

BEYOND BANANA BREAD ~ 2020 cookbook collection

Bill Addison

Los Angeles Times

(TNS) — Cookbooks are always about connection — written to share the love of a cuisine or celebrate ancestry, or sometimes to eulogize broken bonds and safeguard history. If you've run out of ideas or motivation for preparing your next meal, if you're longing to be somewhere far away or want to explore fresh approaches to comfort food at home, or if you're thinking about the broader context of food in our troubled culture, take heart and inspiration from these standout books of the season.

In Bibi's Kitchen

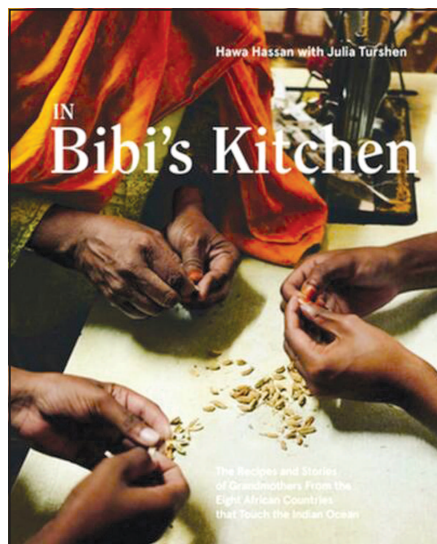
Hawa Hassan — a native of Somalia who modeled in New York before founding the bottled sauce company Basbaas — has assembled a project that is equal parts vital documentary, compelling scholarship and cookbook.

With food writer Julia Turshen, she collects stories and recipes from bibis (grandmothers) who represent eight countries in East Africa: Eritrea, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa and the islands of Madagascar and Comoros.

Dishes as varied as stewed plantains, denningvleis (lamb braised in tamarind), cornmeal porridges, spaghetti with spiced beef, chicken biryani and steak sandwiches doused with piri piri shed light on history, colonization, cultural connections and the daily lives of these women and their families. Try one of Hassan's favorite comforts: digaag qumbe, a spiced chicken stew with potatoes and carrots in a yogurt and coconut sauce (served over rice or, as Hassan prefers, over a bed of spinach) with banana alongside as traditional accompaniment.

Milk, Spice & Curry Leaves

Ruwanmali Samarakoon-Amunugama grew up in Canada; her parents immigrated to Toronto from Sri Lanka, and her mother prepared family recipes from the island's lush, central hill country to keep her children connected



to their heritage. As a teenager, Samarakoon-Amunugama began taking detailed notes on her mother's cooking and on dishes she tasted during trips to Sri Lanka. After decades of observing a lack of Sri Lankan cookbooks on Canadian store shelves, she decided to help fill the void with her own collection of recipes.

Samarakoon-Amunugama sets the scene ("My late grandmother's home in Peradeniya sits on a property that you wish only to walk barefoot upon") and lays out the foundation of the cuisine: Coconut is a bearing wall for flavors; onions, garlic, ginger, chiles, curry leaves and spice blends become frequent building blocks.

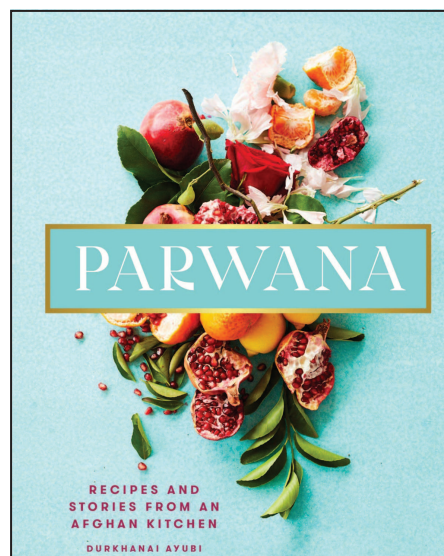
She makes it clear where substitutions might be acceptable (frozen and even dried coconut can stand in for fresh) and where they are not (store-bought curry powder is no replacement for roasting and grinding your own). Her careful instructions and adaptations for North American cooks culminate rewardingly in the recipes such as peppered beef with coconut milk and black mustard seeds, its clinging sauce by turns rich and spicy and sharp.

Parwana

I've been longing to visit Parwana Afghan Kitchen in Adelaide, Australia, since ex-L.A. Weekly restaurant critic Beshia Rodell wrote about it for her Australian Fare column in the New York Times in March 2018.

The restaurant's cookbook — written by Durkhanai Ayubi, who runs the restaurant with her mother, Farida Ayubi, father, Zelmai Ayubi, and four sisters — conveys far more than escapist fantasies during a pandemic. Narratives between recipes and evocative photos detail centuries of Afghan customs and, more urgently, the modern political crises that led the Ayubi family to flee Afghanistan to Pakistan and ultimately to migrate to Australia. Farida

Ayubi's recipes for jeweled rice dishes, herbed kabobs, mantu (dumplings bathed in yogurt and tomato sauces) and gently spiced sweets exist as remembrances and acts of preservation.



"Parwana [the word is Farsi for 'butterfly'] is underpinned by my mother's vision — her belief that through her knowledge of the art of Afghan food, gifted to her from her mother and her foremothers, she had been entrusted with a treasure of old, a symbol of Afghanistan's monumental and culturally interwoven past."

The Rise

The most important cookbook published this year begins with a manifesto: "Black food is not monolithic. It's complex, diverse and delicious — stemming from shared experiences as well as incredible individual creativity. Black food is American food, and it's long past time that the artistry and ingenuity of Black cooks were properly recognized."

Megawatt chef Marcus Samuelsson teams with James Beard Award-winning writer Osayi Endolyn to frame the stories and cultural contributions of more than 50 Black chefs, journalists and activists.

Accompanying Endolyn's perceptive, unflinching essays on many of the featured talents are recipes Samuelsson developed with Yewande Komolafe and Tamie Cook that honor the individuals.

There's a gumbo inspired by Leah Chase; a saucy, okra-embellished shrimp and grits as tribute to Ed Brumfield, the executive chef at Samuelsson's Red Rooster Harlem; and spice-rubbed spare ribs with kimchi-style pickled greens as a nod to Los Angeles chef Nyeshia Arrington.

"The Rise" is as useful in the kitchen as it is meaningful on your reading table. To spur further immersion, an invaluable resources section highlighting other chefs and media is provided at the back of the book: It's a conclusion and also a beginning.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The first part of this article was published in last week's GO! magazine. Look for more in next week's edition.

