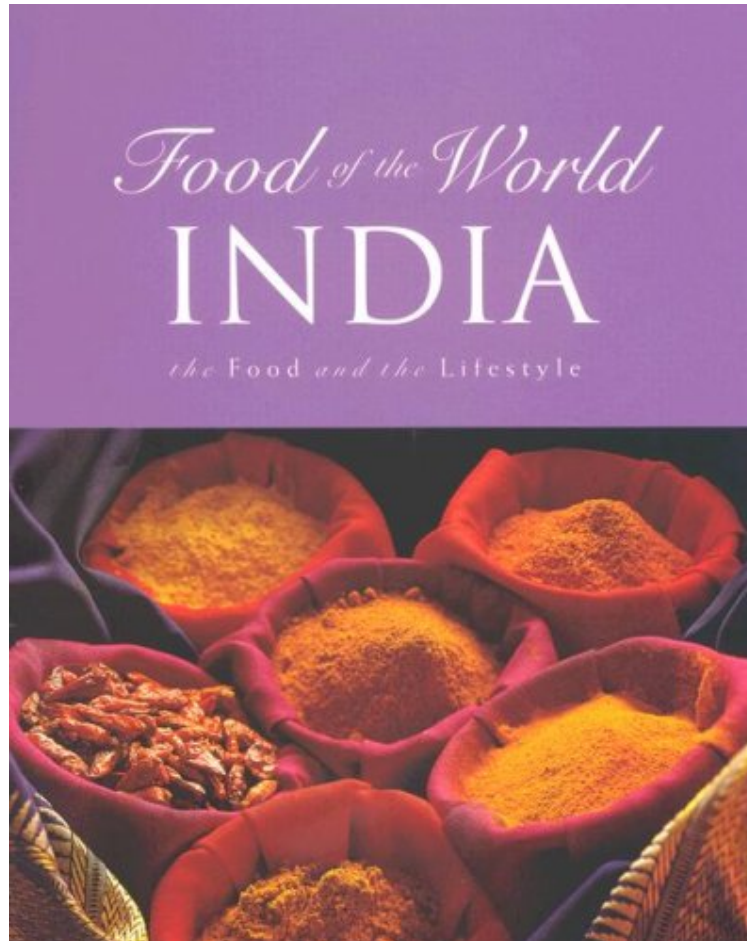


Food of the World India

Beverly Leblanc

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#4231544 in Books 2005-02Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 1.04 x 8.40 x 10.36l, 2.72 #File Name: 1405433647256 pages | File size: 71.Mb

Beverly Leblanc : Food of the World India before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Food of the World India:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A great resource for cooking for my familyBy MadfishI borrowed this book from the local library and just had to have my own copy. My family love the variety of interesting dishes and I have no trouble sourcing the ingredients locally. Recommended for anyone who enjoys cooking tasty food.5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Save your moneyBy Darby{reviewed in Jan 2006}Normally I try hard to avoid an outright tarring and feathering of a book, and try to say something positive instead - but in this case it was unavoidable, because it ran afoul of far too many of my longstanding pet peeves.I was given this book as a Christmas present by a relative. I've developed something of a reputation for collecting cookbooks, so it was a kind (and welcome) gesture. In any case, it turned out to be yet another anemic literary offering on India cuisine. This particular book is an odd hodgepodge of useful information and disappointingly under-explained gaps. The recipes range from interesting and authentic, to trendy nouveaux variations, to inexplicably lame interpretations ... most of them padded

with too many photos and not enough explanation or respect for the subject matter. Getting down to the nitty gritty ...

