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Return to barbecue roots

FROM TERIYAKI TO TANDOORI, ALEX SKARIA PUTS 125 RECIPES TO THE GRILL IN HIS NEW BOOK

WITH a love for cooking and a passion for all things grilled and barbecued, Alex Skaria decided to write a book on barbecue cuisine called *Barbecue Asian Style* (Periplus/RM110).

Alex chose to concentrate on Asian style because he could not find a good barbecue book on it in the market. "The focus of most books was on western and American dishes with a little mix of Asian in it," says Alex in an email interview.

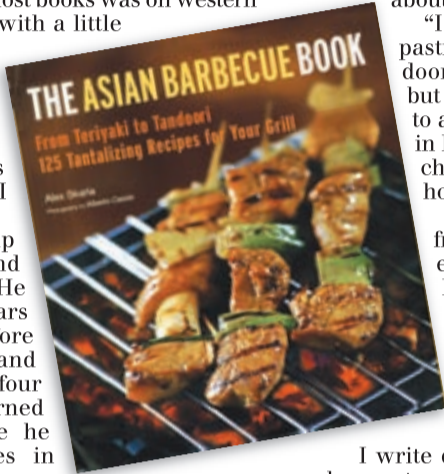
"So I thought to myself that since I have collected enough recipes and materials, why not I do it myself."

Alex was brought up by an Indian father and a German mother. He spent his first five years in Switzerland before moving to India and staying in Mumbai for four years. Then, he returned to Switzerland where he completed his studies in chemical engineering.

After mixing with the Chinese exchange students, he became interested in the Chinese language and took up lessons at the university. When he completed his doctorate, he went to study in China for three months.

He met his wife, Yan-Ping, who comes from Shanghai, in Switzerland. They have a daughter, Surya, and have been living in Bangkok for the past 15 years.

Currently, Alex is working in the power consulting business which has taken him to China, Malaysia, Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Nepal, the Middle East, Turkey and Egypt. And in every country he visits, he tries the barbecued cuisine there.



"I started cooking when I was about 16," he says. "In fact, I watched my mother cook regularly since I was a kid. I also collected as many recipes as I could from my grandmother in Kerala who was known to be an excellent cook. Also with my Chinese colleagues at the university, I learnt a lot about Chinese cooking."

"I find barbecuing a very pleasant pastime, especially if you like to stay outdoors. Also, I enjoy open-fire barbecuing but in cities, this is not possible, so I switch to a smaller charcoal grill on my balcony in Bangkok. I have also designed my own charcoal and smoker grill for my beach house in Pattaya."

"I love to barbecue and entertain friends and I like to try out new recipes every once in a while. Over the years, I have had a collection of several recipes from all corners of Asia."

Alex says he took about three years to complete *Barbecue Asian Style* although he has about 15 years' worth of recipes. "I usually try some of the new things in a restaurant before I write down the recipes. I also made some changes to suit local taste."

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According to Alex, the recent mushrooming of barbecue restaurants all over Asian cities, including Kuala Lumpur, could be due to that fact that doing a barbecue is not just about eating, it is the feeling of going back to our roots.

He elaborates: "As for myself, I think sitting next to a fire and preparing food is a basic exercise that people have not done since mankind evolved. [Barbecuing food] is a feeling and lifestyle."

"As for BBQ restaurants, it is about being together with friends and family members enjoying the food and company, almost like in a camp-fire environment. Also, the grilled food has this special taste of smoke which one cannot create in the normal kitchen but which most people enjoy."



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- Alex Skaria

As the trend these days is on healthy eating, how can we reconcile BBQ food, which are mostly meat and seafood, with this style of dining?

Alex has this wise advice. "It's all a question of balance," he says. "If you grill every day, then it may be useful to look at some of the vegetarian grill recipes which I love to cook as a good balance."

"Secondly, if you have some meat or fish combined with salads, you will have a balanced diet."

"Lastly, I do grill food once or twice a week but I also have more vegetable and salad days during the week which balance off the meat consumption."

"As I said, once should keep a balance, not only in food but in everything one do in life."

BEST-SELLING BOOKS

- courtesy of Borders Bookstores

Fiction

- 1 **THIS CHARMING MAN** - Marian Keyes
- 2 **SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE** - Vikas Swarup
- 3 **BRIDA** - Paulo Coelho
- 4 **HANDLE WITH CARE** - Jodi Picoult
- 5 **PATHS OF GLORY** - Jeffrey Archer
- 6 **THE GIRL WHO PLAYED WITH FIRE** - Steig Larsson
- 7 **ANGELS AND DEMONS** - Dan Brown
- 8 **CITY OF THIEVES** - David Benioff
- 9 **THE ASSOCIATE** - John Grisham
- 10 **THE WHITE TIGER** - Aravind Adiga

