It was a banner year for restaurants in general, but more than anything, it was the year of the woman. Ten of Chicago's 20 best new restaurants are fueled by estrogen, with talented female owners or chefs. Vermilion’s dazzling Indian-Latino cuisine comes courtesy of executive chef Maneet Chauhan and owner Rohini Dey—who heroically unveiled the restaurant a mere two weeks after Dey gave birth to a baby girl.

Vermilion owner
Rohini Dey and chef
Maneet Chauhan

10 WEST HUBBARD STREET; (312) 527-4060

When I heard Vermilion touted as Indian-Latino fusion, I groaned: What now—curried mole? But these exotic cuisines blend seamlessly in the hands of chef Maneet Chauhan. And the owner, Rohini Dey, has created a space as vibrant as its eponym, noting that the color is a symbol of Indian femininity.

The Mondrian-esque, mostly white interior is smartly adorned with large black-and-whites by Farrokh Chothia, a top Indian fashion photographer. The patrons are stylish, too, sipping grenadine-red signature cocktails, rubbing tapis-style appetizers. Koftas here are deliciously spiced fried plaitain dumplings with date-pomegranate sauce; seafood ceviche sparkles with pomegranate seeds. mango, and Indian spices, served on spicy chardonnay jelly. Sensational entrees are a Portuguese stew of lobster tail in coconut-and-curry-leaf gravy with saffron rice pulao (basmati pilaf), and roasted baby eggplants stuffed with spices—the dish looks like chili relleno, but tastes pure Indian. It's an adventure all the way to the orange bread pudding with Cointreau custard, I wish the service didn’t fall as flat as the mediocre Indian bread.

-G.R.W.