JEWS IN AMERICA

In the early 1900s, waves of Ashkenazi Jews came to America from Russia, Poland, Romania, and Germany. Most settled on the East Coast, where they maintained their religious and culinary culture. Their communities were large enough to sustain neighborhood delicatessens, appetizer stores, bakeries, and kosher meat and poultry markets. Brisket, borscht, matzo ball soup, chopped liver, pickled herring, gefilte fish, bagels and lox, latkes, blintzes, kugel, knishes, kasha, challah, and rye bread—these Ashkenazi staples became the cornerstone of Jewish food in America. This is not the healthiest or most varied diet, especially because the only green on the plate might be a token sprig of parsley, but it is a cuisine that has a strong emotional pull on Jewish Americans who want to hold on to their eastern European heritage.

Many early Jewish households in America were observant and kept kosher kitchens. When not cooking traditional family recipes from memory, they relied on a few basic Jewish cookbooks recommended by friends and relatives. These no-nonsense volumes offered practical advice to the housewife, or *balaboosta,* on shopping, kosher cooking, and preparations for holiday celebrations.

In time, more modern Jewish cookbooks were published, as families looked for a broader range of recipes and for time-saving shortcuts. Food processors replaced hand graters for making latkes, and shredded carrots or sweet potatoes were mixed with the traditional russet potatoes for a new taste. Clever recipes for gefilte fish loaves and savory layered kugels appeared, and Lipton soup mix, cranberry sauce, Coca-Cola, and canned beef broth turned up in recipes for braised brisket. Despite these "creative and modern innovations," the recipe repertoire remained basically Ashkenazi. At the same time, enterprising kosher food companies began selling food products nationwide that echoed and thus enforced Ashkenazi traditions. Every year at Rosh Hashanah and Hanukkah, my local supermarket brings out the gefilte fish and matzo meal, even though these foods have no specific relevance to these holidays. Given this scenario, it is not surprising that most Americans think all Jewish food is brisket, chopped liver, bagels and lox, and gefilte fish.

But not all Jewish cooking traditions come from eastern Europe. For centuries, Jewish people lived and cooked in southern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East—what is thought of as the Mediterranean. Because Mediterranean Jews did not immigrate to the United States in large numbers, their delicious and varied cuisines have been nearly unknown here until recently.

Today, many American diners have enthusiastically embraced the Mediterranean diet, seeing it as both a healthful and a flavorful way to eat. It offers a diverse range of recipes from the kitchens of Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Turkey, North Africa, and the Middle East. But even though many Americans, including American Jews, know and enjoy Mediterranean food, relatively few have made the connection between Mediterranean cuisine and its Jewish culinary traditions. This book will enable readers to make that connection by bringing the delicious and varied foods of the Mediterranean Jews into their kitchens and their family traditions.

MEDITERRANEAN JEWISH COMMUNITIES

Large communities of Jews have lived in the Middle East since biblical times, and they have been at home in Italy, Spain, Portugal, and North Africa for centuries. Due to the climate, agricultural possibilities, and local culinary traditions, Jews of the Mediterranean were not dining on borscht, bagels, or brisket. They cooked the traditional recipes of the region in which they lived while observing the kosher laws. That meant a Mediterranean diet filled with seasonal fresh vegetables and fruits, legumes, grains, and small portions of meat, poultry, or fish. Abundant use of spices and fresh herbs and a pantry of homemade condiments made simple foods taste more complex and interesting.

Many people lump Jewish food that is not Ashkenazi under the broad term *Sephardic,* but this blanket designation is inaccurate from both a culinary and a cultural point of view. I prefer to differentiate between Sephardic and Mediterranean Jews. In ancient times, Sepharad was the Hebrew name given to the Iberian Peninsula, and Jews who were forced to flee Spain and Portugal after the Spanish Inquisition and settled in other countries were called Sephardim. The term *Sephardic* does not encompass many of the Jews who lived in Italy, the Maghrebi Jews in North Africa, or the Mizrahi, or Oriental Jews, in the Muslim lands of the Middle East. These Jews and their recipes are Mediterranean and not necessarily Sephardic.

Cultural differences distinguish the Ashkenazim and the Mediterranean Jews. The former maintained a rather closed community to ensure their continued survival. In contrast, even though Mediterranean Jews and Sephardim suffered persecution, their communities, often along the Silk Road, were more integrated with the larger society. They shared recipes and culinary traditions with their non-Jewish neighbors and were open to new ingredients and spices that did not break the kosher laws.

