



**manna**  
from heaven

# August and September

Hopefully by the time this is published my cold will have vanished, the rain will have stopped and my jumpers will be neatly folded in my cupboard.

Tomatoes are originally from South America but it was the Italians who put them on the map. Full-scale canning began in Naples, the home of the famous pizza, which of course would not be without tomatoes (although even pizza bianca, with just garlic, potatoes and rosemary, is pretty good).

The 1830s saw the beginning of production of tomato ketchup, America's favourite condiment (see recipe for my version).

Just as red, yellow and blue are the primary colours, I list the tomato as one of my primary ingredients. As the poem suggests, its appeal is unbounded and its marriageability phenomenal — in fact the tomato is almost a scarlet woman in terms of what it will go with. Is there a cuisine incompatible with it?

I won't wax any more lyrical about tomatoes: I shall leave that to the poets and the gardeners. My love affair is all culinary and I am trying to remember when it began. Was it when I had my first tomato sauce all unctuous over pasta? Was it sliced up red ripe tomatoes with a dressing? Or was it in a thick curry with basmati rice? There was a time for tomato sorbet but I know I never much liked that. Was it in a Bloody Mary, so good for a hangover?

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No, it really has always been in Mediterranean Cuisine that I most loved to see these red round things shine, and nowhere more so than in a Caprese salad. This is rather like a Caesar salad — there are so many interpretations and so many things that can go wrong.

So what makes a perfect Caprese salad? Well first the tomatoes must be very ripe and at room temperature ... and they must taste of tomato. Please find some roma or some oxheart, or grow your own; my mum used to grow them in a greenhouse in England and picking and smelling them was heaven. Slice them and lie them on a flat plate, buy some super fresh buffalo mozzarella and slice or pull it apart in clumps and lie it on top; this too must be room temperature. Then strew basil leaves on top — just the tender, soft green leaves (none of that bolted stuff with flowers) — and then make a dressing with your finest extra virgin olive oil (recently pressed is best), a little white wine vinegar, some French mustard, a pinch of sugar, a few turns of the black pepper grinder and some Maldon sea salt. Pour this all over and let sit for half an hour before breaking bread and dipping in. So simple but so rarely perfect.

Then for me comes the ubiquitous tomato sauce; I like both cooked and uncooked (perfect on some grilled sourdough toast with a smidge of garlic). For a fresh tomato sauce grate some super ripe red tomatoes (the skin stays in your hand) and mix the tomato pulp with some finely chopped garlic, some very good pungent olive oil and lots of salt and pepper. Stir through cooked pasta. This is also a great way to make bruschetta — just spoon onto toasted sourdough and sprinkle a few basil leaves on top. For the perfect tomato sauce for pizza I would use Italian finned tomatoes and cook for a long time in olive oil until thick.

If you cannot get good tomatoes try sundried ones. These come in various forms from completely dried to semi-dried and soaked in olive oil; you need to try different brands until you find the one you like. I favour Italian brands lying in a bath of olive oil. I mix them with more olive oil and stir through fresh ricotta for a heavenly sauce. Olive loves sundried tomatoes finely sliced and sprinkled over plain spaghetti with a dash of cream and lots of garlic. Many years ago there was a company called Randasso in Sydney. It was run by a mother and son who made simply the best sundried tomatoes in the world. They were plump, red and oozing with flavour. Where are they now? I would so love them to teach me how to dry tomatoes. Their product inspired me to make a fantastic flat bread filled with a puree of sundried tomatoes, parmesan, pine nuts and basil: gosh, it was so good. As you ate it all the nuts kept falling out so you could play catch the pine nut.

In the Napa Valley last year I fried a thick slice of green tomato with bacon and eggs; it was a perfect breakfast — the tomato was that perfect combination of cooked and raw. I think there is a French word for it but I have forgotten: is it 'fired'?

Before I turn my mind to other things I have one last linger with tomatoes and try to come up with some quintessential tomato dish. I guess it would be a slice of tomato on a piece of toast with a dribble of olive oil, a sprinkle of Maldon sea salt and a few turns of the pepper mill on top.

What's your favourite tomato dish? Maybe it's not a dish at all it's just the tomato on its own. If an apple a day keeps the doctor away then a tomato a day keeps the Mediterranean close.

