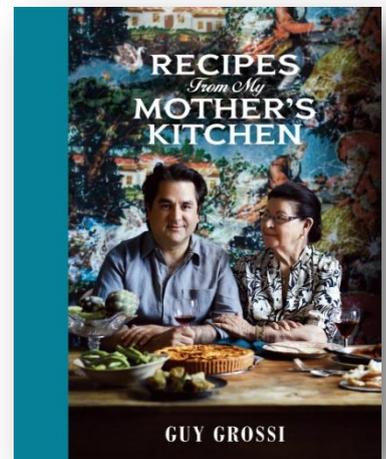


Recipes from My Mother's Kitchen

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Extract



Introduction

I began writing this cookbook as a collection of recipes that evoke powerful memories from my childhood. As I collected the recipes for dishes that I remember eating as a toddler, as a school boy and at countless family celebrations, I developed a fascination for the stories behind these recipes. And of course, all this led me back to my mother's kitchen table.

My mother's food is Italian through and through, based on recipes and techniques she learnt growing up in Verona and later as a young adult in Milan and Rome. Her food is always varied and never dull. When I began to quiz my mum on where each dish came from and why it became such a feature of our family menu, the stories she told were rich but sometimes unsettling.

My mother has lived an entirely different life to that of her four children. In her years in Milan and in Rome, as she waited with her young baby to receive news from my dad that she should join him in Australia, and later with a young family in her adopted country, a scarcity of money meant she required a great deal of strength, courage and resourcefulness to carry on and to nurture her family.

When I was growing up, my mother often told me about a dream she had when she was a young child. A large white horse with wings flew through the sky carrying her over blue waters, while she carried in her arms a crying child wrapped in a blanket. I have heard her recount this dream so many times that it seems as if it were my own. Was she seeing her own future, a time when she would fly to Australia carrying her baby daughter in her arms, ready to begin a new life?

Through my mother's caring nature, the whole family learned to live and share and cook. We were nourished by the food that she provided for us. My mother did well to shield us from many of the harsh realities of life. She always made sure that we never went without; there was always an abundance of food. She had an incredible ability to make something out of nothing and not a single thing was wasted. To this day, if I see one of my kitchen staff wasting food it cuts like a dagger to my heart. A wasteful kitchen is a terrible thing indeed.

In the following pages you will find the food I grew up with, as well as the memories behind the food. Some of the stories of displacement and a feeling of 'otherness' might ring true for those from very different cultures who have also come to Australia. In the 1960s my parents found in Australia a country that was beginning to open up, to embrace its new friends and offer them the chance to prosper.

Some of the memories contained here are my mother's and father's; some are my own, or have become mine through family folklore. Food and the family table were the focal points of my childhood and many of the strong memories from my formative years relate to times spent eating my mother's food. And of course, in adult life food has become an obsession for me. Food has been the vehicle that has taken me to exciting places, both physically and metaphorically. I am lucky to love what I do. My circumstances are very different from those my parents endured, but it is my sincere hope that the food traditions my mother passed on to me will live on in the generations to come.

Buon appetito!