

EATING & DRINKING

IN MY KITCHEN

Adeena Sussman

The Tel Aviv-based author dishes on her seltzer habit, dinner-party strategies and the upside of cooking fails

LAST SUMMER, cookbook author Adeena Sussman packed up her New York apartment and made Tel Aviv her full-time home. She'd straddled two continents for about as many years during her long-distance courtship with Jay Shofet, now her husband. Things appear to be going swimmingly. The name of her new cookbook, "Sababa" (Avery), is Hebrew slang derived from Arabic that's come to mean "everything is awesome." It aptly describes Ms. Sussman's unfussy, generous style of cooking rooted in what's freshest at the market.

Indeed, the bounty and vibrant color of Carmel Market, a short walk from the Tel Aviv apartment where Ms. Sussman wrote the book, spills over the pages. Tel Aviv's major shopping bazaar, or *shuk*, this bustling maze of stalls selling everything from produce to housewares is at the center of her daily routine. She can be found there at the earliest hours of the morning, scrutinizing fruits and vegetables while the vendors are still caffeinating. When Ms. Sussman spoke to The Wall Street Journal, she had just changed homes again; her new apartment is one minute closer to the shuk. (Priorities.) The first room she unpacked, of course, was her kitchen.



HELLO SUNSHINE Clockwise from above: Adeena Sussman at home in Tel Aviv; her go-to cookbooks; ingredients sourced at nearby Carmel Market.

The kitchen tools I can't live without are: my industrial hand-crank Zaksenberg citrus juicer, which I use every day, multiple times a day. My Microplane zester, which I guess is also citrus connected, interestingly. My cheap restaurant-style squeeze bottle filled with olive oil that I realized is the best way for me to have olive oil on hand, since I use so much of it. My SodaStream seltzer machine. I don't drink water, I just drink seltzer.

The cookbooks I turn to again and again are: Michael Solomonov's books. Joan Nathan's. Her book "The Foods of Israel Today," in my opinion, paved the way for a lot that is going on now. A Hebrew-language book about Arab cooking called "Baladi," by Michal Waxman, that I hope gets translated into English. These are essen-

tials; having moved from the U.S. to Israel I had to pare down my cookbook collection.

My refrigerator is always stocked with: Preserved lemons and preserved lemon paste. I have schug, a Yemenite hot sauce that is very herbaceous, spicy and sinus-clearing. In the summer we always have watermelon ready to go. We eat it plain or serve it with feta and mint, and if it's on the verge of overripe, I'll blend it in the Ninja blender and strain it to make juice.

The pot I reach for most is: my grandmother's Magnalite pot. It conducts heat pretty well and is fairly light and thin. I make everything in there, from my freekeh vegetable soup to what my grandmother called potato cholent, which is basically potato kugel that has flanken [beef

short ribs] in it and is cooked overnight.

My pantry is always stocked with: tahini. It's so fresh here. I learned that in Israel the date that's stamped on the container is the date it's packaged, not the expiration date, so you can gauge how fresh the tahini is. I always have it on hand because I use it in savory and sweet preparations, and it was the subject of my cookbook "Tahini." Kosher salt—you would think it has a connection to Israel, but what Americans think of as kosher salt doesn't exist here. Because I'm a bi-national recipe developer, one of the things I haul back from the U.S. is boxes of Diamond Crystal Kosher Salt.

When I entertain, I like to: be with my guests rather than in the kitchen cooking. I've learned

to be more organized over the years. I like to host things family-style pretty much exclusively. Sometimes I won't set the table until people come over. When I see people are hanging out on the balcony or deck, I might bring food to them so I don't break up the flow or groove—no clap-clap come to the table.

I love it when my dinner guests: take seconds.

A liquor I love is: gin. We are a gin house. We drink Israeli gin, like Akko from Jullius Distillery, Pelter made from lady apples, gin made in Tel Aviv called Milk & Honey Levantine. Levantine gin is stronger, when you want to get a buzz nice and quick.

The most important piece of kitchen wisdom I ever received was: there really are no mistakes in the kitchen. My mom used to call them happy accidents. If she over-baked the meringues, they were crispy meringues. If she let the split pea soup cook for too long and there was a burnt layer on the bottom, that was somehow a treat.

If I'm not in my kitchen, I'm probably in: the Gordon Pool. It's an Olympic-size salt water lap pool in the north-central part of Tel Aviv, a few meters from the waterfront. It's a community unto itself. I'm there every day whether it's winter or summer. It really is my happy place.

