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TOTALLY MOORISH

Perfumed biscuits, honey-drenched pastries, spice-soaked fruit salads... In the final part of our North Africa series, **Lucas Hollweg** and **Momo** get their Moroccan desserts

Four o'clock in the afternoon and Mourad Mazouz (Momo), dressed for the occasion in a natty white jellaba and babouches, is striding through the jasmine-scented garden with a plate of syrupy pastries. "It is ze Moroccan tea time," he says, comically rolling his Rs and flashing a naughty-schoolboy smile. "I bring ze briouat."

North Africans have an unashamedly sweet tooth. Stalls in the souk are piled high with cakes and biscuits; breakfast pancakes come with bowls of honey; fruit salads are drenched in fragrant syrup. Even the freshly squeezed orange juice sold on the edge of the Djemaa el Fna in Marrakesh can be enamel-strippingly sugary. Not that this should stop you, of course. Whether it's Moroccan tea time or the end of dinner, a bit of orient excess isn't going to do you any harm.

BEGHRIR (MOROCCAN PANCAKES)

These are good at breakfast or tea time.
Makes 20

200g semolina
1 tsp easy-blend dried yeast
½ tsp salt
1 free-range egg
400ml milk
Runny honey
Butter

Mix the semolina, yeast and salt. In another bowl, beat the egg with the milk, then gradually add to the semolina mix. Whisk until creamy. Leave to stand for 1 hour in a warm place until bubbly. In a small, nonstick frying pan, cook large spoonfuls of the mixture on one side until the top surface is no longer wet. Don't stack while warm or they will stick to each other. Eat with honey and butter.

ALMOND BRIOUAT AND M'HANCHA

Briouats are triangles; m'hanchas are shaped like coiled snakes. Both use ouarka pastry, which is sold in Middle Eastern shops and some supermarkets. You could also use filo; prevent it drying out by keeping it under a damp tea towel, then brush each sheet with melted butter before folding in half. Make the briouats or m'hanchas as described below, but brush with melted butter between folds or before rolling. Filo briouats can be baked in the oven at 180C/350F/Gas Mark 4, as well as being deep-fried.

Makes up to 48 briouats or 10 m'hanchas

For the almond paste

250g ground almonds
250g caster sugar
Zest of 1 lemon
2 medium eggs
100ml orange-blossom water

For the pastry

16 ouarka pastry sheets, or filo (see above)
1 egg, beaten, to seal
300ml sunflower oil
75g sesame seeds, toasted in a dry frying pan for 1 minute; or blanched almonds

For the syrup

250g caster sugar
1 tbsp clear honey
150g water
Juice of 1 lemon
1 tbsp orange-blossom water

In a food processor, blend the almonds and sugar, then whizz in the lemon zest. Mix in the eggs and orange-blossom water.

To make briouats Cut each sheet of pastry into three long strips, 5cm wide. Take 1 heaped tsp of the almond paste and shape into a ball. Place it about 1cm in from the end of one of the strips and flatten slightly. Take the right-hand corner of the strip and fold it over the paste towards the left-hand side to form a triangle. Press down the ▶





Sweet treats Some of the
essentials for Moroccan dessert

Photographs by Brent Darby



Above Orange salad with cinnamon
 Right The restaurateur Momo, dressed for the occasion
 Top centre Moroccan fruit salad
 Bottom centre From centre, m'hancha; almond briouats; Bouchra's biscuits #2, and Bouchra's biscuits #1
 Far right Dried flowers add to the fragrance of tea time



leading edge of the triangle so it seats in the paste. Now fold from the left-hand corner to the right-hand side, in a triangular shape, pressing down the leading edge again. Continue folding in this way, until you reach the end of the strip. Brush the final flap with beaten egg and press to seal. Repeat with the remaining strips.

To make m'hanchas Lay a sheet of pastry on a work surface, brush the right-hand edge with beaten egg, then lay another sheet alongside so that it overlaps this edge by about 2cm. Dot small lumps of almond paste all the way along the bottom edge of the pastry, about 1cm in. Then, using your hands, mould the paste into a continuous sausage shape about 1.5cm in diameter. Now roll the pastry round the paste to form a long tube. Brush the final flap with beaten egg and press to seal. Carefully coil the tube into a spiral.

Prepare the syrup Put the sugar, honey and water in a heavy-bottomed saucepan over a medium heat and stir until the sugar has dissolved, then lower the heat and simmer

for 10 minutes. Add the lemon juice, stir and cook for 10 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the orange-blossom water.

Now fry the pastries Heat the oil in a nonstick pan and fry the briouats or m'hanchas in batches, for 2-3 minutes each side, until crisp and golden. Drain on kitchen paper and leave to cool, then dip in the syrup and leave for 10-15 minutes before removing with a slotted spoon.

To serve, sprinkle the briouats with sesame seeds or decorate the m'hanchas with the almonds.

