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INSIDE EXOTIC EATS, FONDUE'S HIP REVIVAL, COOL SHADES, AND MORE... EDITED BY JULIE VADNAL

ELLE LIVING

BEST BUYS
Minkoff adds
poppies to peony
and hydrangea
bouquets on the
table in her
Manhattan loft.

SPICE COAST

Curry in a hurry? Nah, designer Rebecca Minkoff would rather lounge with guests in her Manhattan loft as she celebrates her growing lifestyle brand with an Indian-themed dinner party. Julie Vadnal stops by

PHOTOGRAPHED BY LIANNA TARANTIN

EASTERN INFLUENCE
 (Clockwise from left) Minkoff in an Isabel Marant dress and Rebecca Minkoff shoes; guests model RM eyewear; Rocha, in Topshop, tries a lamb meatball; Bass's addictive white chocolate fondue



"Babe, should we play Indian music or cool music?" designer Rebecca Minkoff, 31, asks her actor-director husband, Gavin Bellour, just minutes before punctual guests (and newlyweds) model Coco Rocha and interior designer James Conran arrive at the couple's Manhattan loft. In the past 24 hours, the space has gone from a sleek NoHo hangout to a jewel-tone Eastern escape fit for a maharaja. Orange poppies peek from bouquets of blue hydrangeas, brightly colored wooden elephants dance on the dining room table, and Bollywood movies flash on the flat-screen, while the Rapture—the "cool" option—wafts from the stereo.

Tonight, Minkoff has invited a dozen friends (including *The Man Repeller* blogger Leandra Medine, film and photo producer Tali Magal, and Shopbop's

transition from indie-clothing, handbag, and shoe designer to downtown-chic lifestyle brand: There are sunglasses, mixed-hardware jewelry, and cold-weather wear, plus an expansion of Minkoff's tech accessories line, which has included her leather iPad cases scrawled with the phrase TOUCH & GO.

San Diego native Minkoff—known to friends and staff as Becky—has a knack for unpretentious cool that has followed her ever since she ditched ballet for her performing-arts high school (she was too tall; her teachers transferred her to the costume department) and after graduation moved to New York City to study fashion. In 2001, her cut-up-and-knotted-together I LOVE NEW YORK tee caused a post-9/11 rush that had her sewing shirts on her apartment floor just to keep up with the demand.

then fashion director Kate Ciepluch) to one of her notoriously rowdy fondue parties—"One time we had fondue, we found someone's cell phone at the bottom of the pot!" the hostess says, proving that the wedding-gift staple isn't just a '70s-era relic; it's officially hip again. The occasion? Rebecca Minkoff eyewear, a 29-piece collection of funky shades and studded metal frames available this month at Shopbop and Nordstrom. They're the newest offerings in

Then, after four seasons of designing clothes, Minkoff launched her first handbag, the now cultish Morning After Bag, a roomy leather top-handle carryall made to hold a pair of flats and other overnight essentials but simple and clever enough for everyday cool-girl sashaying. Since the MAB's 2005 inception, it's been made in hundreds of colors and fabrics (leopard print and perforated woven leather for spring 2012), and its clutch spin-off has been seen dangling from the arms of Reese Witherspoon, Keira Knightley, and model Agyness Deyn. And last fall, Minkoff won the accessory equivalent of an Oscar, an ACE Awards Breakthrough honor from the NYC-based nonprofit Accessories Council.

Tonight's subcontinental theme was inspired by another Minkoff creation: her five-month-old son, Luca. "When I was pregnant, I craved Indian food," she says of her frequent visits to Manhattan's elegant Tamarind restaurant, or, for cheap and delicious *tikka masala*, the Christmas-light-filled Panna II in the East Village, where the owners shout on the street for patrons to come in. "Also, I had started to do research for my next season, and I was looking at a lot of Indian jewelry," she says. "I like the rich, saturated colors, and I love Indian flavors."





ALL SET Instead of place cards, Minkoff made personalized paperweights to gift her guests. She found the linen table runner and wooden elephants at ABC Carpet & Home.

To decorate, she called Restoration Hardware to borrow its stately Trestle Salvaged Wood table (hers wouldn't fit the larger-than-usual guest list) and set it with blue ikat plates from new SoHo boutique C.