Non Fiction

- 1 **OUTLIERS: THE STORY OF SUCCESS** - Malcolm Gladwell
- 2 **THINGS I WISH MY MOTHER HAD TOLD ME** - Lucia van der Post
- 3 **HOW TO GET FROM WHERE YOU ARE TO WHERE YOU WANT TO BE** - Jack Canfield
- 4 **THE ECONOMIC NATURALIST: WHY ECONOMICS EXPLAINS ALMOST EVERYTHING** - Robert H. Frank
- 5 **101 THINGS I LEARNED IN ARCHITECTURE SCHOOL** - Matthew Frederick
- 6 **THE GREAT DEPRESSION AHEAD** - Harry S. Dent
- 7 **PERANAKAN CHINESE PORCELAIN** - Kee Ming-Yuet
- 8 **GOOD TO GREAT** - Jim Collins
- 9 **BRAIN RULES** - John Medina
- 10 **PEAKS AND VALLEYS: MAKING GOOD AND BAD TIMES WORK FOR YOU** - Spencer Johnson

Living with neurofibromatosis

YVONNE Foong, 23, suffers from neurofibromatosis (NF) Type 2, a genetic disorder that causes tumours to grow in her brain, spine and peripheral nerves.

She has undergone several brain surgeries and her hearing and eyesight are impaired. She is currently in Los Angeles undergoing gamma knife surgery.

While this illness leaves patients living in silence - isolated from a world that so many of us take for granted, Foong refuses to let NF dictate her life, making her a true survivor.

In an effort to spread awareness and educate people about the disease, Foong has penned a touchingly honest account of her life with this dreadful and disabling disease.

Titled *I'm Not Sick, Just a Bit Unwell: Life with Neurofibromatosis* (RM20), the book is published by MPH under its Support Local Authors Campaign.

All proceeds from the sale of the book will be channelled to the Yvonne Foong NF Trust to help her pay for the removal of a tumour in her brain scheduled for September this year.



Foong's story begins with her carefree days as a young child living with her lovable Aunt Ivy and how things changed when Ivy passed away and Foong was diagnosed with this disease at age 16.

Foong writes in a matter-of-fact way about her numerous hospital stays and how close friends and family prove to be her tower of strength.

She also writes about the charlatans who try to milk money out of her family by offering miracle cures, some medical staff who are uncaring and also her own spiritual awakening.

The book is a pretty interesting read and Foong's fighting spirit in spite of her illness makes her someone you could easily admire.

The book also covers what NF is all about and testimonials from others who have

it or the care-givers who have to live with it. - S. Indra Sathiabalan

The book is on sale at MPH Mid Valley, MPH Megastore 1 Utama, MPH Bangsar Village 2, MPH Subang Parade and MPH Gurney Plaza. For more on Foong and her struggles, go to www.yvonnefoong.com.

in a capsule

reviews by S. Indra Sathiabalan

Waiter Rant: Behind the Scenes of Eating Out

Author: A. Waiter
Publisher: John Murray



THE author, who's real name is Steve Dublanica, penned his rants in his famous blog www.waiterrant.net and offers readers an insight into the world of waiters and servers.

While tipping waiters is not the norm here, it is part and parcel of dining out in the US where waiters earn very low wages and the only way they can make ends meet is through tips from customers.

The tips, as Waiter explains, are actually

divided among the waiters, servers and busboys in the restaurant.

Waiter Rant covers a great deal on rude customers who assume that waiters are their servants and, hence, can be bullied. The author also touches on dining-out etiquette, such as making reservations and keeping them, how much to tip and how to treat your waiter with respect so that you get the best service.

Some aspects of the book are plain hilarious while others (on rude customers) will make your blood boil. It is also funny to note that celebrities, on the whole, seem to be less demanding than ordinary mortals when it comes to where they are seated and what they order.

By the way, saying you know the owner, in order to get a good table, is really lame. The book also reveals a great deal about restaurant hierarchy and paranoid chefs.

This is a good read, even though there is quite a bit of repetition in regards to how little a waiter makes (Waiter's pet peeve). Still, the book reminds us that we are all human and your waiter has feelings too.

Winnie and Wolf

Author: A.N. Wilson
Publisher: Arrow Book



WILSON has written many novels and biographies over the years and this latest work of fiction was longlisted for the 2007 Man Booker Prize.

Winnie & Wolf tells of the relationship between Winifred Wagner, a British girl who married the son of Germany's most controversial musical genius, and Adolf Hitler, the infamous Nazi leader.

Told from the viewpoint of the secretary at the

Wagner household in Bayreuth, the book reveals a strange love story between two people who have much in common and seem to cling to each other emotionally.

Wilson also covers the situation in Germany during the Second World War and how Germans (especially the clergy) who opposed the Nazi regime were tortured, sent to concentration camps and killed.

Winnie herself was such a contradiction in terms of character. She possessed a great love for music and even managed to rescue some of the Jewish musicians in her orchestra from the concentration camps. However, she was also devoted to Hitler and actually bought into many of his ideas.

The story also covers the secretary's devotion to Winnie and how appalled he was about her relationship with Hitler.

The book plods along slowly in the beginning but picks up in the second half. Overall, it is a good story but it takes quite a bit of patience to finish.