

Food eMag dxb

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**All the important dates and places for this year's massive
Dubai Food Festival**

By Sandy Dang www.gingerandscotch.com

Sometime last year, I heard through the food buzz that there was a new Emirati cookbook released and I attempted to get my hands on a copy. I know I have been a real slacker in regards to my Emirati Cooking Experiments and I had hoped that obtaining a new cookbook would breathe some life into my little project.

Sarareed by Chef Khulood Atiq is a cookbook of “Emirati cuisine from the sea to the desert” which refers to the inclusion of both coastal as well as desert (in-land) recipes. This bilingual cookbook contains over 80 recipes in English and Arabic. The book reads from right to left like most Arabic texts and has stunning photos of Emirati life and scenery as well as the food. The foreword explains a bit about Emirati hospitality including the important role that cardamom-infused coffee plays in that ritual.

An excerpt from the book: The book bears the name “Sarareed,” an authentic Emirati word, the singular form of which, “Sarroud” is used to describe the big, traditional Emirati mat, made of woven palm leaves, around which people gather to eat and on which food is placed.

For those who are not familiar with Emirati cuisine, the head note to many of the recipes includes beautiful descriptions of the dish and sometimes includes information about the origins, traditions, and history.

I felt mild disappointment in the fact that not all the recipes included an informative head note – for example, the recipe for Khabees. It’s obvious that it is a dessert because it’s in the dessert section but then the last part of the recipe says to serve for breakfast. Hmm...

One place where I felt a distinct void from the lack of any description was the recipe for *bzar* (also spelled “bezar”). Now I am no expert in Emirati cuisine but it seems to me that *bzar* is an essential spice mix that defines many Emirati dishes and I would have expected and loved to have seen a thorough description with historical notes on it.

Things I liked about the book besides the recipes and photographs: dishes popular during Ramadan were noted; the section at the end about Emirati traditions of hospitality (“receiving and honouring a guest with enormous generosity is considered a crucial part of Emirati heritage”); the section on Emirati cuisine terms and colloquial cuisine terms (i.e. dried limes = *loumi*, date essence = *Marees al Tamer*); and the section on cooking utensil names (i.e. *Dalla* = a coffee pot; *Tanour* = an oven used for cooking or grilling). I just wish the lists were alphabetized for easier referencing.



How did I fare in my Emirati cooking?

I settled on *Moadam Rubyan* (Soaked Prawns) from the coastal section (versus desert) because I just love seafood – especially prawns.

Emirati recipes are created with the idea of feeding a large host of people, not a two-adult household like Scotch and mine. So I had to cut this recipe by one third as the original called for 1 kg of rice which is just too much for us as a cup of uncooked rice (~1/4 kg) lasts us for many days!

Other modifications I made to the original recipe from Chef Khulood:

- I used cherry tomatoes instead of larger ones as that’s what I had in my fridge.
- I was short on time so did not use the fish *bzar* recipe as specified in the cookbook but a commercial one instead (the red “urban coastal” one from this post).
- In addition to the coastal *bzar* mixture, this recipe also called for *loumi* (dried small limes), fresh garlic, fresh green chilli, fresh coriander, turmeric, cinnamon, cumin, and coriander powder. I didn’t quite understand the recipe directions of leaving the

marinated shrimp “to dry in a pot” which I assumed was “to drain in a pot” so I used a colander over a bowl.

The other issue I ran into was the cooking of the rice – the instructions required me to “pour in some water until it covers the rice by 1 cm. Cover the pot, bring to a boil and then reduce the heat until the rice is cooked.” I was using Basmati rice, which normally I cook like Jasmine rice (1 part rice, 2 part water) and the results were always great. So the 1 cm reference in this recipe threw me off a little as it didn’t include cooking time and the proportions of water to rice didn’t seem right.

I followed the directions anyway but the rice was very under-cooked, so I added more water and cooked for 5 more minutes. It was still not right so I cooked for another 5 minutes. I was really worried that my shrimps would be totally overcooked.

The final result?

While the shrimp wasn’t too severely overcooked, it was still a little dry but tender. I can’t say I was wowed by the flavors from the first taste but after a few spoonfuls of rice, I began to appreciate the aroma of the spice mixture and I just loved the citrus notes from the *loumi*.