Strengths:INTRODUCTION: The introduction is diverting, and portions of it are actually somewhat informative in places. The author gives a decent overview of regional variations (and taboos) in Indian cuisine - something many authors on the topic tend to gloss over or ignore altogether. It's too short, but it **is** helpful to readers who are new to the subject.RECIPES: Some of the recipes look pretty decent. I'll try a few, as time permits, and report back in future posts.Weaknesses: There are so many - where to begin ? In no particular order.HEADNOTES: They range from occasionally useful and informative, on the good end, to overly terse, inane, and occasionally erroneous on the bad end. For example: contrary to the author's head notes, the English Translation of "Rogan Josh" is NOT "Rogan Josh" (duh) ... the fact that the words don't directly translate from Hindi was a poor reason for the author to apparently just give up on it. For those of you who are interested, "Rogan Josh", I believe, loosely translates as "Intense Fat". More completely, it refers to a dish in which rich (fatty) cuts of meat, usually lamb or goat, is seared on the bone, with spices, in it's own fat (fat + spices = intense rich flavor), and then slowly braised until tender. The key components of the recipe that make it a "Rogan Josh" (think rich curried fricassee, on-the-bone) are meaty bones, fat, and spices. And the author's version ? Not only was the translation of the name side-stepped, the culinary essence of the dish was botched too ... the author calls for lean (read: no fat) boneless (read: no bones) lamb in an unimaginatively spiced sauce. The author also calls for using far too much of the marinating yogurt to finish the dish, and the oversize photo on p.128 clearly shows that it has curdled. So, to sum up: no translation of the name, two significant divergences from tradition, lackluster use of curry spices, plus an avoidable culinary gaffe. I was (and am) unimpressed.PADDING: I'm sorry, but a book of 243 pages should have a LOT more than just a miserly 101 recipes ... that's just a good old fashioned purse-cutting of the reader. Padding examples: a trivial condiment recipe with only 2 ingredients is stretched into an entire page (p.250), with not one, not two, but three photos, plus ample wasted white space ?! Her recipe for plantain chips on p.59 only has 4 ingredients, yet she stretches it to 2 full pages with the same space-wasting tricks ... and she forgot to include the salt. Plantain chips taste dull and unfocused without salt (which also helps to enhance their perceived sweetness). Instead of working so hard to squander space, the author **could** have elaborated more on the various banana varieties available, along with how/why they're handled and used differently. She also could have included a recipe for the dipping chutney shown in the accompanying photo. I felt cheated, on multiple levels - and that's just one recipe.AUTHENTICITY: The author, and editor, went out of their way to portray this book as authentic ... and then they turned around and included several nouveau recipes that are clearly modern (fringe) re-interpretations of old classics. I'm sorry, but you can't be authentic/traditionalist AND nouveau at the same time ... the terms are mutually exclusive. Some of the recipes are just downright wrong, regardless of whether you view it from the old or new perspective. Refer, for example, to my earlier remarks about the author's non-authentic version of Rogan Josh. Another example is the author's version of mulligatawny soup. The author correctly points out in the head notes that it evolved from rassam soup, but I have never seen a `hearty' one-dish-meal version that includes rice and meat - that's certainly within the purview of home cooks, but it's not traditional. It's supposed to be a light brothy appetizer type soup. I'm sure it's tasty, but it's not authentic. Such touches should have been included as a variant at the end of the recipe. I also don't think highly of the author's recipe for Naan bread, which calls for using baking powder, an egg binder (instead of kneading), a greased rolling pin, and a cookie sheet. Sad. The author doesn't even bother to offer a photo of an authentic Tandoor, much less provide advice on how to use a cast iron griddle, or pizza stone, to better approximate it's effect. No attempt at describing how to knead bread, or mentioning sour-dough leavening, yeast leavening, or leavening with baking soda plus yogurt or whey (esp. homemade) for those who wish to explore more authentic/advanced techniques that yield far better tasting results. Nadda ... just the simplest, lamest, and most dumbed-down idiot-proof version possible. That's called writing down to the lowest common culinary denominator of your target audience. The bottom line here is that, despite lip service to the contrary, the author's commitment to authenticity appears to be rather weak in places.PHOTOS: I freely admit it - I like cookbooks with photos of finished dishes ... but at the same time I also dislike (intensely) books that use them poorly, and to wretched excess. By `poorly' I'm referring to things like close-ups that are so microscopically hyper-close that you have a hard time telling what you're supposed to be looking at in the foreground, and everything else (from mid-ground and beyond) is completely out-of-focus (ex: p.85, 91, 112). By "excess" I'm referring to the gratuitous use of oversize space-wasting touristy "mood" photos of things that have nothing whatsoever to do with food or cooking. The third recurrent photographic crime of this book is the `procedural' photos ... those are the ones that **SHOULD** have been featured prominently, in color - but which are all given tiny postage-stamp-sized (1" x 2") black and white shots, and squeezed off to the page borders, like unwanted inconveniences. Um, hello ... isn't this supposed to be a book about COOKING ? Cooking, if I recall, means PREPARING THE FOOD, not oogling food-porn shots of already finished dishes and unrelated tourist photos, to the exclusion of procedural demonstrations. I also don't care for photos that aren't consistent with the recipes they're supposed to document ... such as the photo of saag paneer on p.98 that shows spinach that's al dente, whereas the recipe calls for it to be simmered (for an unspecified amount of time) until "very soft" ... the photo also omits the heavy cream finish called for in the final step(s).IMPRECISE TERMS: It irks me when authors frequently use imprecise terms. For instance, take cinnamon sticks ... tell me how long, and how many curls the piece should have.

Take potatoes (p.84) ... tell me how large or small you want it diced, because like it or not it *does* affect both the cooking time and the texture/presentation of the finished dish. Also, make sure you use terms correctly. For instance: calling a recipe "Pickled Mackerel" (p.186) when it does not, in fact, involve pickling the fish, is both incorrect and confusing to readers. In this case, the recipe probably should have been called "Mackerel, Broiled with Pickling Spice(s)".

