



# MAROC

In the second part of our series on North African food, **Lucas Hollweg** and





# STARS

**Momo** create couscous to die for — and get into stews in true Moroccan style

**M**omo comes over enigmatic when asked what makes the perfect couscous. "What makes it? I can't tell you. It's like asking what makes ze perfect ragout. Ze grain needs to be light and soft in ze mouth. Ze sauce needs to be perfectly mixed with ze vegetables. Ze meat needs to be perfectly cooked. Zat's what makes ze perfect dish." So there you have it.

Of course, as the man who made North African cuisine glamorous in the UK, Momo should know. Couscous is one of the classic dishes of the Moroccan culinary canon. The other is the tagine, a stew of meat and vegetables cooked in a conical pot. Every family and region has its own

variation — and all of them think theirs is the best. Tagine of chicken with preserved lemons and olives, and lamb with prunes, are to be found on every restaurant menu, though fish, vegetable and even rabbit versions are not uncommon. In the Sous plain, south of the High Atlas mountains, ground-squirrel tagine is regarded a particular delicacy.

None of it is fast food, but this cuisine is based on different rhythms to those in the west. As Momo says: "Here, time doesn't matter. It is something people have lots of."

## LE VRAI COUSCOUS WITH VEGETABLES AND LAMB

This isn't as laborious as it looks. Have the ingredients ready in advance, then just

add them to the pot at the appropriate moment. Couscous is traditionally made in a *couscoussier*, a rounded pot with a steamer on top. A large saucepan and steamer are fine as a substitute, provided the holes of the steamer aren't too large. You can make a chicken version in almost exactly the same way. Just leave out the cumin, and cook for 30 minutes less. Vary the root vegetables according to what's in season. You can use easy-cook couscous for this recipe (follow the instructions on the packet), although the texture and taste won't be the same.

