

Bon appétit! Or, as they say in Dubai, Bel'afiah!

After a hectic day preparing for a presidential luncheon in Abu Dhabi, Corporate Executive Chef Harald Oberender and Executive Banqueting Chef Khalel Mustafa Oqdeh, from Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC), took time out to discuss their new book, 'A Culinary Journey, Celebrating 30 Years of Our History', available in major bookstores across the UAE.

Catering to the specific requests of official meetings and dignitary visits and the occasional event of a royal wedding, the two chefs thought it an extraordinary opportunity to compile the traditional Emirati dishes and present them for the commemorative occasion of the Dubai World Trade Centre's 30th anniversary.

As Chef Harald recounts, "Helal Saeed Al Marri, CEO of DWTC, came up with the idea of a cook book and wanted us to capture the history of Emirati cuisine and the particular methods of preparation only used in this region. We realised there wasn't anything like it available and thought it a perfect match for the anniversary of the DWTC."

The Emirati kitchen at the DWTC provides authentic Emirati cuisine and remains true to its foundations. Great care is taken to ensure each dish prepared is presented as it would be in the home of an Emirati family's dining table from the preparation to the presentation, albeit with a difference of scale. Times have changed at an alarming rate in the day-to-day life of the UAE, yet cooking is very much fixed in its practice. Exact measurements are used in industrial sized pots and sealed for several hours, cooked to perfection without the loss of flavours through vapour escaping.

Technologically speaking, Dubai may have developed significantly and, although refrigeration has played a great part in the ability to cater for such large-scale events, it hasn't altered the handling of meats in the Emirati kitchen. Meat during refrigeration loses its flavour and alters the texture. Meat that is prepared in the DWTC's Emirati kitchen is slaughtered on the same day of preparation, with the carcass cooked immediately on delivery from the abattoir. It's at the insistence of the chefs that the dishes retain their true authenticity.

The team caters for over a million covers per year. With its important clientele, both chefs work fastidiously to ensure all meals are prepared with great precision and quality. "We have the opportunity to be a showcase for the country's rich, myriad and diverse culture through the medium of food that is packed with heritage and tradition," notes Chef Harald.



Laham Nashif

When Emiratis went on hunting trips to Iran or on a safari, they would take Nashif made from ostrich or deer meat. The meat would be cut very thinly and salted or sun-dried. For practical purposes, lamb is the most convenient meat to use these days.

Ingredients:

1 tbsp bezar spice mix
20 g black pepper powder
1/2 tsp ground cardamom
6 pcs whole cloves
3 tsp corn oil
1 kg deboned lean lamb
1 bunch fresh coriander
3 pcs fresh tomato
200g large sliced onion
water (small amount)
salt to taste
2 tsp tomato paste
1 tsp ground turmeric

Method:

1 Boil the meat in a medium pot until tender. This should take approximately 45 minutes. Drain and put aside.
2 Fry the onions in a little oil until brown, add the cloves, bezar, turmeric, cardamom, coriander, tomato and tomato paste, and combine with the boiled meat.
3 Continue frying and stirring until all the liquid has been absorbed; if it is not done well enough once the water is gone, add a little more water and continue to stir.
4 Add the black pepper and salt to taste as the mixture cooks, until the gravy becomes almost dry. Serve in a ceramic bowl with Arabic bread on the side.



Machbous Samak

With the Machbous Samak, the fish is cooked the same way as the rice, which is an unusual way of preparation. This is a dish that is enjoyed throughout the Gulf, although every country has slight variations on the way they cook it. The Emirati people hold this dish very close to their hearts.

Ingredients:

2 tsp bezar spice mix
3 pcs chopped fresh tomato
1 tsp ground cinnamon
10g whole cloves
2 cups corn oil
6 pcs crushed garlic cloves
50g curry leaf
3 pcs dried lemon
50g fresh coriander
2 pcs fresh lemon
50g ghee
50g ginger
20g green chilli
2l hot water
2 kg mackerel pieces
2 kg rice
3 pcs thinly sliced onion
1 tsp tomato paste
2 tbsp ground turmeric
salt to taste

Method:

- 1 Rub fish pieces with a mixture of salt, 1 tbsp of turmeric and 1 tsp of bezar. Fry in a little oil on both sides until brown. Remove from the pan and place on a paper towel.
- 2 Fry the sliced onions in oil until brown and add garlic, ginger and green chilli and continue until all is brown. Add rest of the bezar, turmeric, ground cinnamon and cloves, and continue on low heat for three minutes.
- 3 Add the fresh tomatoes, tomato paste, curry leaves and half of the fresh coriander and continue on a low heat for a further minute then add 1 litre of hot water and season the drawn gravy to taste.
- 4 Add the fresh fish to soak up the flavour for five minutes and remove. Add a further 1 litre of water, bring to the boil and add all the rice. Cook until all the liquid has been absorbed.
- 5 Sprinkle ghee on the rice. Place the cooked fish on top with the rest of the fresh coriander. Cover and continue to cook for ten minutes on low heat.
- 6 Serve on a fish platter garnished with fresh lemon.



Humeidh with Green Mango

Humeidh leaves are seasonal and are in high demand during April and May, when UAE nationals like to enjoy this locally grown ingredient. Local mangoes are green at this time of the year and are used to make a crunchy and tangy salad. This dish can be savoured with a fresh Samak Mashwi as an accompaniment.

Ingredients:

2 pcs green chilli
300g green mango
500g humiedh leaf
100ml lemon juice
3 tsp olive oil
salt and pepper to taste

Method:

- 1 Shred the humeidh leaves and cut the green mango into thin wedges and add the green chilli.
- 2 Combine in a bowl and add olive oil and lemon juice, and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Toss well and refrigerate for 1 hour.

To celebrate the Dubai World Trade Centre's 30th anniversary, we have a copy of A Culinary Journey, Celebrating 30 Years of Our History to give away to one lucky Food Club member. To win simply name five spices used in the Arabic spice mix, Bezar. Send your answer to competitions@bbcgoodfoodme.com by April 30th. Not a Food Club member? Log onto www.bbcgoodfoodme.com/bbcGF/Clubs