibit his farm-to-fork philosophy. He's never been to India, and he's been talking to the chefs here. "When I arrive I've asked the chefs to bring me to an open market so I can see what vegetables are available." So while the menu has been put out (it includes courses like Tomato Gelée Salad, from his restaurant in the US), there may be a few nips and tucks. Diners can expect a five-course meal (paired with wines by sommelier Nikhil Agarwal), with simple flavours, textures, and aroma, keeping the focus on the ingredients. Litke is a gardener, and says it's important people know where their food is coming from. He works only with organic produce (they raise their own chickens, even turkeys for Thanksgiving). The real difference in taste, he feels, is reflected in beetroot and beet greens (there's Roasted Beet Tartare on the menu): "You taste more of the terroir. You have to bear with non-perfection, the bug holes and all. It's not going to look like a picture off the internet. This is real food." Food is a great deal to do with gatherings, and the farm has a fair number of people working on it. Litke acknowledges them all as family: "As the farm grows, it takes people to do it all, so your family grows. It's important to know them and work with them."

It's when relationships grow, he suggests, that people begin to ask questions like, "Is there anything new you want me to grow?" It reflects on his fundamental beliefs in preserving heirloom varieties, and on preserving the family meal itself.

Steve Litke' will be in Mumbai on August 7 at Sofitel Mumbai BKC; ₹7,000 all inclusive; for details: info@allthingsnice.in

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