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A Bread You Can Bake in Your Sleep

The Yemenite bread kubaneh spends the night in the oven so you can wake up to a brunch ready to go. Here's the recipe, plus a whole menu of prepare-ahead dishes for lazy days



CASUAL SATURDAY | Kubaneh (center) with (clockwise from top) resak agvaniyot (tomato purée), red z'hug (Yemenite hot sauce), lassis (red bean stew) and preserved-lemon and pomegranate winter salad. PHOTO: WHITNEY TRESSEL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By **ADEENA SUSSMAN**

Updated Dec. 13, 2016 12:17 p.m. ET

MANY MORNINGS, Danish-Israeli master baker Uri Scheft wakes before sunrise to tend to the loaves at New York City's Breads bakeries or his Lehamim bakeries in Israel.

But on days off at home, he likes to take it easier, baking to deliver maximum satisfaction while enjoying the luxury of a sleep-in. Nothing fits the bill quite so well as the Yemenite bread kubaneh. Lofty, rich and decidedly photo-ready, it's a make-ahead project that resembles the three-way love child of brioche, monkey bread and a Pillsbury crescent roll.

Best of all, kubaneh can be the anchor of an entire prep-in-advance meal that requires a little extra work on the front end but pays off big time on the other. Come morning, a comforting, crowd-pleasing feast can be on the table in minutes, just the thing for lazy vacation days.

Mr. Scheft didn't fully appreciate the brilliance of this bread until he met Israeli pastry chef Rinat Tzadok, the child of Yemenite and Moroccan immigrants. (Their collaborations include recipe development for the businesses as well as their 1-year-old daughter, Hallel.) One Saturday at the home of Ms. Tzadok's parents north of Tel Aviv, Mr. Scheft tasted her mother's kubaneh fresh from the oven.

"I didn't think anything like it existed," he said of the mahogany rolls baked in a cluster of snail-shell swirls. "It was warm, buttery and sophisticated, savory and slightly sweet at the same time."

He promptly set about creating the recipe that would appear in "Breaking Breads: A New World of Israeli Baking" (Artisan Books), his recently released cookbook co-authored by food writer Raquel Pelzel. His timing couldn't be better: Kubaneh is having a moment. In New York City alone, it's on the menu at Timna, chef Nir Mesika's East Village restaurant, and will be soon at Nur, the elevated Israeli restaurant that Tel Aviv chef Meir Adoni is opening in the Flatiron District.

Conceived by Jews in Yemen to sidestep the prohibition against cooking on the Sabbath, kubaneh was brought to Israel when the community emigrated, beginning at the end of the 19th century and then en masse after the establishment of the modern country in 1948.

"The bread was warm, buttery and sophisticated, savory and slightly sweet at the same time."

Mr. Scheft's recipe starts with a supple dough that rises more than once, developing a complex flavor in the process. It's spread thin, rolled into logs and sliced into rolls, which are tucked into a round aluminum pot called a *sir kubaneh*, available in virtually every housewares and hardware store in Israel. Stateside, any pot with a tight lid will do. The final step is an overnight slumber party in a low-temperature oven.

On a recent Saturday, Mr. Scheft invited me over for a kubaneh brunch hosted at the Lower East Side home of our mutual friend Naama Shefi, the founder of the Jewish Food Society, an organization that aims to preserve traditional recipes. I found Mr. Scheft passing ripe tomatoes over a box grater to make a condiment called *resék agvaniyot*. "I'm making extra," he said "There's never enough *resék*."

The night before he'd made *z'hug*—the Yemenites' contribution to an impressive canon of ethnic Israeli hot sauces—by pulsing hot red peppers, cilantro and cumin in a food processor. Out of the fridge came a bowl of overnight preserved lemons, which he chopped into a salad of greens, toasted almonds and pomegranate seeds.



Kubaneh PHOTO: WHITNEY TRESSEL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Then, a surprise: *lassis*, a pot of rib-sticking red bean stew seasoned with *hawaiij*, a currylike spice blend that seasons virtually every Yemenite soup or stew. He'd buried eggs inside the beans before sliding it into the oven with the kubaneh 10 hours earlier.