500g medium-grade couscous

Salt

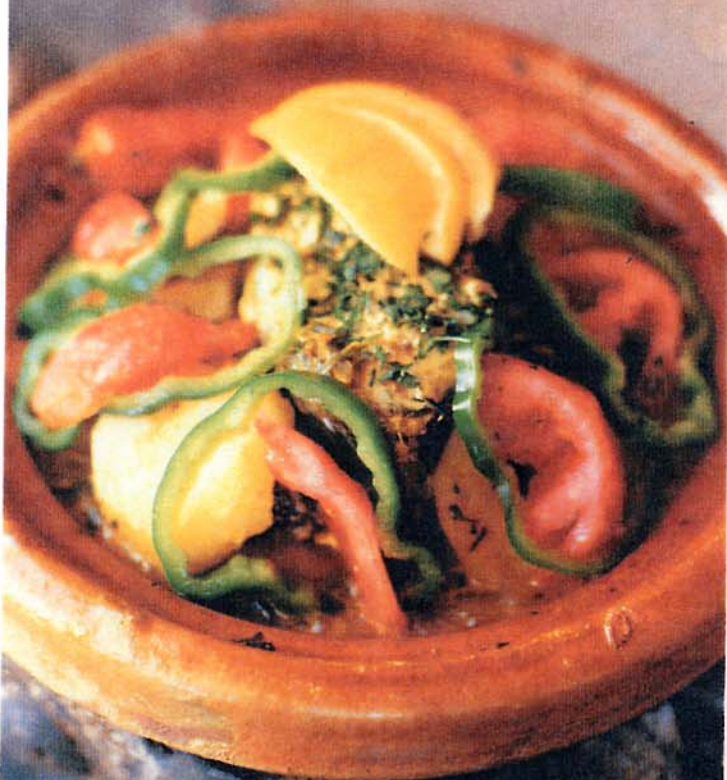
Vegetable oil ▶



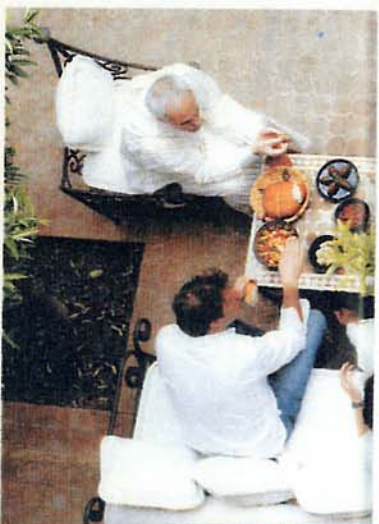
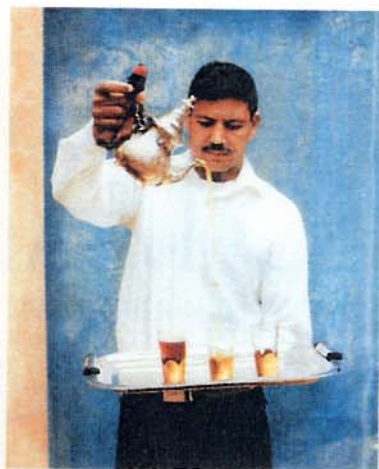
Main picture Le vrai couscous with vegetables and lamb. This picture Mourad Mazouz (Momo), right, and Lucas Hallweg talk tagines

Photographs by Brent Darby

# cooking



Main picture: Fish tagine. Right: Mbro's party sample. Nardine Akolai's delights. Top right: Chicken tagine with preserved lemon and olives.



- 1½kg lamb shoulder, cut into 150g pieces
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 2 tsp ras-el-hanout
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp paprika
- 3 medium white onions, sliced
- 8 tomatoes, skinned and chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 tbsp coriander, chopped
- 1 tbsp parsley, chopped
- 2 knobs of butter
- 250g carrots, peeled, halved and cut into 5cm chunks
- 250g turnips, cut into chunks
- 250g courgettes, peeled, halved and cut into 5cm chunks
- 250g pumpkin, cut into large chunks
- 1 small cabbage, roughly chopped

**Step 1** Spread out the couscous in a large plate or bowl. Add a generous pinch of salt and a splash of oil, then rub into the grain until all of it is coated. Add a handful of water and stir in until absorbed, separating the grains with your fingers. Add a couple more handfuls, letting it absorb as you mix. Continue until the grain has roughly doubled in volume. It should feel damp, but not wet. Separate any lumps with your fingers.

**Step 2** Heat 3 tbsp of oil in a saucepan, add the lamb and cook until lightly brown on all sides. Add a good pinch of salt, some pepper and all the spices and stir.

**Step 3** Add the onions and cook over a low heat for 10-15 minutes until softened. Add the tomatoes, garlic and herbs, plus enough water to cover the meat. Bring to the boil, then reduce to a simmer. Place the steamer on top, sealing the edge of the saucepan

with foil. Fill the steamer with the couscous. Wait until the steam comes out of the steamer, then cook for 15 minutes.

**Step 4** Remove the steamer and spread the couscous onto a large plate. Leave the saucepan to simmer. Add a knob of butter to the couscous and rub in to get rid of any lumps. Add 100ml water, mix in until absorbed, then return to the steamer.

**Step 5** Add the carrots and turnips to the pot, replace the steamer and cook for 15 minutes. Then add the courgettes, pumpkin and cabbage, replace the steamer and cook for 10 minutes more.

**Step 6** Empty the couscous onto the large plate, add the second knob of butter and fluff in with a fork. Form into a mound, then make a well in the middle and put in the meat. Remove the vegetables and arrange around the edge of the mound. Use some of the stock from the pot to moisten





the couscous, then serve the rest separately in a bowl for people to add as they wish.

#### FISH TAGINE

Serves 4

- 2 tbsp fresh coriander, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, chopped
- 2 tsp paprika
- 1 tsp cumin, plus extra
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large preserved lemon, or two small ones, halved
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 4 x 250g fish steaks (sea bass, cod or haddock), cut across the fish
- 3 carrots, sliced
- 4 potatoes, sliced
- 2 tomatoes, sliced
- 2 green peppers, deseeded and sliced
- 2 cabbage leaves

Mix together the coriander, garlic, spices, oil, preserved lemon and lemon juice. Place the fish in a shallow bowl and pour over the marinade. Leave in the fridge for 2 hours.

Blanch the carrot and potato slices in boiling water for 4 minutes, then drain.

