

# A feast for the senses

Cookbook authors Lucy and Greg Malouf indulge their wanderlust – and their palates – with a food-fuelled journey through Iran

Food is one of those things that is deeply universal,” says award-winning culinary writer Lucy Malouf. A year ago, this truth hit home when she explored Iran, a country countless friends had discouraged her from visiting. “A lot of people think it’s dangerous,” she tells *Hello! Canada*. “That couldn’t be further from the truth. You go there and people are falling over themselves to help you.”

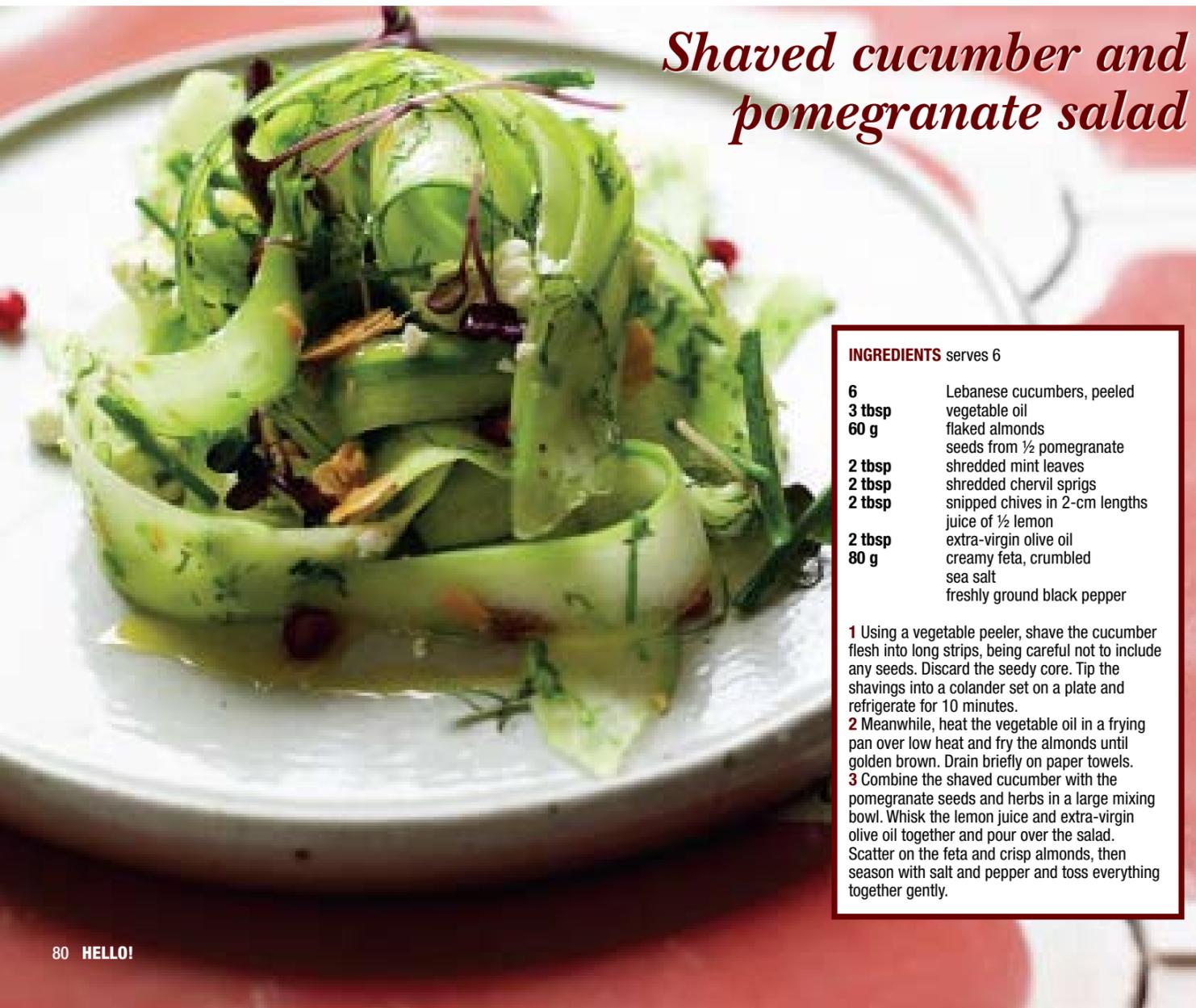
As evidence, Lucy’s latest book, *Saraban: A Chef’s Journey Through Persia* – co-authored with her ex-husband, chef and restaurateur Greg Malouf – is full of stories about warm, welcoming locals. The beautifully illustrated hardcover is part travelogue, part cookbook and part coffee-table collectible. But it’s all heart.