OLD WORLD FOOD IN A NEW WORLD KITCHEN

In the United States, over the last fifty years, major demographic and societal changes have transformed the Jewish home and kitchen. Intermarriage and assimilation have

resulted in fewer traditional observant Jewish households. Today, many Jews do not keep kosher homes or regularly attend synagogue. Yet they still identify with being Jewish. American secular Jews celebrate Jewish holidays and keep an emotional and cultural connection to their heritage. Along with this cultural change, our country is undergoing a culinary revolution fueled by a deep, new interest in food culture. Younger generations of Jewish home cooks are looking for contemporary ideas to match their evolving palates. No matter how many ways one can be innovative with brisket or latkes, these are still brisket and latkes. Rather than stay attached to the predictable and old-fashioned Ashkenazi recipes, these young cooks want to broaden their culinary horizons and eat a more varied and healthful diet. They want to move from heavy, limited cold-weather foods into the sunlight of the Mediterranean and its abundant culinary possibilities.

This does not mean that we are never to cook brisket and latkes again. But it does mean that we need to expand our concept of Jewish cooking to reflect today's greater cultural diversity and broader palate. People are dining out more often and sampling many different ethnic cuisines, so greater variety, innovation, and bolder flavors are in. This increased interest in ethnic food is a big part of why Jewish cuisine is now approached with a fresh eye and open mouth. Jews and non-Jews alike are enjoying Jewish food at restaurants, most of which are not kosher. Even new hip delis like Mile End in New York and Wise Sons in San Francisco are adding Middle Eastern Jewish dishes such as hummus, falafel, *shakshuka,* and preserved-lemon aioli. Today, many Americans attend Passover dinners at restaurants like Perbacco and Delfina in San Francisco, Spago in Los Angeles, and Lumière in Boston, often in place of a Seder at home. Secular and contemporary Jews feel a subliminal cultural connection to Israel and proudly patronize restaurants like Zahav in Philadelphia and Balaboosta in New York, which are run by Israeli chefs who serve food that is neither kosher nor necessarily traditionally Jewish. Indeed, much of it is clearly Arab in inspiration. Despite shellfish stews and meatballs with yogurt sauce, if an Israeli chef is cooking it, the food is "Jewish" by osmosis.

"Old World food in a New World kitchen" is a phrase that has come to define my culinary path. For as long as I have been cooking, at home or at my former San Francisco restaurant, Square One, my passion has been to take traditional recipes and make them enticing to contemporary diners. It is not enough for recipes to be true to their country of origin; they need to satisfy and reflect the flavor qualities and foods that are enjoyed today. In the past, restaurants and cooks prided themselves on culinary "authenticity" and sought to re-create traditional recipes. To mess with a time-honored dish was sacrilege and cause for criticism and kvetching. Not so today. Contemporary cooks and diners value creativity and innovation. They recognize that our palates change as we discover new foods, new flavors, and new cuisines. We can now buy ingredients like *za'atar, ras el hanout,* sumac, pomegranate molasses, Aleppo and Maras peppers, and all manner of fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs that were not readily available when I first started writing cookbooks.

It's not often that one gets the chance to revisit his or her early work with a fresh eye, an open mind, and a newly sharpened palate. This Mediterranean Jewish cookbook for the modern kitchen will build and expand on carefully selected recipes from many of my cookbooks. I have focused on dishes that I still cook today because they continue to please everyone who has eaten them at my table. I have updated recipes to reflect my evolving palate and trends in American dining. I have expanded my definition of Mediterranean cuisine to include my growing interest in Middle Eastern flavors. The recipes in this new book show how to recognize and integrate the signature flavors of the Mediterranean regions—the Sephardic foods of Spain, Portugal, parts of Italy, Greece, and Turkey; the foods of the Middle Eastern countries of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon; and the North African countries of Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, and Libya—into your cooking so that you can delight in diverse and adventurous flavors at the Jewish family table.

It is both possible and desirable for Jewish cooking to evolve—to go beyond the Ashkenazi table—as the varied, seasonal, and healthful Mediterranean dishes that follow illustrate. My hope is that you will find yourself making the recipes again and again for family and friends, as the goal of this book is not only to demonstrate the dynamic, creative elements of a culinary heritage but also to influence future generations of cooks.

ABOUT THE RECIPES

The recipes in this book are based on, or inspired by, dishes from three Mediterranean Jewish cultures: the Sephardic, the Maghrebi, and the Mizrahi. In Israel today, for political expediency, all three identify themselves as Sephardic because they follow the traditions of the Sephardic Jews as opposed to the Ashkenazi Jews and come under the jurisdiction of the Sephardic rabbi. As a group, they represent 70 percent of the Jews in the country. But their culinary heritages and cuisines are not the same.

