



**A FEAST OF LEBANESE-STYLE HOME COOKING**

**COMPTOIR**

**LIBANAIS**

**TONY KITOUS  
& DAN LEPARD**



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Fried aubergine with pomegranate molasses

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Natural pickle brine  
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Pickled turnip and beetroot

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Frozen yoghurt

Pumpkin, sesame and labneh tart

Plum cheesecake

Lebanese date pastries

Date jam

Fig jam

## **DRINKS**

Pomegranate and orange blossom lemonade

Fresh lemon and lime lemonade

Rose lemonade

Lebanese wines and arak

Lebanese coffee

Mint tea

## **THE AUTHORS**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## About the Book

Comptoir Libanais restaurants are the most passionate provider of Lebanese and North African food blending traditional Arabic cooking with modern flavours to create wonderful easy to prepare dishes from Mezze and salads, meat and fish, breads, pastries and desserts.

Using readily-available ingredients and basic kitchen equipment *Comptoir Libanais* contains eighty recipes for quickly prepared, healthy dishes that can be adapted for any occasion using shortcuts and skills to make impressive food quickly and simply.

## About the Authors

For over a decade Tony Kitous has been Britain's most fanatical advocate of Lebanese and North African food. Quietly spoken and inspiring his restaurants were the first in London to merge traditional Arabic cooking with easy contemporary eating, smartly taking ideas from the southern and eastern Mediterranean and transforming them into dishes both approachable and welcoming.

With this his first book he brings his fast-paced and simple approach to the home cook, using evocative flavours and delicate textures inspired by the best food of the region.

Dan Lepard is an award-winning baker, food writer and photographer. His books include *Short and Sweet*, *Baking With Passion*, *The Handmade Loaf* (author and photographer) and, as a contributor, *The Cook's Book* and the *Dictionnaire Universel du Pain*. His other photography credits include *Hawksmoor at Home* and *Made in Italy*. Dan also writes for the BBC and Sainsbury's Magazine and his irresistible weekly column in the Guardian Weekend magazine has brought him a huge and loyal following.



# List of Recipes

Almond-crusted squid, with sumac mayonnaise

Baked sambusak with potato, cheese

Black seed and halloumi flatbreads

Braised chicken with beans

Broad bean dip

Bulgar salad with fresh peas and mint

Chicken wings

Chilli paste

Chilli-marinated king prawns

Cinnamon-marinated quail

Comptoir hummus

Comptoir hummus, step by step

Comptoir kofta hot dog

Comptoir kofta hot dog, step by step

Comptoir Libanais za'atar mix

Comptoir tomato and halloumi salad

Comptoir tomato and halloumi salad, step by step

Courgette fritters

Cumin-braised neck of lamb with baby okra

Cured beef with cheese

Date jam

Falafel

Falafel, step by step

Fatayer with cheese and spinach

Fattoush with pomegranate molasses dressing

Feta and za'atar omelette

Fig jam

Fresh figs or pears with halloumi and rocket

Fresh lemon and lime lemonade

Fried aubergine with pomegranate molasses

Fried aubergine with yoghurt, crispy onions and toasted pitta

Fried courgettes, with yoghurt, tahini and garlic

Fried sea bass with tahini and rice

Frozen yoghurt

Full Lebanese breakfast

Garlic sauce

Grilled aubergine with feta

Grilled aubergines with oil, garlic and mint

Home-made tahini paste

Kibbeh

Labneh

Labneh balls preserved in olive oil

Labneh with beetroot

Labneh with black olives and mint

Labneh with vegetables

Labneh with za'atar (or herbs)

Lamb and pistachio kofta



Lamb kibbeh filling  
Lamb's tongue salad  
Lebanese coffee  
Lebanese date pastries  
Lebanese tortilla with sausages  
Lebanese wines and arak  
Leeks with tahini  
Lentil soup  
  
Meatballs  
Mini lamb flatbreads  
Mint tea  
Moussaka with tahini  
  
Natural pickle brine  
  
Octopus salad with chilli  
  
Pan-fried shawarma  
Pickled cucumber  
Pickled turnip and beetroot  
Pitta bread  
Pitta bread, step by step  
Plum cheesecake  
Pomegranate and orange blossom lemonade  
Pomegranate molasses-marinated salmon  
Pomegranate sauteed chicken livers  
Potato fritter, filled with spiced lamb  
Pumpkin kibbeh