Wonder, as well as decorative cloth napkins from hip online shop Iomoi. Pillows came from John Robshaw, and paper-lined votives were recycled from her wedding, which took place in Sienna, Italy, in 2009. (Minkoff says she learned a lot about entertaining from the experience. Her mom gave the couple a strict \$10,000 budget, "and we stuck to it," the designer says.)

Normally, Minkoff does the cooking—her cheese fondue is a friend's secret recipe—but tonight she has enlisted Sarah Jessica Parker's go-to food whiz, Serena Bass, whom Minkoff calls "the best Indian caterer around," to create a refined East-meets-West menu, including spiced shortbreads with sun-dried-tomato jam, lamb meatballs, goat cheese-stuffed lychees, salmon braised with mustard and turmeric, roasted root vegetables with coriander and ginger, crisp *poppadom*, and Minkoff's favorite, tandoori chicken.

When it's time to eat, Minkoff begins her toast—"To good friends and great food!"—with the ease of a pro, though a few days later on the phone she admits to pre-party anxiety. "I'll just say this," she jokes about their recent down-to-the-wire (because of the party) living room revamp, "Gavin says this is the last party we'll have for a while."

But once the wine is poured—a Domaines Ott Côtes de Provence rosé—and the tandoori chicken hits the table, Minkoff's nerves have been soothed, as her guests settle into a happy calm.

Until dessert, that is, when her friends—cell phones secured in pockets and handbags (just in case!)—gather around her spacious open kitchen (the reason they chose the place in late 2010, though neighbors Fran Lebowitz and Charlotte Ronson don't hurt, either) for cardamom-scented white chocolate fondue with tropical fruit and lemon-almond biscotti. Long-handled dipping forks fly, strawberries tumble across the island, and mumbles of "just one more" turn into "just one more *plateful*."

For a moment, Minkoff turns to Bellour, who's holding Luca, and grins as if to say, "See? The chaos is fun!" How could he help but smile in agreement? ✘



SALMON IN BENGALI SAUCE

Serves 6-8

- 1 1/2 lb salmon filet, skinned and trimmed
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp ground turmeric
- 1/2 tsp cayenne
- 1 tbsp ground yellow mustard seeds
- 1 tbsp virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp whole brown mustard seeds
- 1/2 tsp cumin seeds
- 1/2 tsp fennel seeds
- 2 tbsp heavy cream
- 1 tbsp bird's eye chili, seeded and cut into thin julienne strips

1. Cut fish into 2" x 2" pieces. Rub with half the salt, turmeric, and cayenne. Cover and set aside in fridge for a half hour.
2. Heat a large nonstick pan. Add the fish. Cook two minutes

- on each side. Set aside.
3. Put rest of cayenne, turmeric, and salt in a small bowl with the ground mustard. Add 1 tbsp water and mix into a paste. Whisk in 7 tbsp water. Set aside.
4. Pour oil into pan and warm over medium-high heat. When oil is hot, add mustard seeds. When seeds start to pop (after about 10 seconds), add cumin and fennel seeds. Swirl once. Quickly pour in mustard paste and cream. Bring to gentle simmer.
5. Lay the fish pieces in sauce. Simmer for 2-5 minutes or until fish is only just cooked through. Spoon sauce over fish. Scatter with the chili slivers, and serve.

STUFFED LYCHEES

Makes approx. 20

- 2 tbsp macadamia nuts, chopped
- 1 can lychees, drained
- 4 oz aged goat cheese, room temperature
- 2 oz cream cheese
- 2 tsp fresh lemon juice
- 1/4 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- Salt to taste

1. Toast nuts at 350°F for eight minutes.
2. Slice lychees at the base so they stand upright. Arrange on a

- small tray lined with paper towels.
- 3. Blend cheeses, lemon juice, and pepper in a food processor. Taste for salt.
- 4. Using a piping bag, fill each lychee with cream mixture. Cover lightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate until 30 minutes before serving. Sprinkle macadamias over lychees and serve.



Still life: courtesy of the designers

MINKOFF'S MUSTS



Embroidered Indian pillows put her living room in the mood. Sandstone decorative pillow, \$165, johnrobshaw.com



"Henna-ed" flatware gives every bite an Eastern vibe. Dandelion greens flatware, \$24 per set, anthropologie.com



Minkoff borrows fondue pots from friends, but a Ruffoni copper version tops her wish list. \$299, williams-sonoma.com



Good looking: A style from her newly launched eyewear collection. Chelsea sunglasses, \$150, rebeccaminkoff.com