The Sephardim were western European Jews from the Iberian Peninsula who were expelled after the Spanish Inquisition and found new homes in other parts of the Mediterranean. They spoke a language called Ladino. Maghrebi Jews lived in the North African countries of Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, and Egypt. The term *Mizrahi* translates as "Eastern" or "Oriental" and is the label applied to Jews who had been living in Muslim lands since biblical times. I often refer to the food of Mizrahi Jews as Judeo-Arabic. The cuisines of all three populations were influenced by the local culinary traditions and agricultural possibilities of their homelands. One important element that unites these groups is their ability to adapt local recipes while observing kosher law.

Jews have a long history of intermittent religious persecution and were often forced to move from their homelands. As they roamed from country to country, their recipes changed and were adjusted to reflect local ingredients and traditions. Some recipes evolved so much that it is hard to discern their true origin. For example, the food of the

Sephardic Jews who moved to Italy looks and tastes Italian, and the food of the Sephardic Jews who went to Turkey mirrors Turkish cuisine. In Mediterranean countries, Jews and non-Jews prepare similar recipes in the same manner. You can sometimes identify a recipe as Jewish by the title, such as the inclusion of a biblical figure like Rachel, Rebecca, Ezekiel, or Moses. Or the dish might be described as *all'ebraica* or *alla giudia* in Italy, or as *a la djudia* in the Middle East. But another tip-off is seeing how the traditional recipes have been adapted to conform to the kosher laws. The lamb and eggplant moussaka of Greece and Turkey has a dairy topping, but the Jewish version does not. Observant Jews do not soak bread in milk for their meatballs and do not spoon yogurt sauces on cooked lamb or add a cheese component to pasta with meat sauce. Because of the kosher laws, fish soups do not include shellfish, and sausages are made with beef or lamb rather than pork.

Traditionally, a family's recipe collection was not extensive, and the ingredients available were limited by transportation and region. Unlike today, novelty and constant change were not a priority. The same dishes were prepared over and over again, so recipes were committed to memory and passed on from generation to generation, from mother to daughter. If they were written down, they were "sketches," with just enough information to jog the memory of someone who had made the dish before or had seen it prepared. Measurements were vague—an eggshell of this, a small mustard glass of that—and cooking directions were obtuse—"roast until done," or "fold dough in the usual manner."

Kitchens were nothing like the equipment-enhanced marvels they are today. There were no food processors, blenders, or electric mixers. Before World War II, few homes had refrigerators, and many kitchens had burners but no oven. Traditional cooking methods were not always the most efficient, but they were familiar, the way things had been done for generations. That meant that technique was not challenged and efficiency was not important. It also meant that there was time for cooking. Women fed the immediate family or guests and extended family in a hospitable and generous manner. They went to the market daily and prepared lunch as well as dinner. They preserved food for future meals when certain ingredients might not be available or in season. They cooked special foods for weddings, circumcisions, holidays, and the Sabbath. Most women did not work outside the home, which meant that they did not usually have to rush to get a meal together for a family that might eat in haste because of computer classes, soccer practice, or a full social or business calendar attached to the end of the workday.

Most of the recipes I have collected and cooked over the years are for everyday home cooking and holiday or celebratory meals, much as in the past. I have relied on a variety of sources: a family's stained recipe cards, conversations with home cooks and restaurant chefs, and recipes found in scores of regional cookbooks.

Most of the historic recipes in these books have been transcribed based on oral description. When asked how a dish was prepared, people would give measurements and

directions from memory. Few recipes were recorded as cooks worked in the kitchen. No one followed grandma around with a pad and pencil or a video recorder. So when I began testing old recipes, I often found errors in procedure, missing steps and ingredients, or inaccurate timing. These were not significant impediments to cooking the recipes at the time, because they were part of everyday life, the dishes were familiar, and cooks had seen them prepared many times. But for those of us cooking today, accuracy is important because the recipes are not part of our tradition or our daily routine and fewer people have as much kitchen experience as home cooks did in the past. Nowadays, the goal is to encourage and support home cooking, which means that recipes are typically written in great detail, with every grain of salt, every pan size, every heat level, and every minute precisely recorded to prevent wasting time, effort, and ingredients.

The recipes in this book are not museum pieces. Recipes must be alive, open to change, adaptation, and personal interpretation. Although I respect tradition and believe that cultural authenticity is important, I want a recipe to be efficient and to produce truly flavorful food. To meet those goals, I've reorganized some of the older traditional recipes, primarily revising the order in which the steps are performed or grouped.

During my research, I found many interesting old recipes that would intrigue food historians, but the ingredients would be difficult for contemporary home cooks to find, and even if they could be tracked down, few cooks would take the time to work with them. So in this book I opted for practicality and deliciousness. Most of the recipes are based on traditional dishes that I have updated for today's eclectic palates. Others have been modernized to make them more appealing and relevant to the way we now eat. And some are my own creations, based on traditional ideas.

