

EEN
MAALAn Eenmaal
pop-up in
Amsterdam

TREND

TABLE FOR ONE

For years, we've eyed the empty chair across the table nervously. With the world's first one-person restaurant now open, SAVITA IYER-AHRESTANI ponders the benefits of going solo.

TARUN VISHWA, BIKRAJIT BOSE, GETTY IMAGES

You're at the end of a work week, and you'd like to go to that nice bistro around the corner, order a glass of wine and unwind over a good meal. But are you up to the challenge of making your way there, asking for a table for one—assuming it even has a table for one—and sitting there by yourself?

If the answer is 'no,' we understand. Even the most emancipated of us girls shies away at the thought of dining solo. I'm in my mid-forties, and it took me a couple of decades to work up the guts to do it. Even today, I'm likely to have an iPad with me, partly to ward off unwanted male attention, but also—and I'm reluctant to admit this—because I'm still stuck with "what will other people think of me."

"In our society, there is no room for being alone in a public space unless you are on your way to something," says Dutch designer Marina van Goor, director and creative strategist of MVG/Creative Agency. It's a given, she says, that if you're out in public, you should be in a group. "Eating out alone doesn't fit into that picture and is therefore not considered attractive." Van Goor is trying to change such deeply embedded notions. A corporate lawyer-turned-designer, she's the brains and creative force behind the Amsterdam-based pop-up restaurant Eenmaal, which caters exclusively to solo diners. It bills itself as "a place for

temporary disconnection," where "you come with one, you sit with one and you eat with one." Evidently, there's a serious need for this: Eenmaal is so popular that tables have been fully booked since it opened last summer. It is now set to debut in Antwerp, Berlin, London and New York—all of which are hyper-connected cities where people need "temporary disconnection," says van Goor, who wants to prove that a moment of disconnection—eating out alone, sitting alone—can be attractive. And judging by Eenmaal's success, it would seem that we have bypassed the negative tone that surrounds it.

In our own hyper-connected cities, we would definitely welcome a place to dine solo, and for innovative restaurateurs like Gauri Devidayal of the popular South Mumbai eatery The Table (which features a communal table), the concept is intriguing. Devidayal believes that it may see the light in India in a not-too-distant future, but she's firmly convinced that solo dining has got to be more than a concept, and any restaurant, even one with tables for one, must first focus on putting together a creative menu.

I'll eat that, as I would eat at Eenmaal, which offers up a fine four-course meal prepared with the freshest, most seasonal of ingredients. But I'll probably take a book with me. ■

WHAT'S YOUR
AMMO?

Vogue asked three cool girls about their solo-dining ammunition

RUCHIKA SACHDEVA,
designer

For me, honestly, people-watching is the best activity. I also love an open kitchen or a live Teppanyaki counter while eating out alone; it's always so much fun observing the chef!



SABA AZAD, musician

Day dreaming... sometimes doing absolutely nothing is the best, even though you may look crazy to your fellow diners. It's calming not having to do anything at all except being in the moment. Enjoy your food, soak up the surroundings and dream with your eyes wide open!



KALKI KOEHLIN, actor

I do dine alone when I'm travelling for work. A book is usually good ammo to have. I tend to read a lot of non-fiction, biographies and history books, and I carry those with me.

