

life

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Two's Company with Anil Sabnani and Haresh Sabnani



Nostalgic supper club

The success of two-decade-old Spize lies in its bursting menu of local and Western fare and the strong sense of loyalty it has cultivated among suppersgoers



Ankita Varma

While most residents in the posh enclave of River Valley are fast asleep at 4am on a Friday, a small corner of the neighbourhood is wide awake and bustling.

Late-night eatery Spize in River Valley Road is where one can find a convergence of all sorts of people, no matter the time.

From families in shorts and slippers who are up way past their bedtime to glammed-up youngsters rounding up a night of partying, these people have only one thing on their minds: supper – and a quintessentially good Singaporean supper at that.

After more than a decade at 409 River Valley Road, Spize has unmistakably become a supper landmark – the sort that taxi drivers know how to get to without needing an address.

Together with the chain's second outlet in Simpang Bedok, the Spize

brand has become synonymous with late-night meals, thanks largely to its long hours of operation – starting at noon and shuttering only at 6am on weekends.

But there is more to the brand than just 18-hour days. The real secret to its success is its option-galore, jam-packed menu, offering everything from 17 variations of prata and nasi goreng to kebabs, pastas, steaks, hotplate barbecue and burgers.

For the two brothers behind Spize, it is the nostalgia of taking the brand from coffee shop to restaurant chain that they are particularly proud of.

Mr Anil Sabnani, 41, founder and managing director of Spize, who co-owns the chain with his younger brother Haresh, says: "The huge menu we offer is definitely pretty unparalleled. But for our patrons, it's the memories from those many

late-night suppers that have helped turn them into loyal customers. Food is what people love, but nostalgia is what keeps them coming back."

For a chain so proud of its nostalgic heritage, it is interesting to note that neither River Valley nor Simpang Bedok – its best-known locations today – were the original venues for Spize Cafe when it first opened in 1997.

The brainchild of Anil, the first 600 sq ft Spize cafe opened at Shaw Towers in Beach Road and offered a Western menu of sandwiches, pasta, desserts and coffee.

"The year 1997 was before the coffee craze kicked in... It was pre-Starbucks days, without the cafe culture we see today. Back then, we were one of the few places offering casual food and coffee till midnight daily, which is why things took off almost immediately," he recalls.

Only 23 then, his decision to open his own restaurant was a gutsy one, but not one that he did without paying his dues.

Describing himself as someone who was "too savvy for school", the father of a seven-month-old daughter studied commerce at St Patrick's School, but began working early – taking on jobs in the food and beverage and hospitality sectors as soon as he was 16. His wife is the human resource manager for Spize.

"I did everything from room service at hotels to banqueting and managing restaurants.

"By the time I was 19, I was managing a restaurant, helping the management set up a new venture and regularly roping in Haresh, who is three years younger, when I needed part-time help," he says.

Brothers Anil (left) and Haresh Sabnani have taken their Spize brand from coffee shop to restaurant chain.

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