To start, we pulled off pieces of the kubaneh, peeling away the buttery, spongy layers with caramelized edges, using the bread to mop up the tender red beans and little dollops of fiery *z'hug*. Round two was open-face sandwiches of kubaneh moistened with tomato purée. I topped mine with one of those eggs. We finished with salad and *kafeh lavan* (white coffee), a ginger-laced brew known for its digestive properties. For a moment, as the silence of satisfaction washed over us, we wished this Sabbath would last forever.

Recipe: Kubaneh

Active Time: 1 ½ hours **Total Time:** 12 hours **Serves:** 8

- 1¼ cups room-temperature water
- 2¼ teaspoons active dry yeast
- 4 cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for shaping
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- 4 teaspoons fine sea salt
- 1½ sticks unsalted butter, plus more as needed

1. Pour water into a mixing bowl. Whisk yeast into water. Add flour and sugar, and then salt. Use an electric mixer fitted with dough hook to mix on low speed, stopping mixer if dough climbs up hook. Scrape bottom and sides of bowl as needed. Once dough comes together, increase speed to medium-high and continue to knead until dough cleans bottom and sides of the bowl, about 3 minutes.

2. Transfer dough to a lightly floured surface. Use your palms to stretch a corner of dough away from you in one stroke, and then fold dough back on itself. Give dough a quarter turn and repeat. Do this about 10 times, until dough is shaped into a smooth round. Lightly flour a large bowl, set dough inside and lightly flour top of dough. Cover bowl with plastic wrap. Set aside at room temperature until dough just about doubles in volume, 30-45 minutes.

3. Microwave butter in a glass dish until very soft but not melted, 10 seconds. Lightly grease a large plate with a little bit of softened butter. Lightly flour work surface and set dough on top. Divide dough into 8 equal-size pieces. Gently roll each piece against work surface to gently shape it into a ball and set on buttered plate. Cover plate with plastic wrap and set aside at room temperature for 30 minutes.

4. Use 2 tablespoons softened butter to generously grease a heavy 5-quart pot (8-9 inches in diameter) with a tight-fitting lid. Use 1 tablespoon softened butter to grease a clean work surface. Take a ball of dough from plate and smear 1 tablespoon softened butter on top. Gently press and spread dough to form a paper-thin 12- to 13-inch square, using more butter as needed to prevent tearing (though a little tearing won't hurt). Fold left side of dough over center, then fold right side over left. Starting at bottom of dough strip, roll dough into a tight cylinder. Slice cylinder in half crosswise, then place halves in prepared pot, cut-side up. Repeat with remaining dough, arranging pieces in a circle in pot with a few pieces in center to fill. Cover pot with plastic wrap and set aside in a warm, draft-free place until a finger gently pressed into dough leaves a depression that quickly fills in by three-quarters, about 45 minutes.

5. Preheat oven to 225 degrees. Melt 1 tablespoon softened butter and brush over top of dough. Seal pot with a layer of aluminum foil, then cover with lid and place in oven. Bake 8-10 hours but no longer. Turn oven off and leave bread in until ready to eat. To serve, uncover, remove foil and turn out bread, then invert onto a platter so pretty side faces up. To eat, rip kubaneh apart, separating clusters into smaller rolls.

—Adapted from *“Breaking Breads”* by Uri Scheft (*Artisan Books*)

Recipe: Preserved Lemon & Pomegranate Winter Salad

Recipe adapted from chef Uri Scheft



Cilantro salad and Kubaneh bread. PHOTO: WHITNEY TRESSEL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By **ADEENA SUSSMAN**

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Quick Refrigerator Preserved Lemons

Total Time: 12 hours **Makes:** 1½ cups

- 3 lemons, scrubbed and very thinly sliced
- ¼ cup large-crystal kosher salt, such as David's
- ¼ cup olive oil

Combine lemons and salt in a large nonreactive bowl. Cover and refrigerate at least 12 and up to 24 hours. Uncover, then pour olive oil over lemons. Lemons keep, refrigerated, up to 2 weeks.