More often than not, I've increased the amount of herbs, spices, garlic, and other seasonings to bring the recipes more in line with the modern palate, which is accustomed to bolder tastes acquired from eating in diverse ethnic restaurants. I have also adjusted cooking times to accommodate contemporary tastes and schedules. Cooking times were excessively long in some of the recipes. Modern stoves are more powerful than old-time burners, so I do not call for boiling soup noodles for two hours or fish for over an hour. But whenever a long simmer resulted in a delicious dish with melting textures, I preserved the recommended cooking time. I also kept cooking times longer than is currently in vogue for some vegetables if improved flavor was worth the loss of crunch.

After you have cooked a recipe a few times, you will adjust the seasoning to bring out the best in your ingredients and to suit your palate and sense of flavor balance. I tested the recipes using the best ingredients and without much technical sleight of hand. Most are not overly time-consuming and many are economical. Although prosperous Jewish families lived in some major cities, most Mediterranean and Sephardic Jews were not wealthy, so the recipes reflect a sense of thriftiness. They also display creativity in the way that a few humble ingredients or leftovers are transformed into something special.

Finally, I have given preference to recipes that mesh with my palate, dishes I want to eat over and over again. They represent the comfort of home and hearth, simple cele-

brations, a sense of cultural and culinary continuity with our ancestors as viewed through a contemporary mind-set. It is thrilling for me to see my grandchildren eat these dishes with delight because it gives me hope that perhaps they will continue to cook them long after I have given up my place at the stove.

The Ingredients

Although cooking with seasonal, local food is often characterized as a new trend, in the Mediterranean kitchens of generations past, ingredients were always locally grown, seasonal, and unadulterated. Everything was newly harvested, either from a home garden or from a neighboring farm, and then sold in a nearby market. There were no refrigerated trucks and airfreight. With no deterioration from time and travel, flavors were clean and vibrant. Thus seasoning was kept to a minimum, used to enhance the flavor of truly fresh, seasonal ingredients. Cooks used just a bit of salt and pepper; a pinch of a spice, such as cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom, or cumin; or a good squeeze of lemon juice. Parsley, thyme, and bay were the most common herbs, with oregano, mint, cilantro, and dill used occasionally. Today, large-scale food manufacturing and farming and long-distance shipping have made many ingredients readily available, but they have suffered a loss of flavor and are not as vibrant as in the past. Taste the average supermarket tomato or apple and you'll know what I'm talking about. Who knows when that tomato or apple was harvested?

Plus, manufacturers have laced many prepared foods and condiments with excessive salt and sweeteners (as well as with preservatives and additives) that our palates have inadvertently come to accept as part of the flavor profile. Given such manipulation, it is not surprising that many of the original Mediterranean and Sephardic recipes seem flat and stripped down. This is where careful shopping comes in, because shopping is just as important as cooking.

Dazzling culinary technique and the finest equipment cannot make up for poor ingredients. I am lucky because I live in San Francisco, which has abundant fresh, organic produce at farmers' markets, nearby farming areas with long growing seasons, and people raising poultry, lamb, and beef responsibly. Of course, not everyone has easy access to ideal ingredients. If possible, seek out a butcher and a fishmonger to avoid prepackaged meats and fish and encourage your local markets to stock organic ingredients. For the best seasonal produce, shop at a farmers' market or sign up for a CSA (community-supported agriculture) delivery.

If your community does not have specialty markets, look to online sources for quality oils, spices, and other ingredients, such as vinegars, tahini, and pomegranate molasses. Herbs, except for oregano and bay, which are traditionally used dried, should be fresh. I recommend kosher salt and sea salt, as the best brands do not contain additives, and unsalted butter and good-quality olive oil. For frying and sautéing, use olive oil (sometimes labeled "pure olive oil") or sunflower or canola oil. Although extra virgin olive oil is traditional even for deep-frying, it can be costly, so use it when you can taste it. Toss out any old spices and then buy new ones in small batches from a company dedicated to

spices or from another source with high turnover. Whenever possible, grind pepper and spices as you need them for greater pungency. Taste and adjust the seasoning as you cook, not only at the end.

The Mediterranean Flavor Palate

As noted earlier, I distinguish the cuisines of Sephardic and Mediterranean Jews, dividing them into Sephardic, Maghrebi, and Mizrahi kitchens. Following years of research and recipe testing, I have identified the traditional spices and other ingredients that create the signature flavor profile of each group. So when I speak of the Mediterranean flavor palate, I am speaking of the traditional flavor combinations, spice medleys, or groups of ingredients that appear often in that region or country's cooking, such as tomatoes and cinnamon in Greece; rose water and cardamom in Iran; pine nuts and raisins or tahini, garlic, and lemon in Arab countries; and cumin, coriander, caraway, garlic, and hot pepper in Tunisia. When I see these flavor combinations in a recipe, I know where I am.