Remove the fish from the marinade (keep this), scraping off any bits. Place the carrot pieces on the bottom of a tagine pot or lidded casserole, place the fish on top, then tuck the potato slices around and on top of it. Do the same with the tomatoes and peppers. Add the lemon from the marinade, sprinkle with a good pinch more of cumin, then place the cabbage leaves over the top. Add 100ml of water to the marinade and pour into the pot. Cover and cook gently on the hob for 25-30 minutes.

#### CHICKEN TAGINE WITH PRESERVED LEMON AND OLIVES

Serves 4

- 1 large preserved lemon or 2 small ones
- 2 onions, sliced
- 2 garlic cloves
- 3 tbsp fresh coriander, chopped
- Pinch of saffron threads
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- Olive oil
- 1½kg chicken pieces, on the bone (a mixture of legs and breast or wings)
- 125g green olives (if salty, blanch for 2 minutes in boiling water)
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

Chop one half of the preserved lemon (or one of the small ones) and, in a large bowl, mix together with half the onions, the garlic, coriander, saffron, ginger and a splash of oil. Add the chicken pieces and mix so the meat is well coated. Marinate in the fridge for at least 2 hours, or overnight.

Remove the chicken from the marinade (keep this). Heat some oil in a frying pan and brown the meat on all sides. Add the marinade and the remaining onions and cook with the chicken for 5-10 minutes

until the onions start to soften. Season.

Transfer to a tagine pot or lidded casserole, add the olives and remaining lemon, cut into strips, plus 300ml water. Cover and cook gently on the hob for 40 minutes. Taste, season and add more coriander before serving if you want. Serve with bread to mop up the juices.

#### LAMB TAGINE WITH PRUNES AND ALMONDS

This can also be made with quinces or pears instead of prunes.

Serves 6

- 3 onions, sliced
- 3 tbsp fresh coriander, chopped
- 3 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- 2 tsp ras-el-hanout
- 3 tsp ground cinnamon
- Olive oil
- 1½kg boneless shoulder of lamb, cut into 100g pieces
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 150g sugar
- 4 cinnamon sticks, broken up (optional)
- 300g prunes
- 100g almonds, preferably whole, blanched

Mix half the onions, the herbs, garlic and ginger with 1 tsp each of the ras-el-hanout, the ground cinnamon and 1tbsp of oil. Add the lamb and turn until coated. Marinate in the fridge for at least 2 hours, or overnight.

Remove the meat from the marinade (keep this). Heat some oil in a frying pan and lightly brown the meat on all sides. Season, then add 2 tbsp of the sugar, the remaining 1 tsp of ras-el-hanout and the cinnamon sticks, if using. Stir over the heat for a few minutes, then add the marinade and the rest of the onions. Transfer to a tagine or lidded casserole, add 300ml water, bring to the boil, reduce the heat, cover and cook on the hob for 45 minutes.

When the meat is cooked, remove from the heat, pour off 100ml of the juice into a small saucepan. Keep the tagine warm. Add the rest of the sugar and the ground cinnamon, and then the prunes. Bring to the boil, then poach over a medium heat for 20 minutes until the prunes are soft. Tuck these around the meat, together with the almonds. Bubble up the prune cooking juice for 10 minutes until syrupy, then spoon 2 tbsp of this over the tagine to serve. ■

Mourad Mazouz is the owner of Momo, 25 Heddon Street, W1 (020 7434 4040), and at 2nd floor, Selfridges (020 7318 3620). Recipes were provided by his chef, Nordine Akala. Shot at Dar Uqaina, La Palmeraie, Marrakesh (01252 790222, www.luxurypropertyrentals.com). The house also runs cookery courses in winter and autumn. Royal Air Maroc flies direct to Marrakesh and Casablanca (020 7439 4361, www.royalairmaroc.com).



## A NOTE ON INGREDIENTS

Don't be put off by the long lists: most are spices and seasonings. One of the essentials is ras-el-hanout, a musky amber-coloured mix used in Moroccan cooking. A blend of anything from 10 to 100 herbs, spices and flowers, it is sold in Middle Eastern shops and Sainsbury's, which stocks the Pioneers brand (£2.50 for 10 to 27g) in its Special Selection. If you can't find it, try Seasoned Pioneers (0800 068 2348, www.seasonedpioneers.co.uk).