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# FRIDA'S CAPITAL MOMENT

The trials and triumphs of Mexican artist and rebel Frida Kahlo come alive in a calendar

by **Adila Matra**

**A**FTER Raja Ravi Varma and Gustav Klimt, creative photographer Rohit Chawla's newest muse is the enigmatic artist Frida Kahlo, who's famous for her 'uni-brow', her overt sexuality, and a body of work that made her a pop icon.

To translate Frida's self-portraits into calendar images, Chawla has taken a route that is by now familiar to him. Using models as different from each other as actors Konkona Sen and Neha Dhupia, artists Anjolie Ela Menon and Mithu Sen, dance diva Sonal Mansingh, and Kalli Purie, author of the best-selling weightloss memoir, *Confessions of a Serial Dieter* (HarperCollins), Chawla has brought Frida's paintings to life for a corporate calendar.

The defining image is Chawla's recreation of an unknown artist's impression of Frida Kahlo that was completed 30 years ago. Dhupia modelled for the picture in clothes designed by Sabyasachi Mukherjee, which are striking because of the contrast between the pain in Frida's life that they convey and the vibrant colours that they use. "Neha wanted more extravagance in her photograph," Chawla recalls, "but she has conveyed the exact mood of Frida." Mithu Sen has been given a Cuban makeover; Anjolie Ela Menon, seen on a wheelchair drawing from one of Frida's self-portraits has a connection with Frida. Menon has been painting 'exposed hearts', a common sight in many of Frida's art.

For Purie, her appearance in Chawla's interpretation of Frida's *Tree of Hope* meant a lot personally.



(Above) Anjolie Ela Menon as Frida Kahlo on wheelchair for the corporate calendar shot by Rohit Chawla (right). On Menon's canvas is Sabyasachi Mukherjee, who designed the clothes from Frida's paintings.

The image shows Frida's exposed back with surgery marks and Purie holding a brace used to support weak backs in her hands. It's symbolic of how Frida overcame the debilitating effects of the accident that left her with a damaged spine and pelvis since the age of 18. Frida's story, Purie says, is very similar to her struggle against overweight and her success in losing 43 kilos — and losing in that sense her better half!

Chawla's tribute to the volatile painter's tragical short life does justice to her legacy that often gets overshadowed by her tempestuous personal life.



## POP ICON & SEXUAL REBEL

After her death in 1954, the interest in Mexican artist Frida has been growing, even though *Frida*, the film where Salma Hayek plays her, did better with critics than in the box-office. Here's a fact check on the artist who made more waves outside the studio than in it.

**1907** Though she insisted that her birth date was July 7, 1910, her birth certificate shows Frida was born on July 6, 1907. She was six years old when she contracted polio, which made her right leg appear much thinner.

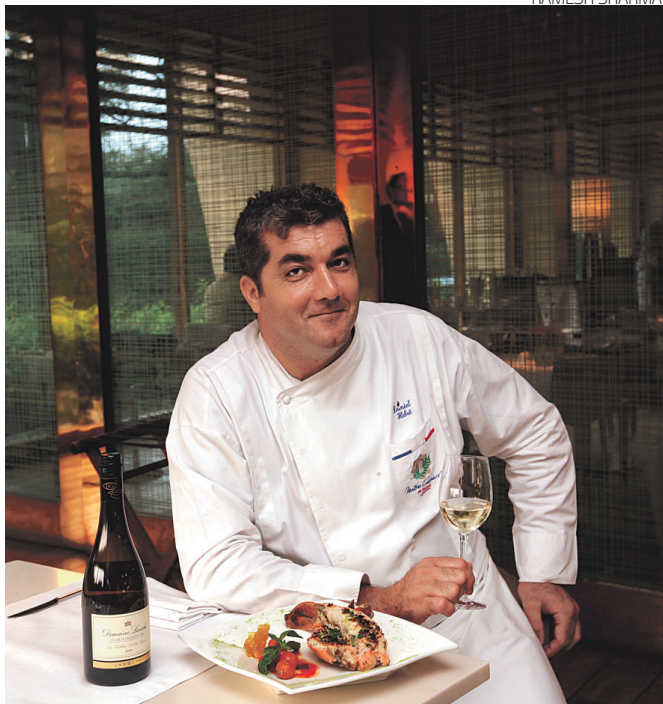
**1925** A bus Frida was in collided into a trolley car. Her pelvis and spinal column were broken and she had to undergo 32 surgeries.