UNDEFINED TERMS: What's "ready-made curry paste" {p.68} ? What's "lamb neck fillet" (p.141) ? For that matter, what the heck is a "grated tomato" (p.94) ? I'd love to see the authoress try to grate a juicy ripe tomato on a box grater sometime.

INCOMPLETE / MISSING / ERRONEOUS STEPS: Step 1 on p.88 instructs the reader to use a hammer and a nail to punch a hole in the eye of an unopened coconut, in order to drain it. First of all, you can do that with an ice pick and a few gentle pushes - you don't have to leave the kitchen and go rummaging around in the basement for a hammer and nails, much less an electric drill. Second of all, making only one hole won't work. Were these people asleep in high school science class ? You need to poke TWO holes, not one, in order for air to get in (so liquid can get out). Even the person in the accompanying BW procedural photo doesn't fare much better, because even though the photo shows her as having correctly punched 2 holes (rather than one), she's still holding the coconut wrong {~ queue canned laughter ~} - she has the coconut water slowly chugging, drip by drip, out of BOTH holes, rather than rotating it so one hole is higher than the other (thus allowing all the water to pour out in a single rapid stream). It gets worse. Step 3 instructs the reader to use the hammer to "break the coconut in half ..." whoa, hold on a second there. I can just see some poor confused reader being needlessly intimidated by this horribly under explained step. You don't want the reader to place an unopened coconut on their counter top, and then begin banging away on it with a hammer like a crazed chimp (while nearby jars skitter around and crash to the floor) ... that's NOT how it's done. For that matter, you don't even need a hammer ... you can hold it in one hand, and then give it a series of firm whacks with the lower back bolster of a chef knife, until it cracks ... then you stop, and gently continue tapping along one end of the crack until it spreads around and the nut falls in half. No muss, no fuss, no dents in the counter and no broken jars on the floor. The author then goes on, in the self-same sentence, to say "... and then peel ..." whoa, hold on there. First you have to get the flesh OUT of the nut before you can peel and grate it ... and the author completely skipped that step (for those who are interested, you can prise it out in pieces with an oyster knife, or something similarly sturdy yet conforming and flexible). Step 4 calls for adding the pumpkin ... whoa, hold on - it's only by looking at the list of ingredients that the reader then sees that they were supposed to have already seeded, peeled and grated some pumpkin (of an unspecified variety) before reaching that step. Anyway, you get the idea.

NON-TRADITIONAL TERMS: I'm sorry, but I don't care what's linguistically in-vogue ... the traditional nomenclature for things should always be given first, and the newer and less-used stuff second. For instance - it constantly set my teeth on edge to see the author refer to Madras as "Chennai", and Bombay as "Mumbai". Also, I don't know what planet the author grew up on, but "Egyptian Lentils" (p.76) are the RED variety, not the black ... and that just after the author herself made a comment about inconsistent use of terminology by other writers.

INCONSISTENCY: For example - the author can't seem to make up her mind on how long it takes to cook onions. In some places, it takes 5-8 mins over med-high heat to get them "soft but uncolored", and in other places it only take 4-6 mins over the very same heat to get them "golden brown". Sometimes, during her oft-parroted "sauteacute; onions for 5-8 minutes" monologue, she includes calling for adding ginger and garlic paste to the pan at the same time as the onions - and that does NOT work, because the paste will begin to stick and burn after just 1-2 minutes ... hence the reason why they're only added in the last 2 minutes of sauteacute; (just before you add liquid ingredients). That's inattentive writing on the part of the author, lazy oversight on the part of the editor, and general clueless ness on the part of the "home economist" who was (I assume) nominally responsible for independently testing these recipes before they went to print. Here's another example of inconsistency - the author disses (and rightly so) the use of generic curry powder on pages 13 14, but then she turns around and uses it without compunction in various places throughout the book. Did I already mention that I'm not impressed ? I did ? Good ... just making sure.

INCORRECT STATEMENTS: For example - the author states on p.253 that ghee only keeps 4 weeks in the refrigerator. Wrong. As long as you store it in a sealed glass jar (it'll harden to a waxy consistency), it'll keep for 6-12 months, if not longer, in the fridge.

POORLY CHOSEN TITLE: I'm sorry, but "India: The Food and the Lifestyle" is just too broad and too vague. You cannot adequately cover THE most culinarily diverse varied cuisine on the planet with a mere 101 recipes ... most of them overly photographed and under described. The author also mentions the word "Lifestyle", but fails to adequately deliver on that aspect as well. A more accurate title for this book could have been "Indian Cuisine For Dummies" ... but that's probably being generous, because the editors of the "For Dummies" series have a reputation for attempting to cover their stated subject matter in reasonably complete and educational detail.

Bottom line ? Save your money. There are a wide array of much better books on the subject out there ... both on the food, and the lifestyle, of India.