*Saraban* is clearly a passion project for Lucy and Greg, one of the food world’s most fruitful



collaborative teams.

The pair’s romantic union may be over, but their creative partnership is thriving. The former couple, who were married for five years, wrote their first cookbook, *Arabesque*, in 1999 while they were still together. Lucy was an investment analyst whose passion for the plate led her to try her hand at food writing. Greg was an Australian-born, Lebanese chef known as “the master of



## Shaved cucumber and pomegranate salad

### INGREDIENTS serves 6

- 6 Lebanese cucumbers, peeled
- 3 tbsp vegetable oil
- 60 g flaked almonds
- seeds from ½ pomegranate
- 2 tbsp shredded mint leaves
- 2 tbsp shredded chervil sprigs
- 2 tbsp snipped chives in 2-cm lengths
- juice of ½ lemon
- 2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 80 g creamy feta, crumbled
- sea salt
- freshly ground black pepper

- 1 Using a vegetable peeler, shave the cucumber flesh into long strips, being careful not to include any seeds. Discard the seedy core. Tip the shavings into a colander set on a plate and refrigerate for 10 minutes.
- 2 Meanwhile, heat the vegetable oil in a frying pan over low heat and fry the almonds until golden brown. Drain briefly on paper towels.
- 3 Combine the shaved cucumber with the pomegranate seeds and herbs in a large mixing bowl. Whisk the lemon juice and extra-virgin olive oil together and pour over the salad. Scatter on the feta and crisp almonds, then season with salt and pepper and toss everything together gently.



## Yogurt baked fish with walnut-herb crumbs

### INGREDIENTS serves 6

- 1 kg unsalted butter, for greasing
- firm white fish fillet, skin removed
- sea salt
- freshly ground black pepper
- rice and fresh herbs, to serve

### WALNUT-HERB CRUMBS

- 150 g fresh bread crumbs
- 150 g shelled walnuts, coarsely chopped and sieved
- ¼ cup shredded flat-leaf parsley leaves
- ¼ cup shredded tarragon leaves or dill sprigs
- 90 g unsalted butter, melted

### YOGURT SAUCE

- 250 g thick natural yogurt
- ½ tsp corn flour
- 1 large egg
- 1 small shallot, finely diced

- 2 tbsp finely chopped chives
- juice of ½ lime
- 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- sea salt
- freshly ground black pepper

- 1 Preheat the oven to 350° F. Lightly butter a baking dish just large enough to fit the fish comfortably.
- 2 To make the walnut-herb crumbs, combine the ingredients thoroughly in a bowl.
- 3 To make the yogurt sauce, whisk the yogurt with the corn flour and egg. Stir in the shallot, chives, lime juice and oil and season lightly with salt and pepper.
- 4 Remove any stray bones from the fish, then cut the fillet into 6 even pieces. Season the fish lightly all over with salt and pepper and arrange in the baking dish.
- 5 Pour the yogurt sauce over the fish. Pack a generous layer of the walnut-herb crumbs on top of each piece of fish. Season lightly again and bake for 15-20 minutes, or until the topping is golden and crunchy and the fish is cooked through.
- 6 Serve immediately.

modern Middle Eastern food.” Classically trained, he honed his skills in kitchens across Europe and Asia. When he returned to his native Melbourne, he devoted himself to introducing exotic flavours to the local food scene. “At the time, the only Middle Eastern food that was around was the takeaway falafels and kebabs,” says Lucy. “People didn’t really know much about the cuisine and he changed that.”