**1929** She married the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, and it was tumultuous. Frida also discovered her bisexuality and had raging affairs with Japanese artist Isamu Noguchi and American dancer Josephine Baker.

**1937** Frida began an open liaison with the exiled Russian Bolshevik leader, Leon Trotsky.

**1939** Rivera and Frida divorced, but got remarried the following year. The wedlock remained rocky.

**1954** Frida died on July 13, leaving behind mostly self-portraits. She said, "I paint myself because I am so often alone and because I am the subject I know best."



French chef Daniel Hebet, who has a Michelin star, at the threesixty\* restaurant of The Oberoi. Next to him is a bottle of Chablis and lobster with mint served with new potatoes and chanterelles sweetened with dried apricots.

## French chef brings the Provencal sun

by **Sourish Bhattacharyya**

**I**F Daniel Hebet didn't appear in chef's whites, your children would have mistaken him for a genial WWE wrestler with a Provencal tan. Hebet, instead, is a Michelin one-star chef (and like all sensible chefs who want a life, he's not aiming for another) who owns the restaurant named Le Jardin du Quai at L'Isle Sur la Sorgue, a little town 20km away from Avignon with a thriving antiques business.

He's in the city with the lovely Gwenael Laroche, the better half of one of the most enterprising Chablis winemakers, for a French food promotion at that haunt of men in sharp suits and diamond-dripping ladies who lunch, the ever-busy threesixty\* restaurant at The Oberoi New Delhi.

My first taste of Hebet's cooking was on the day he had arrived in the city. I was among a small group gathered at the private dining room of threesixty\* to partake of the wines from Laroche — the Chablis winery has spread its wings to Languedoc, Chile (Colchagua Valley) and South (Western Cape) — and sample Hebet's food. My first course was a terrine of Mediterranean vegetable served with herb salad, ricotta cheese and citron vinaigrette. I instantly fell in love with Hebet's dab hand — it brought the Provencal sun to brighten up a persistently foggy day.

As Gwenael spoke about the confederacy of wine lovers — that mobile republic of men and women whose first love is wine — and talked with trepidation about her next stop being Cape Verde, where she would join her husband Michele, a fanatical sailor all set to cross the Atlantic in his boy toy, Hebet presented me with a red snapper on a bed of warm puy lentils.

Let me confess that puy lentils make my taste buds come alive with anticipation because I love *maa ki daal*, and the two, I am convinced, are separated at birth. The wine served with it was the Punto Nino Carmenere Reserve 2009 from the Chilean estate of the Laroche family. A red wine with a fish with as pronounced personality as a red snapper? It defied logic, but

**DINING OUT**  
**FRENCH PROMO AT THREESIXTY\* THE OBEROI**  
MEAL FOR TWO (WITHOUT ALCOHOL): ₹5,000. Price includes VAT.

the wine, a Chilean speciality, went so well with the dish that it told me one more time not to accept old-fashioned pairing rules without checking them out myself.

These were dishes from the French menu, where the prices range from ₹775 for the terrine of vegetables to ₹2,675 for a roasted beef fillet packed with *foie gras*. My hosts invited me again for lunch, where I was promised that Hebet would present dishes from his restaurant's menu. It turned out to be a feast for the senses — starting with asparagus soup with cream and black truffles (a delightful balance of flavours), going up to pan-fried *foie gras* with an artichoke heart and bacon (again a symphony of simplicity), moving on to steamed red snapper with tomatoes, olive and lots of garlic (minimally invasive cooking at its best), and ending with *croque* chocolate (I can only describe it using the shamelessly Phillistine expression, chocolate *pakoda*, where the chocolate melts in the mouth!) and pistachio ice-cream.

I have eaten out of the hands, literally, of many Michelin-star chefs, but I won't forget Hebet in a hurry. His strength is his simplicity. And he has done us a favour by not aspiring to more stars. It would have turned him into an entrepreneur who dons a chef's whites only for cameras.



A contemporary picture of Frida Kahlo, who was bisexual and had a rocky marriage.