

Back in the day when rock wallpaper and snaggy sideburns were all the rage, restaurateurs who wanted to give their customers an authentic taste of the tandoor had to import their ovens from India. Aside from the high costs of shipping and handling, the ovens were built installations, made of unrefined clay that often contained traces of animal impurities.

This violation of health and safety standards led Mr. Shahi Gulian to develop a new clay mix and oven design, which he launched in 1972 as the Tandoori Clay Oven Company, in a move that took the industry by storm and revolutionised the way that clay ovens are made.

Today, the company is leading the market and are renowned for producing quality clay ovens to a distribution circuit that practically covers the globe. The highest demands come from Europe, the Middle East and Dubai, but there is also a growing interest from the US and Australia where exotic south Asian cuisine is becoming increasingly popular.

Sonia Yenovkian, sales, credits much of their success to their continued efforts to upgrade their products. "We are constantly improving and investing a lot of money in research and development and that's been our driving force," she explained. "Our customers' needs have changed and we're recognising these changes and meeting those needs."

Another strength they have capitalised on is the continued development of the special clay mix. It's no surprise the recipe is top secret. Mr. Gulian has created a mix that produces extremely durable ovens that can withstand extreme thermal shock without cracking or flaking.

Their unrivalled success and budgets has led them to increase their product line outside of tandoors and introduce new ranges like pizza ovens, kebab grills and the new Shahi Flame Grill. This new grill retails for £695 and incorporates a unique design to cut back on cooking time. The way the gas outlets are distributed and the bed of glowing ceramic rocks ensures that the food is grilled remarkably quickly and maintain a constant high heat level, and the oil-drip evaporates because of the heat. Plus the side stainless steel panels are removable for easy cleaning.

Despite the popularity of their other products, it's their classic tandoor that remains the bestseller thanks largely to the extensive research and development in areas such as the insulation to the anthropometrics of the unit. Now revamped to meet and exceed health and safety and customer requirements the unique design, which is registered, has no visible joints preventing the build up of bacteria and the top surface has a rear extended lip enabling it to sit flush against the back wall, eliminating a gap between the wall and unit and preventing food debris from falling behind making the kitchen more hygienic. It is also user-friendlier and there are removable trays allowing for easier cleaning and maintenance.

With the obviously health benefits and exceptional taste of tandoor-cooked food, the Tandoori Clay Oven Company



have introduced a domestic range of gas-fired clay ovens for home kitchens to be used to grill, bake or barbeque. Currently a lot of their marketing budget is being injected into the domestic range, which is streamlined to a compact width of 600mm and a height of 900mm and retails for £795.

With all these product developments set in place, one thing still remains the same; their level of customer service. According to Sonia, "we've developed a good reputation and the Shahi name has grown thanks largely to our customer service. We take care of our customers and offer the best that we possibly can and that's been our driving force."

Reluctant to reveal their annual turnover, the company's level of success can also be measured by the extent of their expansion. Today the operations are run from their massive 20,000 square foot factory in west London's Park Royal. Nearby are the central offices where assembly rooms and showroom kitchens invite customers to come and use the display ovens and get a real idea of how the products work before making any purchase. "We actively encourage people to visit our premises to test our products for themselves," says Sonia.

As the oldest manufacturers of tandoors in Europe, the Tandoori Clay Oven Company have come a long way from their humble beginnings 34-years ago. Constant innovations, research and development have allowed them to stay on top of their game and there is no sign of looking down. www.clayovens.co.uk



Tandoori Clay Oven Company

Shahi Gulian has pioneered the evolution of tandoor clay ovens. Tandoori finds out his plans for the future