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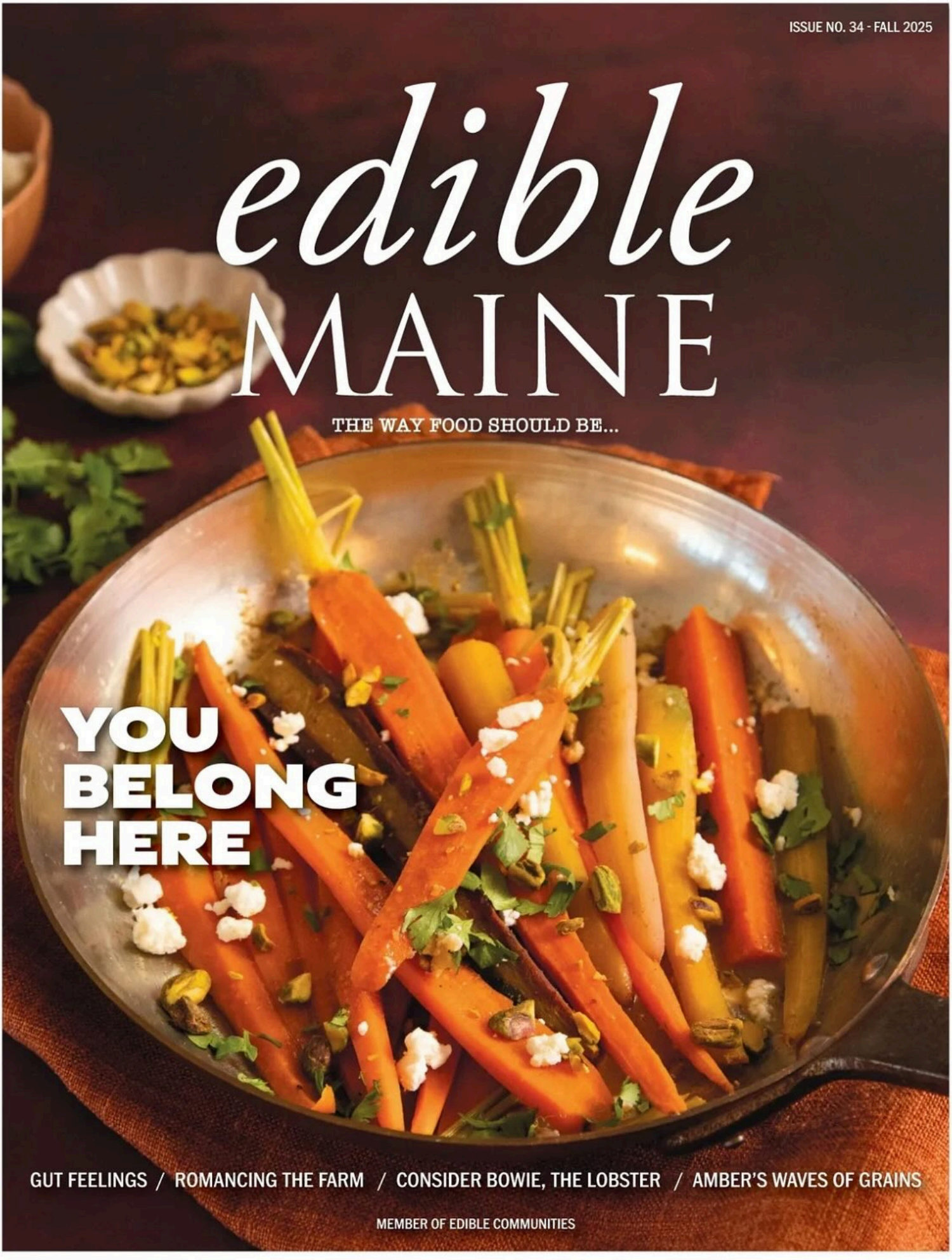
edible MAINE

THE WAY FOOD SHOULD BE...



YOU BELONG HERE

GUT FEELINGS / ROMANCING THE FARM / CONSIDER BOWIE, THE LOBSTER / AMBER'S WAVES OF GRAINS

MEMBER OF EDIBLE COMMUNITIES

BREWED FOR THE BITE

WORDS AND IMAGE BY LAUREN LEAR

When brothers Van and Sumit Sharma moved back to Maine during the early days of the pandemic, it wasn't to start a beer company. They had returned to help run their family's restaurant, Bombay Mahal, a fixture in the community for decades. However, when supply chain issues left them without Indian beers to serve, they spotted a clear gap in the market.

"Kingfisher and Taj Mahal weren't making it to the U.S. during COVID," Van says. "And they were never really stocked in Maine to begin with."