Compared with North Africa and the Middle East, the Italian Jewish palate is most restrained—almost austere—in seasoning. Because the Italians had, and still have for the most part, stellar raw materials, Italian Jewish cooks don't rely on exotic spices and herbs to achieve full-flavored dishes. They are ingredient focused. They use salt, a bit of pepper, and a few grains of nutmeg, though they can't resist a squeeze of lemon on nearly everything. Their herb of choice is parsley, followed by thyme and basil. Their preference for clean flavors resulted in an uncomplicated cuisine, even when the foods of the New World were added to their larder. Keep in mind that the simpler the cooking style, the more attention you need to pay to every detail. The margin for error is smaller, which means ingredients must be chosen with great care.

The Sephardim of Spain and Portugal who settled in the Ottoman Empire and Greece already had a Moorish, or Arabized, palate. Theirs was a cuisine with vivid spices, like cinnamon, allspice, cumin, and paprika, and mint, dill, and bay leaves joined parsley in the herb bouquet. They ate rice, spinach, and artichokes and gradually embraced the foods of the New World, such as tomatoes, peppers, pumpkins, vanilla, and chocolate. They brought with them nut-and-bread-thickened sauces, saffron, a love of citrus, a penchant for sweet-and-sour combinations, and a sweet tooth for desserts.

Judeo-Arabic cooks, the southern Mediterranean Jews living in Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Lebanon, share much of the Ottoman flavor profile, but add sumac, tamarind, pomegranate, and sesame to their pantry, as well as dates, figs, and apricots. The Jews of North Africa play with an even fuller spice spectrum, using ginger, cumin, coriander, and cayenne, along with cinnamon, pepper, and elaborate homemade spice mixtures. Cilantro (fresh coriander) joined mint, dill, and parsley in the herb garden. Flower petals coupled with orange flower water and rose water add scent and sweetness. Preserved lemons, tangy olives, and spicy *harissa* join the dried fruits and nuts for a complex and sensual cuisine.

Although Israel does not represent a distinct culture covered in this book, I would be remiss if I did not mention the Israeli flavor palate here. Israel is a Mediterranean coun-

try, but it is a melting pot of diverse cultures and has a gradually evolving cuisine of its own. Like the food of the United States, Israel's food reflects all of the immigrants who have settled there. You can find Ashkenazic dishes of Russian, German, and Polish Jews; foods of the Yemenites, Ethiopians, Moroccans, and Arabs; and now, contemporary restaurant cuisine with some chefs cooking Asian-inspired dishes. Like here in the States, trendiness and fusion have also become part of the country's current food scene. Instead of trying to narrowly define a true Israeli cuisine, I have chosen to base my Sephardic, Maghrebi, and Mizrahi dishes on original sources, rather than filter them through the eclectic Israeli kitchen.

Sephardic Recipe Sources

Although it would be wonderful to discover a cookbook of classic Spanish and Portuguese Sephardic recipes from pre-Inquisition days, I do not believe one exists. Yes, there are Jewish recipes documented from the medieval period in Spain, and recipes from Arab cookbooks from the period before Columbus and before the introduction of foods from the New World. They are, like many recipes of that period, seasoned with far too many spices in what today would be considered unconventional and not always palate-pleasing combinations, or they are excessively laced with sugar or honey in the Arab fashion. Some of these recipes are loosely described in medieval texts, such as the thirteenth-century *La cocina hispano-magrebi al-Andaluz,* the fourteenth-century *Libre de Sent Soví,* and Roberto de Nola's *Libre del coch* from 1520. Other Sephardic recipes are referred to obliquely in the transcripts of Inquisition trials, where people testified as to what was cooked in the converso household, to reveal their covert adherence to Jewish life. Preparing a stew on Friday afternoon to be served as Sabbath lunch certainly put a family in danger, because it showed that they had not given up observing Jewish law, which did not allow work on the Sabbath. A most interesting book that attempts to re-create and guesstimate some of these early Sephardic recipes is *A Drizzle of Honey: The Lives and Recipes of Spain's Secret Jews,* prodigiously researched by David Gitlitz and Linda Kay Davidson, fine scholars but not accomplished culinary professionals, which they readily admit. The stories are fascinating but most of the food is unappealing to the contemporary cook.

