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taken the best of traditional food and taken it to another level. Whatever the future its clear that one of the defining characteristics of Lebanese food is, like its people, its ability to adapt.

Tony Kitous is the owner of a chain of Lebanese-style restaurants across London, in major shopping centres and airports. The menus at these 'Comptoir Libanais' restaurants, and his Kenza restaurant in the City, feature many of the same traditional Lebanese dishes that appear in this book, which can perhaps be described as the book of the chain. There are no great surprises here, with recipes for *hummus*, *baba ghanoush*, *fattoush*, *batata harra*, *shorbat adas*, and the use of *tahina*, sumac, pomegranate, all of which I suspect we are getting used to. Many of the recipes give a little twist to the traditional but perhaps not enough for a generation now familiar with the innovative Middle Eastern cooking of the likes of Yotam Ottolenghi, or who may themselves have visited Beirut today. That said, the recipes certainly work and there are some which deserved repeated consumption, for example the salmon marinated in pomegranate and molasses, which may sound a trifle rich but in fact works really well.

The writing style leaves something to be desired, to be fair not an issue exclusive to this cook book. When you get words such as 'passion', 'love', 'simple', 'honesty', 'fun', and 'easy' all within the first two paragraphs I get a little uneasy. There is plenty of hyperbole and repetition in the introductory sections, which I suggest you skip to get to the recipes, which is a shame as the short piece there by Kamal Mouzawak, of Tawlet Souk el Tayeb fame, seems a major missed opportunity. The photos are by Dan Lepard, best known for his baking books, and are a real bonus.

Tim Harris

Anya von Bremzen: *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking. A Memoir of Food and Longing*: Doubleday, 2013: 340 pp., hardback, £16.99.

I regret not having previously encountered the work of Anya von Bremzen. Had it been otherwise, the entries on Russia and the various republics of the USSR in the *Companion* revisions would have been better. Her first cookery book, *Please to the Table: The Russian Cookbook*, written with John Welchman, was published by Workman in 1990. *Mastering…* is partly a memoir of a Russian childhood, something about dislocation and adjustment once in America and a general account, informed by her own and her family's experience, of life, food and cooking in the Soviet Union after 1917. Although her grandfather was head of Soviet Naval Intelligence and a thoroughgoing Communist, he was also Jewish, so the author's identities were split between membership of the *nomenklatura* on the one hand (a club that occasionally paid dividends) and a problematic ethnic group. Her own mother felt the difficulties to a much

greater extent and resolved the matter in 1974 by emigrating to America with her school-age offspring who aspired at first to a musical career, but settled into writing and reporting about food and travel. This memoir is the outcome of a very extended conversation (over 50 years) between that child and her mother. And the outcome too of a joint attempt to cook meals that exemplified the culinary history of the USSR, decade by decade, in a small flat in Queens, New York. Out of these two activities comes an enticing account, at once depressing and uplifting, and always intriguing, of the Revolution across the stove-top. There is sufficient history, and it is well enough researched, to provide structure; sufficient anecdote and consecutive narrative to entertain and inform; sufficient wild facts to supply a week's worth of dining-out. The author's approach to history smacks of Carlyle and the Great Man complex, but it is probably a true reflection of some people's experience that the history of Russia seems to concentrate on the big men and their failings: Lenin, Stalin, Brezhnev and the rest. The fall-out from their autocracy was felt in the smallest and barest grocery store, and in the shopping bags of those who relied upon it. The book is rich in detail about culinary shifts, problematic supplies and matters of housing and accommodation. It also offers a very different interpretation of the Gorbachev regime to that which we are accustomed to here in the West. There are a few of those paradigmatic recipes at the end, but this is a memoir, not a cookery book. Were I to say that she would have written in a different style had she ended up in England, that would be to cavil.

Ben Downing: *Queen Bee of Tuscany: The Redoubtable Janet Ross*: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2013: 340 pp., hardback, £22.85.

Janet Ross was the author of *Leaves from our Tuscan Kitchen* (1899 and repeatedly reissued; still in print indeed, with Grub Street). [As a young man, I had the privilege of knowing Michael Waterfield, her great-great-nephew (and editor of a later edition of *Leaves*), who was the chef-proprietor of the Wife of Bath restaurant in Wye, Kent – one of England's finest in its time – when he was cooking with my stepfather at the Hole in the Wall in Bath.] There is little enough in this book about *Leaves*, save for the admitted fact that Janet Ross cooked not one of the dishes herself, and that the original idea was her niece's. There is a great deal, however, about her family background and the affairs of the English and foreign colony in Florence from the late 1860s until her death in 1927. The author is literate and well informed; the book is readable and instructive, as well as serving as a constant reminder of the closeness of connection among the Anglophone intelligentsia of the time. That is not to say that it is entirely enjoyable. By the finish, I had come to the conclusion that Janet Ross was not someone I would have liked to have met. Nor did Ben Downing persuade me I was mistaken. Perhaps because there