

New Texts Out Now: Rawia Bishara, *Olives, Lemons & Za'atar: The Best Middle Eastern Home Cooking*

Recommend 6 people recommend this. Be the first of your friends.

Tweet 3

by **Rawia Bishara**

Mar 19 2014

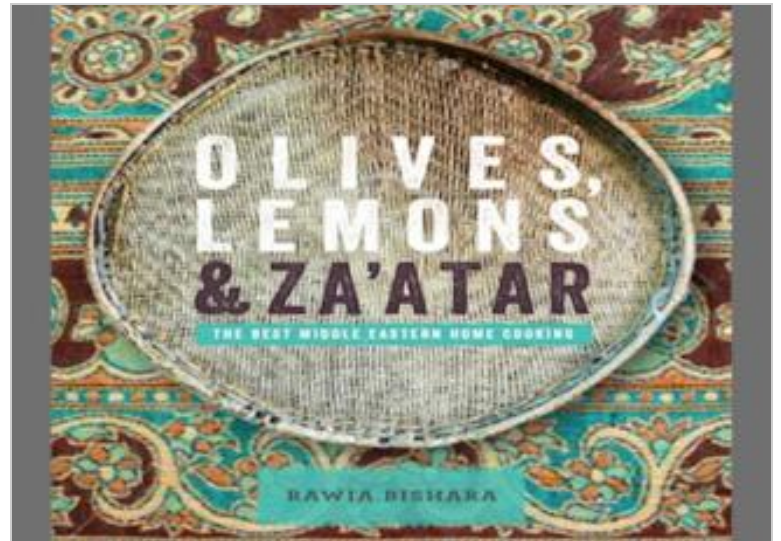
 **Listen**

Rawia Bishara, *Olives, Lemons & Za'atar: The Best Middle Eastern Home Cooking*. Lanham, MD: Kyle Books, 2014.

Jadaliyya (J): What made you decide to write this book?

Rawia Bishara (RB): *Olives, Lemons & Za'atar* has been a long time coming. My restaurant, **Tanoreen**, is now fifteen years old and I have been, in essence, testing these recipes all along. I also felt like this was the right time to contribute, as Middle Eastern food has come to the forefront and I have something to say about it.

Additionally, I wanted to continue tradition. *Olives, Lemons & Za'atar* is a piece of family history. I'm glad my children and, one day (hurry up!), their children will read it and cook from it and understand what a profound journey it has been.



[Cover of Rawia Bishara, "Olives, Lemons & Za'atar: The Best Middle Eastern Home Cooking"]

J: Can you talk a bit about the process of establishing and developing Tanoreen and how that fit into your own journey as a chef and restaurateur?

It was the perfect storm of circumstance. I have always cooked dinner parties at home, and when my children left for college, I tried to figure out what the next phase of my life would be. I was always encouraged by friends and family to open a restaurant, but I wanted to do something authentic—something I hadn't seen from a Middle Eastern restaurant, home cooking as we experienced it growing up. There was skepticism as to whether the general public would "get" this kind of cooking. But I was certain. Our food is warm, hearty, and let's be honest, delicious!

J: What was the process of putting the book together, and what sorts of topics and recipes are covered by the book?

RB: This was not a straightforward process with recipes and chapters and introduction. I was digging into the past and essentially pairing up the most significant food memories I had and assigning each to a dish. My first mezze memory, for instance, was when I was a young girl at my uncle's wedding. My first maftool memory was my father peeling the onions so my mother wouldn't cry.

It was an intensive process and quite cathartic in the sense that I was reliving memories that are associated with food for the purpose of the book but also my family and parents, who are no longer with me. In the end it was very much worth it.

J: How did working on this book relate to and/or depart from work you had previously done?

RB: Well, this is my first book, but I have been writing this book in my head for years.

At Tanoreen, I may very well come in from the market with bags full of groceries and come up with a dish that I may not have done before if I find something I haven't seen for a while, say sunchokes. While I make a large pot of this to serve at the restaurant, the recipe must then be redesigned, simply in terms of quantity, to accommodate a home cook who may only be cooking for four or six people.

J: Who do you hope will read this book, and what sort of impact would you like it to have?

RB: Anyone who loves food should read this book.

Olives, Lemons & Za'atar is a journey of the food memories I cherish most. It is a fusion of my family's food traditions from Nazareth and the dishes I serve today at my restaurant in New York City, Tanoreen.

I always say Middle Eastern food is galaxies beyond just shish kabob and falafel. This book offers up what is in the beyond.

J: What other projects are you working on now?

RB: We just finished our signature Tanoreen Spice blend. We are working on creating a Middle Eastern market space adjacent to our restaurant, and hopefully another book and another restaurant in the future.

J: How do you think this book differs from other food books that have been written recently?

RB: Honestly, when something is as deeply personal as this book is, you really cannot compare. It is specifically my experience in relation to Palestinian gastronomic culture and how that translated, along with my travels and life experiences. But of course it's always about the good food!

Excerpts from *Olives, Lemons & Za'atar: The Best Middle Eastern Home Cooking*

From Chapter Two: Mezze

Eat, Talk and Drink

The Italians have antipasto, the Spanish tapas, the Americans appetizers, the Chinese dim sum. In the Middle East, there is mezze, small plates of food served all at once, before the main course, to provide a bounty of tastes and textures. That said, one or two plates can comprise a snack, while a few more can add up to a whole meal. Mezze is invariably served with arak, an anise-flavored spirit, to sip in between swipes of creamy dip on Arabic bread, forkfuls of fried or raw kibbeh, and bites of spicy meat pies.

The simplest mezzes are made up of whatever is on hand in the garden and the pantry. When I was growing up, this meant *makdous*, *labneh*, olives, hummus, Arabic bread, cucumbers, and tomatoes.

