

BRAIN FOOD



Kept in the dark



Richard Cornish

Epicure answers your vexing questions

Q What's the difference between white and green asparagus?

A They are the same asparagus. Green asparagus is grown in the open field and erupts from underground crowns. It is cut with a blade under the soil level. This part of the stem is a paler green, even white. This is because it has not been exposed to sunlight and this part of the plant doesn't produce chlorophyll. Traditionally, white asparagus was mounded with earth as it grew so no sunlight would reach it. Now, hooped houses covered in black plastic are

constructed over the asparagus rows. Growing without sunlight, they are pale, slightly more tender and lack that grassy flavour. Delicious with egg, truffle, parmesan, extra virgin olive oil and toasted nuts.

Q I can't find pancetta — can I use bacon?

A Yes. You can also use prawns instead of lobster, margarine instead of butter, evaporated milk instead of cream. You can substitute many ingredients in the kitchen but at some stage you're no longer cooking the same dish — you're cooking something that will taste and smell different. However, pancetta is cured pork belly. You use it for the richness of the fat, a porky nuance that comes from the natural curing and aromatics from any herbs with which it has been cured. Bacon is salted and, generally, chemically cured pork. Middle bacon is made from the belly and lean muscle. Streaky bacon takes in the fatty belly. Some bacons have been smoked or have smoke flavour added. So use unsmoked streaky bacon instead of pancetta for the closest match.

Q Truffles seem really expensive. Are they?

A It's all relative. If you're an apprentice chef with a voracious hunger for food knowledge but are struggling to buy beer — give up beer and save up. Those who are entranced by the rich, heady perfume of fresh truffles don't really mind paying the premium. Those who pay the premium but get served stale truffles should feel quite ripped off. I am writing this from Europe where the white truffle season is in full swing and yesterday I paid €20 (\$29) for a single egg covered in shaved Italian truffle. However, I am renting a cheap apartment in a dodgy part of town where, at night, the noise of barking dogs is drowned out by that of fighting drunks. A Melbourne property developer said recently he couldn't get over how cheap and accessible truffles had become. Then he jumped into his Aston Martin and drove off to his second home in Flinders.

Have a food dilemma? Email: brainfood@richardcornish.com.au.

BOOKS

Miguel's Tapas

Miguel Maestre
New Holland,
HB, \$45



MIGUEL Maestre's Sydney tapas restaurant, El Toro Loco (The Crazy Bull) might well be named for him — those who have seen him on TV shows *Boys Weekend* and *Miguel's Tropical Kitchen* could attest to the Murcian-raised chef's... exuberance. There's no doubting his passion; his acknowledgments and introduction confirm such and it continues throughout his debut book. Featuring about 75 recipes, most beautifully photographed and interspersed with "action" shots from the restaurant, the book is broken down into logical chapters (breakfast, morning tea, lunch and so on), and ends with basics and sauces, as well as a glossary. There are the classic tapas such as Galician-style octopus and garlic prawns, but Maestre also draws inspiration from his stint at elBulli to serve up quirkier fare such as tuna carpaccio with tomato sauce ("suquet" in Catalan), and the "five-minute Spanish potato omelette" with a filling of lime and black pepper potato crisps. And, of course, there's his version of paella, "a la Maestre", a three-generations-old family recipe. If a cookbook's primary purpose is to make you want to eat the food straight off the page, Maestre — who is head chef in the Emirates tent during the spring carnival — hits the mark. As he writes: "I am a passionate man and think honesty, respect and love go a long way to creating success." Hard to argue with that.

GARY MUNRO

The Australian Veg Food Guide 2011

Edited by Lisa Dempster
Aduki Independent Press, PB, \$17.99



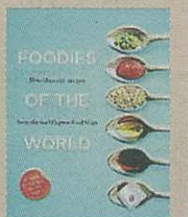
WITH vegetarians growing in number and hungry for eating-out information, the launch of

the first *Australian Veg Food Guide* in November is timely. After a sell-out Melbourne edition, the handbag-sized paperback makes a big promise — the best vego places you've never heard of. And with almost half of the 200 reviews in Victoria, they have a good go at sating frustrated local gourmets seeking tempting meat-free meals or snacks. Don't expect a fine dining guide but if you want a veg-o-rama hotdog or an "enlightened" Chinese diner in the city or suburbs, you'll find it here.

VERONICA RIDGE

Foodies of the World: More than 100 recipes from the world's great food blogs

Edited by Julia Gaw
Slattery Media Group, PB, \$40



THE joy of this book is the food bloggers' stories as much as the recipes themselves. Meet British Columbian Elizabeth Nyland, inspired on her Guilty Kitchen blog by her husband, son and Alice Waters — and then try her vegan brownie, a "no animal products" dare that turned out to be the most "decadent, fudgy, dense, chocolatey" brownie she's made. Or check out software engineer Michael Natkin's take on mujadara (rice, lentil and caramelised onion pilaf) taken from his Seattle-based blog Herbivorous. The thoughtfully designed and produced book — the polaroid snaps are particularly cool — offers a diverse mix of bloggers, including Melbourne's own Trotski and Ash. There's a few recipes from each, and a helpful sample menu page bringing it together at the end. Editor Julia Gaw describes the project as part cookbook, part guidebook. It's perhaps not the definitive line-up (there are a few surprising omissions) but it matters not. Who doesn't welcome a little help navigating the ever-growing world of the food blog? And in print, no less.

JANE WILLSON

Hospitality



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WAIT STAFF
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WAIT STAFF
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WAIT STAFF
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