BOUCHRA'S BISCUITS #1

This, and the following recipe, comes from the cook at Dar Liqama.
 Makes a decent plateful

75g sultanas, chopped
150g walnuts, crushed
250g butter
75g sesame seeds
7 tbsp icing sugar, plus extra for dusting
4 tbsp vegetable oil

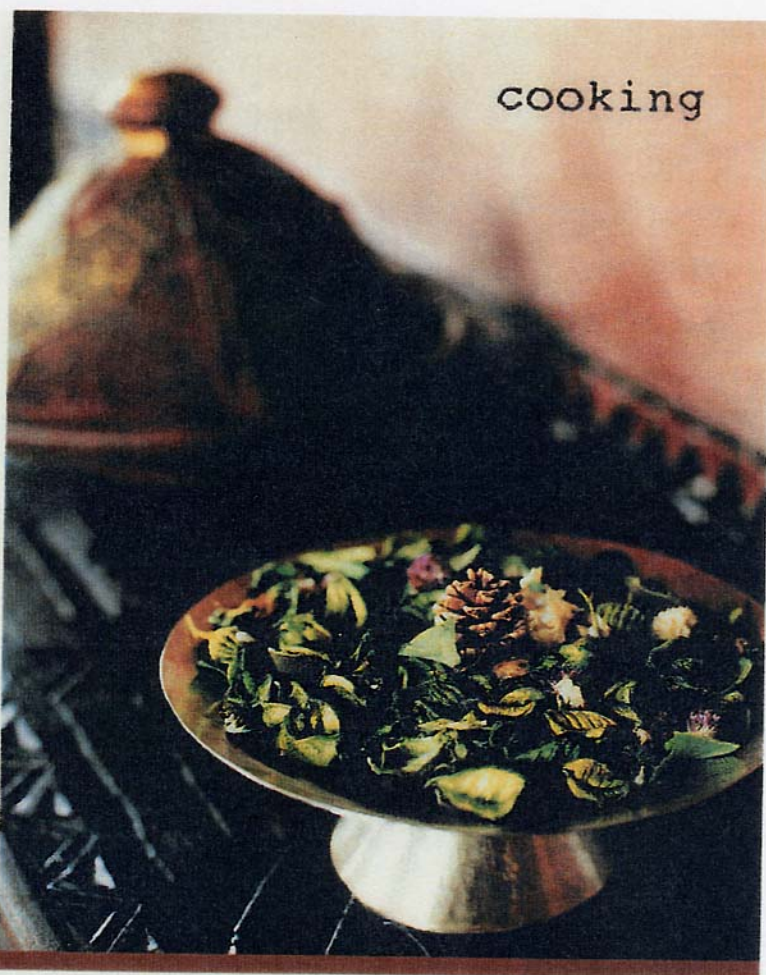
½ tsp vanilla essence
500g plain flour
2 tsp baking powder

Mix all the ingredients in a bowl and knead together until it forms a smooth dough. Shape into walnut-sized balls with your hands, then place on greased baking trays and press down with your hands to form rounds 1.5cm deep by 4cm across. If you want, you can press a pattern into the top. Bake at 240C/475F/Gas Mark 9 for 10-15 minutes (check after 10). Remove from the oven onto a wire rack to cool. To serve, drench each biscuit with icing sugar.

BOUCHRA'S BISCUITS #2

Makes a decent plateful

4 eggs
75g sugar
80ml vegetable oil
Zest of ½ orange
500g semolina
4 tsp baking powder



Orange-blossom water
icing sugar
Whole almonds

Beat together the eggs, sugar, oil and orange zest, then sift in the semolina and baking powder. Mix until combined into a dough and shape into walnut-sized balls. Put some orange-blossom water and icing sugar into separate bowls. Take a dough ball, flatten it slightly, dip the bottom into the liquid, then into the sugar. Place sugared side up on a greased baking sheet, leaving enough space for the biscuits to spread during cooking. Press an almond into the top of each one, then bake at 240C/475F/Gas Mark 9 for 10-15 minutes (check after 10).

ORANGE SALAD WITH CINNAMON
Serves 6 to 8

6 seedless oranges, peeled and pith and any hard core removed
50g icing sugar
Juice of 2 oranges

100ml orange-blossom water
1 tsp ground cinnamon
Sprig of mint leaves

Slice the oranges 5mm thick and arrange in overlapping circles on a large, round plate. Sprinkle over the sugar, then the orange juice and the orange-blossom water. Cover with clingfilm and place in the fridge.

To serve, sprinkle with the cinnamon and place the mint in the centre.

MOROCCAN FRUIT SALAD
Serves 6-8

For the syrup
1 litre of water
200g granulated sugar
150ml orange-blossom water
1 cinnamon stick

For the salad
200g green apples
200g pears
150g strawberries

1 mango
1 small pineapple
Fresh mint, chopped

Bring the water to the boil with the rest of the syrup ingredients and cook gently for one hour. Leave to cool in a bowl.

Peel and cube the fruit, then drop the pieces immediately into the bowl of cooled syrup to prevent them from browning. Cover with clingfilm and leave to macerate overnight in the fridge. Sprinkle with the mint before serving. ■

Mourad Mazouz is the owner of Momo, 25 Heddon Street, W1 (020 7434 4040); and at 2nd floor, Selfridges (020 7318 3620). Recipes by Nardine Akalai. Shot at Dar Liqama, La Palmeraie, Marrakesh (01252 790222, www.luxurypropertyrentals.com). The house also runs cookery courses in winter and autumn. Royal Air Maroc flies direct to Marrakesh and Casablanca (020 7439 4361, www.royalairmaroc.com)