Pumpkin soup

Pumpkin, sesame and labneh tart

Rakakat with chicken and sumac

Rice with vermicelli

Roasted peppers, nuts, chilli and cumin

Rose lemonade

Rose marzipan stuffed dates with yoghurt

Saj bread

Sambusak filled with cheese and mint

Sambusak or fatayer pastry

Sesame- and black-seed crusted goat's cheese with mint

Smoked aubergine purée, with garlic, tahini and mint

Spiced baked fish

Spiced fried potatoes

Spiced fried potatoes, step by step

Spiced minced lamb with tomato, courgettes and aubergines

Stuffed aubergines

Stuffed vine leaves

Tabbouleh

Tahini butter buns

Tahini sauce

Tomato-crust potatoes

Warm lentil purée with onions

Yoghurt, chilli and dried mint sauce

Za'atar flatbreads



# COMPTOIR

LIBANAIS

A FEAST OF LEBANESE-STYLE  
HOME COOKING





**COMPTOIR**  
LIBANAIS

TONY KITOUS  
& DAN LEPARD

  
preface







# *Tony Kitous*

*Look, I am not a chef and I don't want to pretend that I am. I'm a self-taught, passionate home cook who adores Lebanese food. My love of Lebanese food is very simple. I enjoy sharing good food: food that's healthy, delicious and, above all, simple and honest. And that's what this book is about. I wanted to share my passion, and I honestly believe that once you get close to Lebanese food, you'll want to share it with your family and friends, and you'll get hooked on it too.*

YOU DON'T NEED TO BE A CHEF TO cook Comptoir Libanais dishes. This is food to enjoy: it's simple, it's fun and it's easy to make yourself. It's a way of eating that I hope you'll want to embrace and make part of your lifestyle. It's friendly, it's often vegetarian, and above all it's affordable.

If I go back to when I was about 14 or 15, I didn't really have dreams for the future. I was a street boy. I was the type of boy who would go and hitch-hike, taking myself to the seaside, which was an hour away from where I grew up. I'd wake up and tell my dad I was going to visit my neighbour's family. My father naively believed me, so I'd hitch-hike to the seaside, then call him and say that my neighbours had asked me to stay for a week or two. Sometimes I'd stay a month and just call my dad and say, 'they want me to stay longer', while I was really squatting in lots of different friends' houses at the seaside.

My holidays were my adventure time, and I had always been a boy who wanted to experience life. My father came from a very humble family and I couldn't rely on him giving me pocket money, as that sort of money was almost non-existent when I was growing up. I grew up living next to one of the biggest football stadiums in Algeria and at that time my city had one of the best football teams in the country, and whenever they played it was a sell-out. So, when I woke up in the morning during match time, I'd buy 50 or 60 tickets, then I'd sell them back and make some money. I was brought up on the street and I wanted to survive. I used to make street food, like sandwiches with merguez and fries and a little harissa, and I would go and sell them at the football matches. My mother was my accomplice, she used to help me out making the sandwiches, and obviously my father didn't know- that as he didn't want people to think that his son sold things on the street. I was always independent and someone who had summer jobs. That has always been my life. I was never dependent on my father because it wasn't an option.



I arrived in London when I was 18 years old, and I came here on holiday. Yet 25 years later it still feels like I'm on holiday. I just love what I do so for me it's been one long holiday and I've just been working from day one.

People ask me if I was shocked by British food when I first arrived. But right from the start I appreciated whatever home cooking I found in front of me. I was on holiday, enjoying myself, and like any student I was trying to find myself, eating different kinds of foods, travelling around London trying to explore it and find my place. At first I lived everywhere, staying in north then south London, until I eventually settled in the west.

I came to London with £70 in my pocket, and with that money I managed to find work and start my career. At no stage did I feel it was difficult. I came here with no expectations, it was simply a holiday. I remember the day I

arrived, and my first night sleeping at Victoria station. I remember it very well because there was a promotion for chocolate bars which they were handing out for free in the station. That's something we definitely didn't have back home: we don't give out free chocolates in the street. And I remember my friend and I getting two huge bags of the chocolates and we lived on them for a couple of weeks. And then for the following few weeks I was living on kebabs from the Turkish restaurants in north London. Looking back, it sounds crazy but that's where my fascination with food and restaurants began. Sometimes the food you try isn't all that good, but I ate everything, and a voice in my head says, 'I can make this better'. Perhaps it was my mother's influence, letting me think that with hard work and really good-tasting food you can excite customers. That's what I've always strived for. And from those early days in London it has been work, work, work. But delicious work.

*With this book Tony Kitous brings his fast-paced and simple approach to the home cook, using evocative flavours and delicate textures inspired by the best food of the region.*

To my dearest Dad, Haj Chabane Kitous 'Allah Yarhamak'.  
Rest in peace. Just hoping you are next to me today...  
Missing you so much. This book is for you. Your son. **TK**



# *Introducing Comptoir Libanais*

THERE ARE TWO THINGS ABOUT me that everyone knows. I love food and enjoy making food, and I love people too. I'm the type of guy who just loves meeting people, talking to people wherever I am. Looking back at my childhood, selling those sandwiches outside the stadium gates was a sort of 'hospitality' and that interaction with people was just as important as the product itself. You can't just say, 'here's a sandwich, give me your money'. You have to challenge people with flavours and textures, open their minds to new tastes, and serve it with charm. Even if you're on the street you have to greet them as if you're in your own restaurant or your own home.

*'Keep your approach fresh and light, allow ingredients to retain their natural flavours'*

Why did I open Comptoir Libanais? I knew that if I was to stay in this country I'd better save up and open my first restaurant. And at 22, I did. It took four years of hard saving, some mistakes and a mountain of support from friends, but I got a place off the ground and my approach to restaurant food started to evolve.

