

# Food Court

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## May it Please the Palate

NICK ROUMEL

### *Breakfast in Bombay*

(This week, Nick Roumel welcomes  
guest columnist Ashish Joshi.)



If you ever find yourself in Bombay (called “Mumbai” these days, but for me it will always be Bombay), you must go and eat a meal at one of the city’s old Irani cafes. These cafes are a nostalgic part of Bombay’s success story and were established by the

Parsis—an ancient community from Persia who landed and settled north of Bombay in what’s now the state of Gujarat, more than a thousand years ago. One of my favorite cookbooks, “Dishoom,” evokes a beautiful and distinctive portrait of the Irani cafes:

“The story of the disappearing Irani cafes has a certain wistful poetry...These Irani cafes became an irreplaceable Bombay institution. One which earns a fond place in the hearts of Bombayites, regardless of caste, class, religion or race, by providing a cheap snack, a decent meal, or just a cup of chai and cool refuge from the street. Fans turn slowly. Panelled walls are hung with sepia family portraits and mirrors. Wealthy businessmen, sweaty taxi-wallas and courting couples sit close to each other on rickety bentwood chairs at chipped marble tables. Students eat breakfast while high-court lawyers read their briefs. Families have lunch and writers find their characters.”

Sitting in one of these Irani cafes, sipping a cup of steaming chai together with a bun maska (bun with butter), it’s easy to imagine oneself in a Graham Greene novel observing Bombay’s characters come to life. For me, a stand-by favorite dish to order at an Irani café is a masala omelet (also called a “Parsi Omelette”). Parsis are notoriously fond of eggs and many Irani cafes devote whole sections of their menu to eggs in their various permutations and combinations. A masala omelet is typically flavored with green chilies, onion, tomato, coriander, and a pinch of garam masala. For an “upgrade,” you can add shredded cheese onto the omelet prior to rolling it and for the authentic experience, buy Amul processed cheese from an Indian grocery store (or Amazon).



Masala Omelet

#### Ingredients

2 large eggs  
Salt to taste  
¼ red onion, very finely diced  
½ small tomato, deseeded and finely diced  
½ green chili, finely diced  
6-7 coriander sprigs, leaves finely chopped  
Coarse black pepper  
A pinch of garam masala  
1 tbsp ghee or butter

#### Directions

1. Crack the eggs into a bowl and beat lightly with a fork until nicely mixed. Add all the ingredients (except ghee / butter) and mix well.

2. Heat a frying pan over a high heat. Add ghee/butter and swirl around the pan. Pour in the egg mixture and maneuver the pan to ensure that the mixture is evenly spread and reaches the edges. Cook for about 20-25 seconds.

3. Using a large spatula, carefully lift and turn the omelet to cook on the other side. Alternatively, you can fire up a broiler and have it on the ready to place the pan under the broiler. Cook for another 25-30 seconds until just set.

4. Roll the omelet and slide it onto a warm plate. Serve it with tomato ketchup and hot buttered toast (crisp!) on the side along with a steaming cup of masala chai.

Those of you who are intrigued by Bombay’s Irani cafes might enjoy the movie “Maska” (2020). You can find it on Netflix.

*Ashish Joshi is the owner and managing partner of Joshi: Attorneys & Counselors. He serves as the lead counsel in high-stakes, complex family law and divorce cases including cases involving severe parental alienation. He has counseled and/or represented clients in state and federal courts across the United States and internationally. Joshi serves as a senior editor of Litigation, the flagship journal of the ABA’s Section of Litigation.*