Preserved Lemon & Pomegranate Winter Salad

Total Time: 10 minutes **Serves:** 6-8

- 6 ounces (8 cups) baby arugula
- ½ cup pomegranate seeds
- ½ cup lightly toasted sliced almonds
- 3 preserved lemon slices (recipe below), chopped
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Combine the arugula, pomegranate seeds, almonds, and preserved lemons in a salad bowl. Add the olive oil and toss to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Recipe: Hawajj

Recipe adapted from chef Uri Scheft



PHOTO: WHITNEY TRESSEL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By **ADEENA SUSSMAN**

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Hawajj

This spice mix can also be purchased from Kalustyans.com.

Total Time: 5 minutes **Makes:** about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup

- 4 tablespoons whole cumin seeds
- 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons whole black peppercorns
- 2 teaspoons whole coriander seeds
- 2 teaspoons whole cardamom seeds
- 1 teaspoon whole cloves
- 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons ground turmeric

1. Combine the cumin seeds, peppercorns, coriander and cardamom seeds and cloves in an electric spice grinder and grind until fine. Transfer to a bowl and stir in turmeric. Hawajj keeps in an airtight container up to 6 months.

Recipe: Lassis (Red Bean Stew)

Recipe adapted from chef Uri Scheft



Lassis PHOTO: WHITNEY TRESSEL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By **ADEENA SUSSMAN**

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Lassis (Red Bean Stew)

Active Time: 35 minutes **Total Time:** 21 Hours **Serves:** 8

- 2 cups dried red beans
- 6 whole garlic cloves
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1 ½ teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 ½ teaspoons Hawaiij (recipe here)
- 4 dried red chiles
- 6 eggs, rinsed

1. Place beans in a medium bowl, cover with water by 2 inches and soak at least 12 hours and up to 24, changing water every 3-4 hours.

2. Drain beans and place in a large, oven-safe pot or Dutch oven with a tight-fitting lid. Preheat oven to 225 degrees. Cover beans with water by 3 inches, bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer 30 minutes, skimming and discarding any foam and scum with a spoon. Add salt, cumin, hawaiij and chilies and cook to let flavors meld, 5 minutes more. Stir stew and gently lower eggs into pot. Cover pot, place in oven and cook until beans are soft and liquid is thick, 8-10 hours. (If stew is a bit liquidy after removing from oven, simmer, uncovered, on stovetop 15 minutes. If it's a little thick, add hot water 1/2 cup at a time and simmer briefly to loosen.)

Recipe: Red Z'hug

Recipe adapted from chef Uri Scheft



Red Z'hug PHOTO: WHITNEY TRESSEL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By **ADEENA SUSSMAN**

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Red Z'hug

Total Time: 10 minutes **Makes:** 2 cups

- 3/4 pound fresh red chili peppers, such as cayenne, stemmed and halved
- 8 garlic cloves

- 1 1/2 cup packed cups cilantro leaves
- 3/4 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 3/4 teaspoon whole cumin seeds
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom
- 1/2 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1. Place chilies, garlic, cilantro and salt in a blender or food processor and pulverize, stopping to scrape down sides as necessary. Add cumin, cardamom, coriander and pepper. With motor running, slowly add olive oil until well combined.

2. Transfer z'hug to a glass jar or other airtight container. It will keep in the up to 2 weeks and in the freezer up to 3 months.

—Adapted from *“Breaking Breads”* by Uri Scheft (*Artisan Books*)

Recipe: Resek Agvaniyot (Tomato Purée)

Recipe adapted from chef Uri Scheft



Preserved lemons and tomato puree. PHOTO: WHITNEY TRESSEL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By **ADEENA SUSSMAN**

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Resek Agvaniyot (Tomato Purée)

Total Time: 5 minutes **Makes:** 3 1/2 cups

- 4 very large beefsteak or vine-ripened tomatoes (about 2 1/2 pounds)
- 1 teaspoon salt, or more to taste

Grate tomatoes on large holes of a box grater into a bowl, discarding skins. Stir in salt.