With traditional Indian beers in short supply—and demand clearly growing—the brothers began to think bigger. What if they could create a new kind of beer? One brewed specifically to complement Indian food and other spice-forward cuisines? A beer smooth and easy to drink, but deep enough to pair with a wide variety of dishes?

Rooted in their experience growing up in the restaurant industry, Van and Sumit saw a unique opportunity. They reached out to Alan Pugsley, the British-born co-founder of Shipyard Brewing and a respected voice in the craft beer world. In a lucky twist, Pugsley lived just down the street and was already a fan of the restaurant.

"It was serendipitous," Van says.

The collaboration sparked an intense period of research and development—and Bombay Mahal became the unofficial test kitchen. With their chefs preparing a range of traditional Indian dishes, the brothers organized countless tasting sessions, sampling beers from around the world to see how they interacted with spice, acidity, and richness.

"We probably tried over a hundred different beers," Van says. "From local Maine beers to international brands."

Their approach took inspiration from the wine world, where pairing food with the right varietal is second nature. "The wine world is way more advanced when it comes to pairing a vineyard with an expensive French or Italian meal," Van says. "Beer never got that same level of nuance."

Working with Pugsley, they set out to reverse-engineer a beer built for food—quite literally. One of the most crucial changes was lowering the carbonation level.

"When you eat something spicy or heavy like Indian food, carbonation makes you feel bloated and gives you indigestion," Van explains. "And if your tongue's already on fire from chili peppers, the worst thing you can do is drink something fizzy—it just irritates your pain receptors more."

The brothers also looked to traditional ingredients like basmati rice and corn to round out the beer's flavor. "For centuries, those crops have been used in Asian brewing," Van says, "and they make beer softer, rounder."

The result was Rupee Beer, a crisp, spice-friendly lager brewed in the U.S. but designed with Indian cuisine—and global flavors—in mind. While it was created to accompany Indian food, Rupee is now served in Thai, Middle Eastern, and Caribbean restaurants around the country.

"The goal was always a crushable, clean-tasting beer," says Van.

Rupee has since expanded its lineup with a Mango Wheat Ale, inspired by India's national fruit. "People have really responded to the mango," Sumit says. "It's sacred. It's beloved."

From the beginning, the brothers have focused on quality and flavor over mass production. "Many of those legacy companies were built around cost, not taste," Sumit notes. "We want to bring quality ingredients and innovation to the table."

It wasn't always smooth sailing. The Sharmas faced rejection from local brewers and struggled to find a place to produce their beer. But eventually, they partnered with a facility in Boston, and the business took off. Today, Rupee is distributed in Maine through Nappi Distributors, bringing the brand's story full circle and back home.

You can find Rupee in Michelin-starred restaurants, boutique groceries, and dinner tables across the country. The brothers often hear from people enjoying the beer in other contexts, too.

"Our parents have been in the business for years, so there are a lot of longtime customers who still come in and tell my dad, 'Tell your boys we said hi—I brought their beer to Sebago Lake,' or, 'I took it with me on a ski trip.' People have been incredibly supportive," says Van. He laughs, "Even people in India message us, saying they had to Google where Maine was! It's cool to put Maine on the map in the Indian food and beverage space."

Rupee Beer's journey is as much about flavor as it is about family, culture, and carving space for Indian cuisine in the American culinary landscape—one thoughtful pint at a time. EM


SPECIALLY CRAFTED FOR INDIAN & SPICY CUISINE
Rupee
रुपी
Premium
IPA
NAMED BEST BEER FOR WORLD FOOD
INDIA PALE ALE
BREWED WITH ALL-NATURAL MALTED BARLEY, WHEAT & FIVE TYPES OF HOPS
1 PINT (16 FL. OZ.)
5.4% ALC./VOL.
SPECIALLY CRAFTED FOR INDIAN & SPICY CUISINE
Rupee
रुपी
Premium
LAGER BEER
NAMED BEST BEER FOR WORLD FOOD
BASMATI RICE LAGER
BREWED WITH ALL-NATURAL RICE, MAIZE, MALTED BARLEY, & THREE TYPES OF HOPS
1 PINT (16 FL. OZ.)
4.75% ALC./VOL.
SPECIALLY CRAFTED FOR INDIAN & SPICY CUISINE
Rupee
रुपी
Premium
MANGO ALE
NAMED BEST BEER FOR WORLD FOOD
MANGO WHEAT ALE
ALE WITH MANGO PUREE, MALTED BARLEY, WHEAT & NATURAL FLAVORS ADDED
1 PINT (16 FL. OZ.)
4.0% ALC./VOL.