

# Cooking With Love



Linking food with culture, Café Clock, a cookery school in the heart of Fez, chaperones the gastronome from recipe to souq; from preparation to plate



Time is of the utmost importance at the charmingly named Café Clock situated in the gastronomic capital of Morocco. The sympathetically restored 250-year-old courtyard house in Fez is home to a successful café and cookery school, owned by Englishman Mike Richardson, whose aim has been to create a cultural hub for a vibrant community. A former maître d' at London's prestigious Ivy and Wolseley restaurants Richardson has established a cookery school with a difference; one that aims to revive the art of traditional Moroccan cookery with the help of Souad Majjda who has been leading classes in the kitchens there for four years.

'I learned how to cook at home from my mother,' she says. 'We're from Nador on the Mediterranean coast, and she loved to cook seafood. After I got married and moved to Fez, my mother-in-law taught me to prepare the traditional dishes.'

Moroccan cuisine has a long and exciting history. As different societies settled in the country, so their culinary influences impacted upon the community. The Berbers

## TAGINE DESIGN

The tagine is the funnel-shaped, two-piece, clay pot used in North African cuisine to create the dish of the same name. The flat base contains the meat and the cover is so designed to promote the return of all condensation to the bottom. With the cover removed, the base can be taken to the table for serving

introduced the tagine, the Jewish community enjoyed caramelized fruits, jams, preserved meats and vegetables. The Arabs brought couscous and introduced the shawaya (traditional barbecue). Northern Morocco was a Spanish colony resulting in paella and churros lingering there, and the French were responsible for Moroccans' incredible love of cakes and breads.

It is, however, the use of spices in particular combinations such as chermoula – a marinade to flavour fish and meat and ras al hanout – a blend of about a dozen spices particular to Morocco, including cardamom, cloves, cinnamon and chilli, as well as the inclusion of ginger, turmeric and coriander into many dishes that makes Moroccan cooking unique. 'My favourite dish is grilled sardines marinated in a chermoula mix – it makes me think of home,' Majjda enthuses. 'And fresh olive oil is very important in our cuisine. It comes from the many olive groves in the Fez area. Then there is the ferran [community oven] where we take our bread to be baked, along



01 For the last four years Souad Majjda has been leading cooking classes in the kitchen at Café Clock





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SOUAD MAIJDA



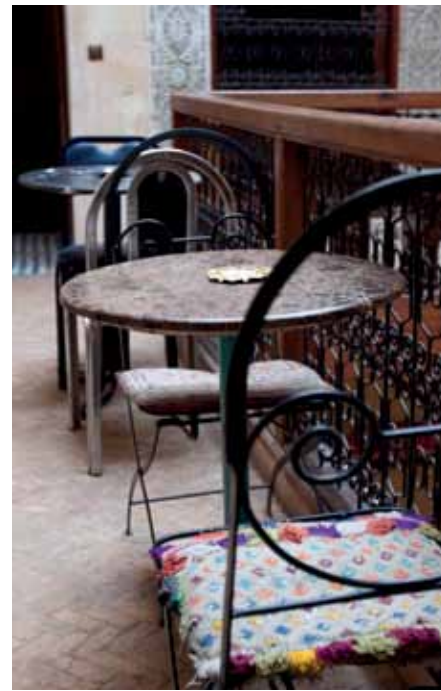
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#### VITAL INGREDIENTS

**Chermoula:** a mixture of garlic, coriander, dried parsley, cumin, paprika, salt and pepper, oil, lemon juice, pickled lemons. It is the original seasoning for grilling meat and fish in Moroccan cuisine.

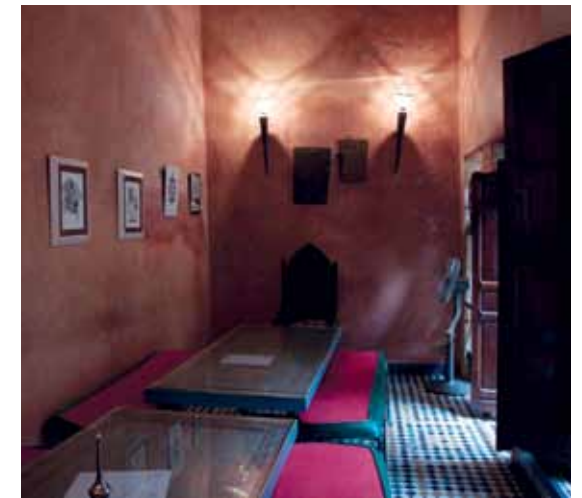
**Warka:** thin pastry sheets (essential for b'stella) made using a heated, head-shaped metal mould. They are generally purchased ready-made, as the skills needed to make them are known only to a few

**Tagine:** named after the clay vessel it's cooked in, it simmers in the pot for eight hours

with pumpkin and our tagine. Tagine is a meat stew cooked in a clay vessel of the same name directly on coals or over a gas flame.

'We adopted Middle Eastern dishes and put our own twist on them,' she tells us. 'Moroccan food has more colour than that of many other Arab countries, because of the vegetables and spices we use. Our cuisine is also famous for combining sweet and savoury flavours. For example, our wonderful b'stella is a traditional dish made from pigeon or sometimes chicken, egg, cinnamon and sugar encased in warka (thin pastry sheets) and cooked in the oven.'

Maijda firmly believes the core ingredient of any Moroccan dish is love. 'The best food comes from the heart,' she says. 'We show someone we care by preparing them a wonderful meal. I think it is very important never to forget who you are cooking for and how special they are to you. My passion for food comes from my mother and she has insisted that I pass it on to my children and everyone who comes to my classes.'



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This is such an important part of our culture and we don't want to lose it.'

Students at the cookery school learn, under Maijda's expert and often-humorous instruction, the essence of this tradition. During a typical one-day workshop, they go with her to the souq to bargain for fresh ingredients. Then Maijda will teach her cooking techniques and share her knowledge about the diversity of flavours. By mid afternoon the students will be enjoying the fruits of their labours – a three course feast.

Alternatively, Maijda offers a two-hour bread-baking workshop or a one-day patisserie workshop. 'I teach people to shop, to mix spices, to prepare and present food - all in the true Moroccan style,' Maijda explains. 'I also teach them how to adapt using the ingredients available to them in their home countries. And I tell them about the traditions of my country. I want to share as much of my culture as possible. At the end of the day, I want people to leave with a wonderful impression of Morocco and the people.'



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#### RED OR GREEN?

- Green Chermoula**
- 1 large handful fresh coriander, chopped (stalks removed)
  - 1 large handful fresh parsley, chopped (stalks removed)
  - 8 cloves garlic, crushed
  - 2-3 hot green chillies, finely chopped
  - 1 tsp sea salt
  - 50 ml olive oil
  - 50 ml lemon juice

- Red Chermoula**
- 1 large handful fresh coriander, chopped (stalks removed)
  - 1 large handful fresh parsley, chopped (stalks removed)
  - 8 cloves garlic, crushed
  - 1 tbsp bright red paprika
  - 1 tsp cumin, ground
  - 1 tsp black pepper, ground
  - 1 tsp sea salt
  - 50 ml olive oil
  - 50 ml lemon juice

Instructions – Combine all ingredients together in a bowl (or use a hand blender or food processor), cover and chill for at least an hour before using to let the flavours develop