I've always had in the back of my mind the idea of doing a simple version of casual Lebanese dining, essentially a Lebanese canteen. It was just a matter of time before I was ready to do it, and when the time was right I opened

Comptoir Libanais. I took the idea right back to basics and focused utterly on what I really wanted, what my friends wanted, and made that the goal. My vision of Lebanese food, which inspired Comptoir, is very much good food, good atmosphere, good design, and good value. So when we started Comptoir we made sure every single item, from the design to the lighting, the displays on the counter, the elements that made up our souk or retail bazaar, had relevance to Lebanese culture and to Comptoir. It was very important to me that we created something that wasn't pretentious, but was inviting, simple, and had something for everyone.

You can't do big ideas on your own, and it wasn't until I met Chaker Hanna, my partner in Comptoir, that we really began to create places to eat that were both friendly and relaxed, but with a huge emphasis on bold flavours and freshness. Chaker brought a calm to my craziness, made me think about taking steps towards goals and kept me sane and ordered when we had those days that almost seemed too difficult. And we share a passion for food. Chaker and I both eat at Comptoir daily, not just to ensure it's good but because — quite honestly — we love it. It just seems like the best place to meet and spend time with friends.



Living in London for the last 25 years has given me the opportunity to understand London culture, British culture and European culture. But since I arrived here at such a young age I've wanted to stay in touch with my Arabic culture. I hope what we've done at Comptoir makes Lebanese food and culture more accessible for the European customer, whether it's from our design, or our service, or simply the attractiveness of the whole selection of food we present.

That's also what this book is about. Don't worry about where your inspiration comes from, or get distracted by having to search for the most authentic or most traditional Lebanese ingredients. Keep your approach fresh and light, allow ingredients to retain their natural flavours and, most of all, enjoy the food you cook. I hope you will enjoy cooking these dishes as much as I've enjoyed eating them, but above all,

hope that they'll inspire you to play around with Lebanese flavours and techniques and have fun. **TK**

# Lebanese food by Kamal Mouzawak

*Kamal Mouzawak is the founder of Souk el Tayeb, an extraordinary farmers' market in Beirut that brings together the produce grown by farmers and families from all over Lebanon. His world-renowned restaurants, Tawlet in Beirut, and Tawlet Ammiq on the eastern slopes of Mount Lebanon, invite women from the villages to take charge of their kitchens with their home recipes, farm ingredients and rare skills.*

WHEN WE TALK ABOUT TONY'S COMPTOIR LIBANAIS AND ITS MIX OF Lebanese, Mediterranean and North African cooking and influences, people often start to talk about food as being 'Arabic' as an adjective. And I always wonder what that means. Is it being Muslim? I'm not Muslim myself and so much in Lebanon isn't Muslim. There are many Christian and Jewish people, so I don't think you can define Arabic food by religion. Is it the language? Well I do speak Arabic but that doesn't mean I have lots in common with a North African or a person from the Arabic Gulf. Not all French or Spanish people have something in common as the same language doesn't necessarily mean they have the same background or traditions.

I think Arabic food is more defined by a region divided into three very distinct parts. The whole of the Eastern Mediterranean is one part, so southern Turkey, the coasts of Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, or what we call the Levant.

Then there is the Arabic Gulf, which has a totally different climate. And thirdly there is North Africa.







When we talk about Lebanon we're talking about a very small country: 200km of coastline along the Eastern Mediterranean and 50km going inland, with Beirut in the centre of that. And nearly all Beiruti come from villages outside the city in a similar way to that in which many New Yorkers or Londoners come from other places. But while many people in London or New York might have travelled a long distance from their first home to the city, in Lebanon you would only need to travel a maximum of 150km and you would be back in your village. And for many Lebanese

their place of origin is the place they associate with the country's best food. The ingredients are the most flavoursome, and like Proust's madeleine, where food, nostalgia and sentimentalism meld, their mother's cooking and their village's food and produce is always the best.

Is Lebanon a melting pot of different cultures? It's half Christian, and half Muslim; half city people and half mountain people; half people looking to the east and half looking to the west. Geographically it's at a crossroads: if you look at it on a map it's like the belly of the Eastern Mediterranean. So many different civilizations and influences have left their mark on the tastes, traditions and politics, and all of these things translate into a very diverse cuisine.

What has changed about Lebanese food over the last 30 years or so is the attitudes to food and cultural traditions. During the civil war (1975-1991) the priorities were about surviving rather than safeguarding traditions or the environment. Following this, Lebanon looked to international trends and fast food, fast consumption and fast agricultural methods began to proliferate. But in more recent times the Lebanese have rediscovered and repossessed their heritage, and we have seen the resurgence of traditional food production methods, cooking styles and dishes - as well as mounneh, the traditional method of food preservation. You now see more handcrafted food on sale, fruit conserves made with authentic home methods, tomato pastes cooked and bottled on small family farms, unusual varieties of olives cured in small batches rather than vast factory containers. This is what excites and inspires me today.

For me the dish that typifies the spirit of the Lebanese kitchen is tabbouleh. I have a journalist friend who compared tabbouleh to Lebanon. You can have a salad where you can see the tomato and the parsley and can