

## BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES

## TRAVELING WITH JEWISH TASTE

**Chasing Smoke: Cooking Over Fire Around the Levant**

By Carol Goodman Kaufman / Special to the BJV



The Israeli husband and wife duo of chefs Sarit Packer and Itamar Srulovich are two very busy people. Not only have they founded three Middle Eastern restaurants in London, with a fourth about to launch this year, the couple also hosts a podcast, "Honey & Co: The Food Talks," on which influential guests from the food and drink industry talk about their life in food. And they write a weekly recipe column for FT Weekend Magazine. As if that were not enough, they also write cookbooks. Their first, *Honey and Co. Food From the Middle East*, won the Sunday Times Food Book of the Year.

Their fourth book is *Chasing Smoke: Cooking Over Fire Around the Levant* (Pavilion Books), for which Packer and Srulovich traveled the Mediterranean and Middle East to research, test, and chronicle some of the signature recipes from the peoples of the countries they visited. Whether from Egypt, Jordan, Greece, Turkey, or Israel, all of them are prepared over some form of fire.

Fair warning for kashrut observers: Fully half the dishes in this book are *treif*, so I did not test them. But those that aren't are absolutely worth making. And to my great surprise, one particular ingredient that I usually avoid plays a major role in some of them.

As you may recall, the torrents of rain we experienced this recent summer made outdoor grilling a dicey proposition, but keep your Weber grills ready because the end of that season doesn't necessarily mean the end of grilling. Fall's crisp weather is still amenable to outdoor cooking. However, this being the Berkshires, cold and snow will soon arrive. No worries, because the authors of *Chasing Smoke* offer a unique feature in their cookbook. They provide alternatives to outdoor grilling, using griddle and skillet.

There is one recipe, however, that calls for placing a large "clean, metal, lidded bin (or drum)" into a hole in the ground filled with hot coals, and cooking the contents for several hours. For that dish, the chefs say there is no alternative to that labor-intensive step. In fact, they write, "No way, Jose."

I've prepared one recipe from each section of the book to get a feel for (some of) the different methods of cooking over fire. First up in my little culinary marathon was "Chicken Shish in Sweet Confit Garlic Marinade." Although I'm a dark meat turkey girl, I'm not particularly fond of the dark meat in chicken thighs. However, in this dish the *pulkes* shone. The recipe calls for heating a head's worth of unpeeled garlic cloves in a pot of oil, then mashing the garlic with sea salt, pepper, and lemon zest. The result was aromatic and delicious.



Sarit Packer and Itamar Srulovich

Next on the agenda was an Egyptian dish, "Tuna Shish With Chermoula And Preserved Lemons." Chermoula is a relish made with a full bunch of cilantro. Now, for those of you who, like me, cannot tolerate the taste of cilantro, I have news. The garlic, parsley, and preserved lemon called for in this recipe actually moderate that soapy taste that we cilantro haters experience.

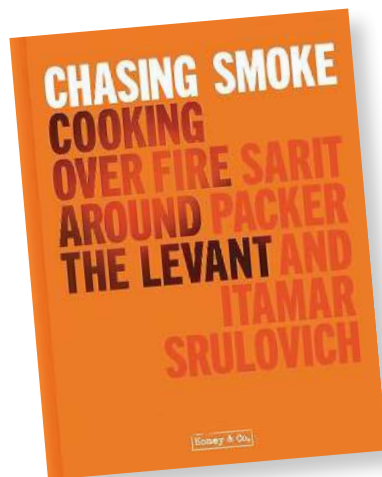
Before even considering making this dish, make sure that you have good-quality ingredients. I recommend using sushi-grade tuna to avoid getting stuck with tough fish. By the way, a little cultural translation is necessary here. The authors consistently use the term "coriander" in their list of ingredients. While coriander is the term the British (and this Israeli couple working in London) use to describe the herb, here in the U.S., we refer to fresh coriander as cilantro.

Calling for a variety of sizes, shapes, and colors of the fruit, the couple's "Tomato and Kashkaval Salad" garnered high praise from the family. Grilling caramelizes the tomatoes so that they become even sweeter than they are fresh from the garden, and the cheese provides an excellent, pungent counterpoint.

What's for dessert? "Grilled Stone Fruits with Rosemary and Rose Syrup" are great for finishing a summertime meal. As with the tomatoes, grilling the peaches,

plums, apricots, and cherries caramelizes the fruits and brings out their sweetness (especially if the fruit you have purchased is a bit sour) while giving a hint of smoke. The called-for sprigs of rosemary added to the grill a slight piney taste. The one ingredient that may cause you to balk is rose petals. If you spray your garden with insecticides, I would avoid those and simply use rose water, with one proviso: because it can be very strong, my suggestion here is to start with half the amount of prescribed rose water and then adjust to taste. Too much of it will make the fruit taste like perfume.

So many other recipes in this cookbook looked appetizing that I probably will be cooking well after filing this story.

**Tuna Shish With Chermoula and Preserved Lemons**

Makes 4 skewers (allow 2 per person for a meal)

With the holidays calling for intensive food prep, I suggest trying the Tuna Shish since it is the easiest to prepare. It also makes a really big impression.

## INGREDIENTS:

2 good-quality thick tuna steaks  
(about 14 ounces in total)  
Drizzle of olive oil, for brushing  
Flaky sea salt  
Freshly ground black pepper  
Juice of half a lemon

1 clove garlic  
½ red chilli  
1 bunch coriander, top part only  
½ bunch parsley, leaves picked  
Freshly ground black pepper  
½ teaspoon ground coriander\*  
About 1¾ ounces olive oil  
Freshly ground black pepper  
½ teaspoon ground coriander\*

## For the chermoula:

2 preserved lemons, skin only  
(pulp and seeds removed)

## DIRECTIONS:

The chefs like to make this chermoula by hand, chopping everything until very fine, then mixing it with the oil in a small bowl. You could use a pestle and mortar instead to pound the ingredients, in which case add the oil at the end once everything else is well combined.

Cut each tuna steak into four large cubes and thread two on each skewer. Brush well with olive oil, sprinkle with salt and pepper and place on a very hot grill to cook and char nice lines. Turn the skewers after a minute and repeat twice more to char the tuna cubes for a minute on each side. Some like the interior a little raw, but if you don't, simply cook for 30 seconds more on each side. Remove from the grill, douse with the lemon juice, then top with the chermoula.

To cook without a grill: Use a lightly oiled, preheated griddle pan on your stove and cook just as you would on the fire. Or you could simply use a non-stick frying pan.

**Carol Goodman Kaufman** has just published the second picture book in what is planned as a series about nature for young children. Written under the name Carolinda Goodman, *Pirate Ships and Shooting Stars* is written in rhyme, and its lively stanzas encourage young children to use their imaginations when looking up at the sky. From rainbows to constellations to pictures in the clouds, Kaufman believes there is much to see if only they lift their eyes.

In addition to her work for children, Kaufman also writes under her "real" name about food history (including for the *Berkshire Jewish Voice*), and her first novel, a murder mystery, will drop in 2023.

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