



We talk to Greg Malouf about his latest book and Middle Eastern cuisine.

After over 30 years in the food industry, chef/author Greg Malouf (pictured) is widely recognised as a master of modern Middle Eastern cuisine with a number of award-winning travel/food books already under his belt – but he had never released a cookbook. Until now, that is.

As with all his books, Greg co-wrote this latest release, *Malouf: New Middle Eastern Food* with his ex-wife, travel writer Lucy Malouf, but this time it is just about the food.

The book has over 400 beautiful pages of delicious, unadulterated, richly spiced and lovingly textured Middle Eastern dishes inspired both by Greg's Lebanese heritage and their extensive travels across Lebanon, Iran, Moorish Spain, Morocco and Turkey.

In contrast to previous books with a travel focus, the idea behind Malouf's new publication was to create a compendium of sorts; bringing the dishes from their travel books and a selection of new recipes together – all under the same, easily-searchable index.

"A lot of people were asking me to put out a book just with an index for all the other books – so if they wanted to find a recipe they didn't have to rummage through entire travel books to find it.

"Which was quite an interesting suggestion," he laughs, "I didn't have any comeback to that.

"So this new book is purely a cookbook. I want people to put it under their arm and take it straight into the kitchen," says Greg.

While there are a few more complex, restaurant-style dishes in the book, the majority of the recipes are easy-to-prepare, simple dishes designed for any occasion.

Think crunchy fried calamari with tahini remoulade; grilled saffron chicken with lemon, chilli and mint; tuna steaks with dried mint, oregano and sumac; lamb kibbeh (a torpedo-shaped meat dumpling) stuffed with mozzarella and pine-nuts, and desserts like date brulée with Kahlúa, or chocolate bread and butter pudding with Turkish delight.



Alongside these more contemporary dishes, the book also includes a huge variety of the better known Middle Eastern classics like, baba ghanoush, falafel, hummus, and kofte kebabs.

Greg's exploration of what is now known as 'modern Middle Eastern food' began when he returned to Melbourne in the 1990s after 10 years spent working overseas in France, Italy, Belgium and later in China.

"When I returned to Melbourne I was thrown into a kitchen where I had free rein over the menu and I immediately started dabbling in a little bit of Lebanese cooking with an edge to it – I think that's where it all started," he says.

It is this creativity with traditional dishes and flavours that has since earned Greg his reputation at the forefront of modern Middle Eastern cuisine, bringing a contemporary and at times Western edge to Middle Eastern-inspired flavours.

"For the last 20 years, I've been focusing on recreating the emotions and memories attached to traditional dishes.

"It's not about fusion – in fact 'fusion' is a bad word. It's important to maintain a lot of respect and integrity in using classic dishes," he says.

"The flavours are there; the aromas, the textures and the techniques are there – but the dishes may look a little more architecturally designed or have a slightly Western edge."



Both the recipes in his book and the menu and style of eating at the elegant and sophisticated MoMo Restaurant in Melbourne, where Greg has been executive chef since 2001, hone in on the traditions of generous banquet-style food, with a selection of dishes placed in the middle of the table to be shared between family and friends – the culture that Greg grew up with.

“As a child I was surrounded by an army of Lebanese women,” says Greg.

“There was always food on the table and it was generous and plentiful and with great variety to it.

“Middle Eastern food is all about generosity and hospitality,” he says.

“It’s a lovingly beautiful, vibrant food culture that breaks down lots of social barriers because the food comes into the middle of the table and everyone is eating and sharing - it’s a lovely way to eat and experience food.”

Recipe extract from *Malouf: New Middle Eastern Food*



Lamb kifta tagine with eggs ▯ Serves 6

Meatballs with a difference. This makes a tasty supper dish and with its spicy tomato sauce and rich runny eggs, is bound to become a firm favourite.

MEATBALLS:

500g lamb, finely minced

1 medium onion, finely chopped

3 tblsp finely chopped flat-leaf parsley leaves

¼ tsp cayenne pepper
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tblsp olive oil for frying

SAUCE:

2 tblsp olive oil
2 medium onions, finely chopped
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
2 x 400g cans tomatoes, drained and chopped
1 tsp ground cumin; 1 tsp ground cinnamon
½ cayenne pepper
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
500 ml water
¼ cup finely chopped flat leaf parsley leaves
¼ cup finely chopped coriander leaves
6 free-range eggs
Baby radish leaves and sage flowers to garnish (optional)
Arabic flatbread or buttered couscous and natural yoghurt to serve.

METHOD:

To make the meatballs, thoroughly mix the ingredients, except for the oil, and with wet hands, form into walnut-sized balls. Heat the oil and brown the meatballs all over. Drain well on paper towel.

For the sauce, heat the oil in a heavy-based casserole dish and lightly sauté the onions and garlic until they are translucent. Add the tomatoes, cumin, cinnamon, cayenne and salt and pepper to taste and stir well. Then add the water, stir again and bring to the boil. Lower the heat and simmer the sauce, uncovered, for about 30 minutes or until it has reduced to a very thick gravy.

Add the meatballs to the sauce and continue cooking for a further 8 minutes. Stir in the parsley and coriander. Carefully break the eggs into the sauce, cover the pan with a lid and cook until the eggs are just set, which will take about 5 minutes.

Serve at once, straight from the pot, liberally garnished with the radish leaves and flowers, if using, and with plenty of Arabic flatbread to mop up the runny egg yolks. Alternatively, accompany with a dish of plain buttered couscous and a dollop of thick natural yoghurt.

Those who enjoy a more piquant dish may add one finely chopped bullet chilli while sautéing the the onion and garlic.



Manish and Nisha's Cookbook by Greg and Lucy Malouf