Different cooking styles existed in northern and southern Iberia. The north preserved the culinary customs of the Roman Empire, while the south was more heavily Islamized. The Romans planted vineyards, olive trees, and wheat. The Arabs established the cultivation of rice in Valencia and updated Roman irrigation systems. In the Levant, on the Spanish Mediterranean coast, they planted sugarcane. In Andalusia and the Algarve in Portugal, they cultivated almonds, citrus fruits (including oranges and lemons from China), eggplants, spinach, and artichokes. The quince may have come with the Romans or the Arabs, from its original home in Iran. The Arabs also introduced the use of such spices as cumin, nutmeg, saffron, and black pepper. The custom of double cooking—that is, frying and then stewing or baking—is an Arabic culinary practice. Their mark is everywhere, from bread-based soups to egg-based sweets to the nut- or bread-thickened

sauces that are now a signature of Portugal and Spain and continue to manifest themselves in the Sephardic kitchen.

The medieval manner of seasoning and food preservation, which involved an excessive use of spices, herbs, and sweeteners, was not retained in the Sephardic kitchens of Spain and Portugal, except in the case of highly sweetened desserts. Once the Sephardim emigrated to Italy and the Ottoman Empire, where they learned local styles of cuisine and became familiar with the foods from the New World, they dropped their old culinary ways, adopting new ingredients and Turkish and Greek recipes in their place. (The flow of Iberian Jews to the Ottoman Empire was not a single late-fifteenth-century event but continued well into the sixteenth century, along with the dispersal of foods from the New World.) True, some older terms like *almodrote* (garlic, oil, and cheese sauce) and *albóndigas* (meatballs) and Arab ingredients such as *alcachofas* (artichokes), *arroz* (rice), *almendras* (almonds), *azafrán* (saffron), and *naranjas* (oranges), as well as eggplant and chickpeas and other beans, were still employed, along with a stray sprinkle of cinnamon or sugar on fried eggplant, or a nut-thickened sauce in the Arab manner (probably already in use in the Arabized Ottoman Empire), but that is about as far as the medieval Arab-inspired cuisine was carried. Gone are the various *almori,* thick pastes made from rotting and fermented grains, salt, spices tempered with water, and cilantro juice. (Cilantro is used now primarily in Portugal and North Africa but not in Spain or Greece and only rarely in Turkey.) Saffron, cinnamon, and cumin were retained on the spice shelf, but they were typically joined by allspice, paprika, and hot pepper. Arab egg-based sauces, with the egg-and-lemon *agristada* and *ajada* or *allioli* (garlic mayonnaise), were kept on, as well. In the estimable *Eat and Be Satisfied: A Social History of Jewish Food,* John Cooper also notes that Sephardic Jews were used to cooking with lots of onions and garlic in Spain but cut back on garlic when they moved to Turkey, as they sensed that Muslim Turks had an aversion to the pungent bulb.

The recipes of the Sephardim in Turkey bear a great resemblance to the cuisines of Andalusia, Valencia, and the Balearic Islands. Méri Badi's *250 recettes de cuisine juive espagnole* is a valuable source of Spanish-inspired recipes that appear similar to many Sephardic Turkish recipes found in *Sefarad Yemekleri: Sephardic Cooking Book,* a collection of recipes edited by Viki Koronyo and Sima Ovadya. Many of these recipes are derived from the oral tradition and have vague or nonexistent cooking instructions. For the Greek table, I am indebted to Nicholas Stavroulakis's *Cookbook of the Jews of Greece,* a thorough compilation of recipes by this multitalented historian, artist, and scholar. He also helped to put together *Salonika: A Family Cookbook,* an interesting volume of recipes from the family of a woman named Esin Eden. Her family members were Ma'amin, Muslimized Jews who emigrated to Salonika from Turkey. Although over the years their recipes had drifted away from the kosher laws and mixed dairy with meat, I have brought them back to their Jewish roots and made the readjustments. Eden's family recipes are outstanding in flavor and have become some of my favorites. Both volumes of *La table juive* by Martine Chiche-Yana revealed traditions and holiday specialties from Greece and Turkey and other parts of the Mediterranean. *The Book of Jewish Food,* a masterpiece

by my friend Claudia Roden, proved both helpful and inspiring. We have used many of the same original sources for recipes and share a certain predilection for similar flavors. But Claudia also has an extraordinary family history to tell, and she generously shares many of her family's recipes and traditions.

In doing my research, I have looked at classic Greek, Turkish, Spanish, and Portuguese cookbooks in search of ancestors of, and variations on, the recipes. I needed to see what remains from the Spanish legacy, or was derived from it, and how the recipes have changed and evolved as the Sephardim moved to new locales. These points of comparison often reveal minor variations or surprising historic origins of dishes. The titles of the recipes may vary from Ladino to Turkish to French to Greek. I have tried to keep them in the language of my original sources. It follows that many of the same recipes appear under different names.