## The Bibendum Cookbook

The Bibendum Brasserie in London is housed in the original Michelin Tyre Company building. Their logo and namesake is Bibendum, the Michelin Man, made of tyres, puffing on a cigar and wearing a monocle. The restaurant opened in 1987 and this marvellous book captures its history along with the stories of its owners and above all of its chefs. Although the original business was about selling tyres it went on to launch the Michelin Guide and restaurant rating system that is used all over the world (an extremely clever marketing idea dreamt up by the brothers to sell more tyres; read all about it in this book).

One of my favourite English food writers, Simon Hopkinson, was Bibendum's original chef and here he and Matthew Harris, the present head chef, present a classic but contemporary collection of recipes for this book. *Roast poulet de bresse with tarragon, onion tart* (I really am going to make this), *piemontese peppers* (inspired by Elizabeth David's book *Italian Food*), *iced zabaglione parfait* (that's given me a good idea for Christmas) and *watermelon and mint granita*. Those are just some of the delights.

Sir Terence Conran, one of the owners of Bibendum, renovated the building and designed the restaurant, which also houses the publishing company Octopus. The whole look and feel of the place is as successful today as it was when it opened twenty-five years ago. Good restaurant design and functionality will last a lifetime and it is Terence's attention to detail that helps make Bibendum so successful. For example, they change the colour of the seat covers with the seasons. Terence and the role he plays in restaurant design in the UK remind me of the late Anders Ousback in Sydney, who played a defining role in the shape and feel of restaurants here today. Who remembers the grace and simplicity of Taylor Square Restaurant (created by Anders), which fitted so perfectly with the food served there?

Therese Good



## Recipe

### Organic Tomato Ketchup

- 5 kilograms red over-ripe tomatoes, quartered
- 4 cups raw sugar
- 1 cup of harissa
- (You can buy this or make your own. Yalla do a good one and Claudia Roden's recipe in her *The Book of Middle Eastern Food* is the one I make — although I don't use caraway seeds.)
- 750 millilitres verjuice
- 2 tablespoons coriander seeds
- 4 cinnamon sticks
- Juice of four lemons
- Season to taste with salt

In two large saucepans (or preserving pans) place all the ingredients. On a medium heat simmer the mixture for a couple of hours, stirring every now and again. Push through a moule or drum sieve and season to taste. Pour into jars or bottles and store in the refrigerator.



## chocolate

### olive oil cake with pistachios



### Special of the month

This month's special is our new chocolate cake, made with pistachios, dark chocolate and Jingilli olive oil. This whole concoction is topped with a chocolate cream. Come and try them at the growers' market in Pyrmont every first Saturday of the month or at the Eveleigh markets every Saturday.

## Ode To Tomatoes

by Pablo Neruda

The street  
filled with tomatoes,  
midday,  
summer,  
light is  
halved  
like  
a  
tomato,  
its juice  
runs  
through the streets.  
In December,  
unabated,  
the tomato  
invades  
the kitchen,  
it enters at lunchtime,  
takes  
its ease  
on countertops,  
among glasses,  
butter dishes,  
blue saltcellars.  
It sheds  
its own light,  
benign majesty.  
Unfortunately, we must  
murder it:  
the knife  
sinks  
into living flesh,  
red  
viscera  
a cool  
sun,  
profound,  
inexhaustible,  
populates the salads  
of Chile,  
happily, it is wed  
to the clear onion,  
and to celebrate the union  
we  
pour  
oil,  
essential  
child of the olive,  
onto its halved hemispheres,  
pepper  
adds  
its fragrance,  
salt, its magnetism;  
it is the wedding  
of the day,  
parsley  
hoists  
its flag,  
potatoes  
bubble vigorously,  
the aroma  
of the roast  
knocks  
at the door,  
it's time!  
come on!  
and, on  
the table, at the midpoint  
of summer,  
the tomato,  
star of earth, recurrent  
and fertile  
star,  
displays  
its convolutions,  
its canals,  
its remarkable amplitude  
and abundance,  
no pit,  
no husk,  
no leaves or thorns,  
the tomato offers  
its gift  
of fiery color  
and cool completeness.

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from heaven

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