

PADMA LAKSHMI

She is beautiful, ambitious, complicated, and Indian. She dates the novelist Salman Rushdie and has written a low-fat cookbook called *Easy Exotic*, which Talk Miramax Books published and which is coming out in paperback. Her voice is husky, though still charmingly girlish. Some of her favorite authors are Raymond Carver, Willa Cather, and Henry James. And Rushdie? "You can't help falling in love with his characters," Lakshmi says. "They're so complicated and tormented and joyous and sexy and obnoxious."

Now, there are those who have compared Lakshmi to Vina Apsara, the central character in Rushdie's latest novel, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. There are those who have taken to calling the model, would-be actress, and cook Rushdie's new muse. Lakshmi remains reticent about that, but she relishes the comparison to young Vina Apsara. "You dream to have a life like that," she says. ■

Photo by Alice Springs

Fed and photographed at Monkey Bar in New York City, with chef Andrew Chase on the spoon.