A food I'm always hungry for is: falafel. I could definitely eat falafel every day.

—Edited from an interview by Gabriella Gershenson



Cardamom-Kissed Schug

Total Time: 15 minutes

Makes: 2 cups

Ms. Sussman considers this Yemenite hot sauce one of the great immigrant contributions to Israeli cuisine. Chock-full of the usual fresh herbs and chiles, Ms. Sussman's version benefits from the fragrant addition of cardamom. She uses it on falafel pitas, as a marinade for lamb chops and in countless other ways.

2 cups tightly packed fresh cilantro leaves and tender stems
2 cups tightly packed fresh

parsley leaves and tender stems
20 cloves garlic (about ⅓ cup)
10-12 medium jalapeños or 6-8 medium serrano peppers, stemmed and coarsely chopped, with seeds
2 teaspoons kosher salt
2 teaspoons ground cumin
2 teaspoons ground cardamom
2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
2 teaspoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil, plus more as needed
1. In the bowl of a food processor, combine cilantro, parsley, garlic, ja-

lapeños, salt, cumin, cardamom, black pepper and lemon juice. Pulse 15-20 times, then process until smooth, about 1 minute, stopping and scraping down bowl as necessary. (If you need to, add water by the tablespoonful to get the processor running.)
2. Drizzle in olive oil and pulse very briefly. Transfer schug to a 2-cup jar with a tightfitting lid (or two 1-cup jars with tightfitting lids), and cover with a very thin slick of olive oil. Schug can be stored up to one month in the refrigerator.

—Adapted from "Sababa" by Adeena Sussman (Avery)

A LITTLE SOMETHING SWEET

Sesame Treat

You only need a few ingredients to make these cookies. One of them provides infinite complexity

NUTTY, LUSCIOUS tahini features in many of the dishes at Nur, in Manhattan. Chef Meir Adoni drizzles the sesame paste on his smoked eggplant carpaccio and his branzino, his vegetable couscous and his pan-roasted octopus. Come dessert, it plays a starring role in the tahini cookies, imparting an unforgettable toasty aroma. If a cookie can be said to have a long finish, this one does.

In taste and texture a cross between peanut-butter cookies and shortbread, tahini cookies have wonderful nuance and some ever-so-slightly bitter notes to balance the sugar. Popular in Mr. Adoni's native Israel and in other parts of the Middle East, they've been popping up stateside thanks in part to delicious recipes in Yotam Ottolenghi's seminal book "Jerusalem" and Michael Solomonov's vibrant "Zahav." Terrific as both of these recipes are, the cookie at Nur is perhaps the

lightest, most delicate and crisp version to date.

Tahini cookies are as easy to make as American-style peanut-butter cookies, but be selective when it comes to the marquee ingredient. The better the tahini, the rounder the taste; a lesser product will be pasty and bitter. I use either Soom Foods or Seed + Mill, two widely available artisan brands. Like any seed or nut butter, tahini separates when stored, so before measuring it out for this recipe, reintegrate the oil by giving it a very strong stir or a minute in a food processor or blender.

At Nur, the dough is rolled in sesame seeds before baking. This adds texture, for those who want it. I happen to love these fragile little treats even more without. After removing them from the oven, let them cool on the pan before transferring them via spatula to a flat serving plate. They won't stay there long.

—Aleksandra Crapanzano



GOOD SEEDS These sesame cookies are at once rich and remarkably light and crisp.

Tahini Cookies

Total Time: 25 minutes

Makes: about 24 small cookies

7 tablespoons butter, at room temperature
½ cup white sugar
½ cup tahini
1 cup all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon baking powder
¾ cup sesame seeds (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Use an electric mixer to cream the butter and sugar together until light and fluffy.
2. Place tahini in a food processor or blender to reintegrate oil and paste if it has separated. Then beat tahini into butter-sugar and mix until fully incorporated.
3. Reduce speed to low and add flour and baking powder. Mix until just combined. Refrigerate dough 15 minutes to make shaping the cookies easier. (The dough may also be refrigerated overnight.)
4. Line a cookie sheet with parchment paper. If using sesame seeds, place them in a shallow bowl. Roll teaspoon-size pieces of dough in your hands to form balls. Roll cookie dough balls in seeds to completely cover, transferring them to prepared baking sheet as you go. Bake cookies until just golden, 10 minutes.

—Adapted from Nur, New York City