Maghrebi and Mizrahi Recipe Sources

Most of the source cookbooks for the Maghrebi and Mizrahi recipes have been written by women, who did all of the cooking, working together as families: grandmothers, aunts and cousins, mother and daughter teams, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law teams—and neighbors, too. Thanks to Fortunée Hazan-Arama, Andrée Zana-Murat, Simy Danan, Hélène Gans Perez, Daisy Taieb, Maguy Kakon, Jeanne Ifergan, Jacqueline Cohen-Azuelos, Léone Jaffin, Zette Guinaudeau, Poopa Dweck, Jennifer Abadi, Stella Cohen, Suzy David, Lisa Elmaleh Craig, and Viviane Moryoussef and her mother, Nina, for taking the time to transcribe the recipes as they prepared them in their homes and thus keeping these flavors and memories alive. I have also relied on cookbook authors who are experts in the traditional cuisines of North Africa and the Middle East to see what non-Jews were cooking and evaluate the differences.

In *The Architecture of Memory,* Joëlle Bahloul traces her Algerian family's cuisine and notes that while taste memories and home traditions were important to the men, their remembrances were focused primarily on public ritual, on the gatherings at the synagogue, and on the community at large. The women's memories revolved around "ritual gestures and foods that embody the slowing of the domestic pace and the strengthening of family ties." Their community was more intimate. Marketing and cooking filled up their days and brought their families pleasure, treasured traditions, and long-lasting memories.

Life is easier now with refrigerators and freezers, stoves with ovens, blenders and food processors. But today as we work—often alone—in our appliance-laden modern kitchens, what we miss is the joy of team effort, with lots of nimble, experienced hands gathered around the kitchen table folding intricate pastries, rolling grape leaves and stuffing vegetables, grinding nuts and spices, and trimming fruits for preserves, all the while discussing flavor balance and the news of the day. Television newscasts and food processors are not worthy substitutes for those communal times in the kitchen.

Many of the traditional pastries, sweets, and preserves are rarely made at home these days. Instead, they are purchased from stores, anonymous and compromised in flavor,

less personal and idiosyncratic. Although it is true that they are time-consuming for the single cook, if some of the more intricate recipes tempt you, I recommend that you invite a friend, daughter, son, or other family member to join you. It promises to be one of the best times you will have spent together. And it will create taste memories and traditions that your family will never forget.

THE KOSHER LAWS

You may wonder what makes the recipes in this book Jewish. At first glance, they don't appear different from similar Mediterranean recipes. What distinguishes them is that they follow kashrut, the dietary laws that govern the kosher kitchen.

Many still believe the old story that these laws came about as a health measure, to prevent the Jews from eating foods that were more likely to transmit disease. It is true, for example, that pigs were known to pass along trichinosis. But there is another explanation. The rabbis of the Talmudic period cite the Torah when explaining the dietary regulations, and while the book does detail the restrictions, it offers no explanation for them. However, such laws were holy, to be obeyed, not questioned. The rabbis also believed that the secret of Jewish survival was separatism. By limiting contact with non-Jews, the religion and culture would be preserved.

The twelfth-century philosopher Maimonides, seeking a rationale for the dietary laws, surmised that they "train us to master our appetites, to accustom us to restrain our desires; and to avoid considering the pleasure of eating and drinking as the goal of man's existence." While those of us who are used to total culinary freedom might feel a bit stifled by the restrictive kosher diet, the laws inspired great creativity in observant Jewish cooks. Over time, Mediterranean Jews adapted regional cuisine for the kosher home, joyfully embracing both the local flavors and the traditional boundaries of kashrut.

Kosher laws are set forth in the Torah's books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, which specify which animals are kosher and which are not. The word *kosher* (derived from *kasher*) did not originally refer to food. It means "good" and "proper" and was used for ritual objects. Foods that are not kosher are considered *treyf* or *treyfe.*

Many of the most important kosher laws describe what kinds of meats can be consumed. Only animals with split hooves and who chew their cud are kosher (thus the absence of the pig). Animals must be slaughtered in a ritual manner by a *shochet,* or trained ritual butcher; beasts killed by hunters, for example, are forbidden. The *shochet* must sever the jugular vein in one clean cut and drain all of the blood from the animal, as blood is the essence and symbol of life. To remove all signs of blood, the meat must then be salted and soaked, unless it is slated to be broiled or flame cooked. Liver cannot be drained of blood, so it must be broiled, and only after it has been broiled can it be sautéed. Before the hindquarter of an animal can be eaten, the sciatic nerve and the blood vessels attached to it must be removed. Expert butchers can remove the nerve, but it is

a time-consuming process, so many kosher butchers prefer to sell this part to non-kosher butchers, or to halal butchers who do not share the same restriction. Now you know why there are so few kosher recipes for steak or leg of lamb. In Israel today, some butchers are learning how to remove this nerve, a technique called *traibering,* thus broadening the kosher cuts available. All meats must be koshered before they can be frozen.