At its core, though, mezze is a mood. In Arabic, the verb for mezze is *mezmiz*, which loosely translated means “eat, talk, and drink”—all at once. Imagine friends and family sitting around a table, passing heaping plates of hummus, baba ganouj, falafel, and za'atar bread, and laughing, talking—and of course debating heatedly—amid the clang of glasses and plates. Mezze is a ritual about sharing—not just bites of delicious food, but stories, experiences, laughter, and opinions.

There are no real rules when it comes to serving mezze; several small plates and good company are the keys! When I visit one of my friends to play cards, she offers Hummus, page 36, romaine lettuce cups for scooping Tabouleh, page 73, and a bowl of roasted nuts served with chilled glasses of arak or cold beer. When my children entertain guests, they serve *Mhammara*, page 42, with toasted Arabic Bread, page 57, and some cheese with honey and crisp crackers. It can be that simple.

Admittedly, I tend toward the extravagant with my own mezze spreads, both at home and at Tanoreen. It is part of my culture to offer food in abundance, and it begins with these small treasures. There are plenty of inspiring options to choose from in this chapter as well as in the salad chapter that follows. From among all of these

recipes, you can create an array of dishes that beautifully capture the flavors and spirit of the Middle Eastern mezze table. The trick is not to overindulge if a main course follows; in fact, I often advise customers against ordering too much for fear they will be sated before the main course arrives!

The mezze dishes in this chapter easily cross over to other mealtimes—hummus is a favorite breakfast for many and an essential part of a wedding or cocktail party spread. Falafel, page 52, is a mezze staple, of course, but also makes an excellent lunch, tucked into Arabic bread and dressed with Thick Tahini Sauce, page 195.

But, always remember, to “*mezmez*” is not so much dependent on the selection of dishes you provide at the table, as it is about the atmosphere you create around it. So, eat, talk, drink—and enjoy!

[...]

From Chapter Four: Soups & Stews

Lentil Noodle Soup with Greens (*Rushtay*)



Makes eight to ten servings

This hearty Palestinian soup is more commonly prepared by West Bank cooks than by those in Galilee; I learned how to make it from friends I met in Jerusalem. It is a meal in itself and a favorite among vegetarian patrons of Tanoreen. If you don't have one of the greens on hand, just substitute more of the others. Don't skip the squeeze of lemon near the end—it transforms the soup. Stirring in the garlicky Teklai (page 196) at the very end gives the soup a bit more intensity. Serve it with a few olives.

- 3 cups brown lentils
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 pinch sea salt
- 1 cup olive oil
- 3 medium red or yellow onions or 5 large shallots, diced
- 1 poblano or other chile pepper, seeded and diced (optional)
- 6 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 4 1/2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 4 1/2 teaspoons ground coriander
- 1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper

- 4 stalks celery, diced
- 2 large carrots, peeled and diced
- 1 packed cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 2 packed cups chopped fresh spinach
- 2 packed cups chopped kale
- 2 green or plum tomatoes, diced (optional)
- 8 ounces fettuccini, broken in half
- Juice of 2 lemons (1/4 to 1/2 cup)
- 1 tablespoon *Teklai* (page 196; optional)

Combine the lentils and a pinch of salt in a pot and cover with water by 1 inch. Cover with the lid and boil over high heat for 20 minutes. Drain and set aside.

Heat the olive oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Toss in the onions or shallots, and chile pepper, if using, and saute until golden brown, 7 to 10 minutes. Stir in the garlic and saute until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Sprinkle in the cumin, coriander and black pepper and saute until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Toss in the celery, carrots and cilantro, cover and cook for 5 minutes. Add the spinach, kale, tomatoes, if using, 15 cups of water and remaining 1 tablespoon salt and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat, cover and simmer for 20 minutes.

Pour in the lentils, return the broth to a simmer and cook for 10 minutes more. Add the fettuccini and cook until al dente. Stir in the lemon juice followed by the *teklai*, if using. Serve hot.

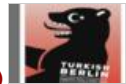
VARIATION For a gluten-free version, cut six 8-inch corn tortillas into 1/2-inch strips and use in place of the fettuccini or use gluten-free pasta.

[Excerpted from *Olives, Lemons & Za'atar: The Best Middle Eastern Home Cooking* by Rawia Bishara, by permission of the author. © 2014 by Rawia Bishara. For more information, or to buy this book, click [here](#); you can also follow Tanoreen Restaurant on Twitter [here](#) and on Facebook [here](#).]

Latest posts in **NEWTON**:



New Texts Out Now: India: Wounded States (Special Issue of Warscapes)



New Texts Out Now: Annika Marlen Hinze, Turkish Berlin: Integration Policy and Urban Space

If you prefer, email your comments to info@jadaliyya.com.



Also post on Facebook

Posting as Jumana Bishara ([Change](#))

Facebook social plugin

Jadaliyya

- [About Jadaliyya](#)
- [Jadaliyya Team](#)
- [Contributors](#)
- [Contact Information](#)

Contributions

- [Submission Guidelines](#)
- [Release Form](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Terms of Service](#)

Pages/Sections

- [Culture](#)
- [Reports](#)

- [Reviews](#)
- [Interviews](#)
- [Jad Navigation](#)
- [O.I.L.](#)

Features

- [Roundtables](#)
- [Essential Readings](#)
- [Photo Essays](#)

Pedagogy Section

- [Pedagogy Homepage](#)

القسم العربي

- [Arabic Section](#)
- [Arabic-Culture](#)
- [Arabic-Politics](#)
- [Arabic-Economics](#)
- [Arabic-History](#)

©2010-2014 by the Arab Studies Institute. All Rights Reserved.

info@jadaliyya.com

site by [concepcion design](#)