Lucy and Greg’s first book became a classic for fans of Middle Eastern fare, winning the Best Australian Cookbook at the 2000 World Food Media Awards. “We have complementary talents,” Lucy says. “The food recipes are Greg’s interpretations, often tweaked a little bit to be more accessible. My role is to act as the conduit.”

Accolades and opportunities poured in. And so, when the couple decided to divorce, they continued creating cookbooks as amicable exes, publishing three more exploring the cuisines ▶

# Pistachio-sour cherry nougat



**INGREDIENTS** makes 750 g

140 g	unsalted shelled pistachios, roughly chopped
250 g	dried sour cherries, roughly chopped
50 g (2-3)	egg whites, at room temperature
380 g	caster sugar
120 g	liquid glucose
100 ml	water
230 g	honey

**1** Preheat the oven to 230° F. Scatter the pistachios and dried cherries onto a baking tray and put them into the oven to warm while you make the nougat. It's important that the nuts and dried fruit are warm when added to the nougat mixture or it will seize up and be unworkable.

**2** Prepare all the ingredients: put the egg whites into the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with a whisk; put the sugar, liquid glucose and water into a saucepan; put the honey into another small saucepan. Line a baking tray with edible rice paper or parchment paper.

**3** Begin cooking the honey over medium heat and measure the temperature with a candy thermometer. When the temperature reaches 108° C (225° F), begin whisking the egg whites on medium-high speed. Continue cooking the honey until it reaches 120° C (248° F), by which time the egg whites should have reached the stiff-peak stage. Turn off the mixer and take the honey off the heat.

**4** Now begin gently heating the sugar, glucose and water until the sugar has dissolved, then increase the heat and bring to a boil.

**5** Meanwhile, turn the electric mixer back on low speed and mix the hot honey into the egg whites. When incorporated, increase the speed to high.

**6** Continue whisking until the boiling sugar syrup reaches 155° C (311° F). Slow the speed of the mixer down again and pour in the boiling sugar syrup slowly and carefully until incorporated. Increase the speed of the mixer again and whisk for 3 minutes.

**7** Turn off the mixer and, working quickly, take the warm fruit and nuts out of the oven and tip them into the nougat. Fold in by hand as quickly as you can, then scrape into the prepared baking tray. Smooth out the nougat with a large, strong spatula into a rough rectangle, about 3 cm deep – don't try to make it fit the shape of the tray. The nougat will be very stiff to work with, but try to make the surface as even as possible. Use a rolling pin if you like.

**8** Cover with a second sheet of rice paper or parchment paper. Rest overnight, then cut into portions and store in an airtight container.

of Morocco, Turkey, Lebanon and Syria.

The pair – who have now both remarried – focused their fifth project on Iranian food and culture. They spent nine weeks travelling through the country, spending nights under the stars in desert villages and riding ancient trade routes that once made up the Silk Road, where the only signs of life were groups of dusty camels. Other days were passed on streets swarming with pilgrims on their way to gold-trimmed shrines, or at bazaars packed with walnuts, sour oranges, pomegranates, freshly picked saffron and fish from the Caspian

Sea. “It was a bit like being thrown back to a time when travel was an adventure and people were really journeying in unknown lands,” Lucy says.

Since very few Westerners visit the region, it was almost impossible to dig up information before the trip, and so Lucy and Greg were forced to rely on the kindness of strangers when they arrived in the country. “We found that the Iranian people were incredibly welcoming and hospitable,” she says. “Everybody likes to talk about food. People are very happy to talk about their favourite dishes.”



*Saraban: A Chef's Journey Through Persia* chronicles food writer Lucy Malouf and chef Greg Malouf's adventures in Iran. In this gorgeous volume,

the globetrotting foodies explore the country's culture and cuisine. Recipes are organized by typical courses: small dishes of fresh herbs, cheese and flatbread, followed by salads and pickles, stews, grilled meats and delicate sweets. These delicious dishes are interlaced with travel tales, stunning photos and accounts of Persian history. *Saraban* is more than a cookbook – it's a fascinating glimpse into a world that's often shrouded in mystery.