Kosher law also extends to fish and fowl. Only fish with scales and fins are permitted. Some fish are born with fins and scales but lose them at some point in their development. Such fish, including swordfish and sturgeon, are controversial for observant Jews, and not all authorities permit their consumption. Unlike cows or sheep, a fish does not have to be slaughtered in a prescribed manner, as it is considered to die a natural death when removed from the water. According to Deuteronomy, all shellfish, because they lack fins and scales, are non-kosher. A kosher fowl is a domesticated bird such as a chicken, turkey, game hen, duck, or goose. A wild fowl killed by a hunter is non-kosher because, as with meats, it has not been killed in the prescribed manner. Only eggs from kosher birds may be eaten.

Additional laws govern what foods may be eaten or prepared together. For this purpose, foods are categorized as meat (*fleishig*) or dairy (*milchig*). Other foods are designated neutral (pareve) and can be served at both meat and dairy meals. Fish is pareve, as are eggs, spices, grains, fruits, and vegetables. In Deuteronomy, it is written that Jews shall not cook a kid in its mother's milk, and thus kosher law prohibits eating meat and milk at the same meal. Additionally, many observant Jews will not eat cheeses made with animal rennet, perceiving them as a combination of meat and dairy. The length of separation between eating meat and dairy can range from one to six hours, depending on the orthodoxy of the community and local rabbinical views. Many observant families keep different sets of dishes for meat meals and dairy meals, as well as two sets of pots and pans.

The holiday of Passover adds yet another layer of kosher laws. Products that contain wheat, barley, rye, oats, or spelt and have come into contact with any kind of moisture for more than eighteen minutes are considered fermented or leavened foods, or *hametz,* and thus forbidden. This is why matzo, which is made from wheat but whose production falls under the eighteen-minute rule, replaces bread on the Passover table. The Ashkenazim, though not the Sephardim, also abstain from eating rice, millet, corn, and legumes during Passover.

THE FOOD OF JEWISH HOLIDAYS

Throughout this book, I have noted certain dishes that are ideal for serving, or are traditionally served, on one or more of the Jewish holidays. Holiday foods are also listed in the index. Here are brief descriptions of the major holidays on the Jewish calendar and, with the exception of those holidays that are fast days, the dishes or foods that are associated with them.

The Sabbath

The Sabbath (or Shabbat) is the Jewish day of rest and spiritual rejuvenation. It begins every Friday before sundown; is ushered into the home with the lighting of candles and the kiddush, a blessing recited over wine or bread; and ends at sundown on Saturday. The Sabbath dinner is a festive meal, but because this is a holy day, orthodox law prohibits work or business of any kind, including cooking, until the Sabbath has ended. That means the Saturday midday meal must be prepared before sunset on Friday. In the days before refrigeration and modern appliances, observing the Sabbath inspired great ingenuity in the kitchen. Cooks prepared dishes over very low heat, or they buried them in the *hamin* (oven) for many hours or sometimes overnight. This type of cooking was regarded as a passive activity, thereby escaping the no-working rule. Cooked vegetables and marinated fish that tasted good served at room temperature were also on the Sabbath table. Today, many of these vegetable and fish dishes would be called meze, the small dishes commonly found on the menus of Mediterranean restaurants.

Rosh Hashanah: The Jewish New Year

Rosh Hashanah marks the start of the New Year. A two-day celebration that begins on the first day of the month of Tishri, usually in late September or early October, it is a joyful holiday for the most part, with people wishing one another good luck, happiness, and health in the coming year. It is the beginning of the Days of Awe, a ten-day period of introspection, which culminates on Yom Kippur.

Many symbolic foods appear on the Rosh Hashanah table. Among them are apples with honey, which symbolize the wish that the New Year will be sweet. The many seeds of the pomegranate signify the many good deeds to be performed in the coming year. Black-eyed peas characterize abundance and fertility, and pumpkin or winter squash with its hard covering symbolizes the desire for protection from harmful and oppressive decrees, and the hope to be remembered for good deeds. Leeks represent the wish for all enemies to be cut off. Spinach and chard represent the hope that all enemies will be removed from the community. Dates signify the wish that our enemies cease harassment. For Moroccan Jews, the couscous with seven vegetables represents the seven days it took for God to create the world. A whole fish is often served, its head representing the head—the beginning—of the New Year.

Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur, which falls on the tenth day of Tishri, is the most solemn day of the year—a day when you seek forgiveness from God for your sins, so you can start the New Year with a clean slate. As on the Sabbath, you must do no work. You must also fast for twenty-five hours, consuming neither food nor water or other liquid. The meal before the fast must be filling, simple, and not highly seasoned, to avoid making the diners thirsty during their fast.