

Cashew cream and other vegan delights in ‘Isa Does It’

By **T. Susan Chang** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT APRIL 01, 2014

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Vegan cookbooks have come a long way in just five years, when an underwhelming “The Vegan Cook’s Bible” by Pat Crocker made the dinner rounds in our house for a week. Today’s vegan cookbooks are as multitudinous and exuberant as their omnivore counterparts. Sure of their audience, they dispense with the conversion narratives and dive right into recipes that wear their rightmindedness lightly, and with a whole lot of flavor.

Isa Chandra Moskowitz, once of Brooklyn, N.Y., and now of Omaha, has had a hand in any number of collaborative vegan cookbooks (including the best-selling “Forks Over Knives” and “Veganomicon”). But this focused solo effort should enchant mainstreamers and the vegan-curious alike.

Some recipes depend on canny substitutions, like cashew cream (soaked, blended cashews) for regular cream. It was a convincing doppelganger in a New England clam chowder recipe, which doesn’t taste a bit like clam, but has the same satisfying richness. A creamy sun-dried tomato penne with broccoli gets an extra dose of sun-dried tomatoes (pureed in the sauce, slivered in the dish), resulting in a plate which, while unsightly, delivers on both texture and taste. Tofu-mushroom Stroganoff swaps seared tofu for beef and doubles down on mushrooms, and you’d be surprised how little you end up missing the less virtuous version.

Sesame slaw with warm garlicky seitan miso and sesame offers crunch and color combined with savory chew. Moskowitz makes effective use of meat substitutes like seitan, the chewy, flavor-absorbing gluten-based protein with the funny name. Thin strips of seitan take a starring role in a “beefy” asparagus stir-fry with fresh herbs. (Here as elsewhere, Moskowitz is vague about the size you should aim for with your knife). And in a red cabbage slaw, seitan absorbs a sweet lime-soy dressing so congenially I find myself dredging the pan appreciatively. The same is true for the combination of tofu and a curried peanut sauce that hits all its marks so seductively you’ll want to eat it all by itself.

A sweet-and-sour brown rice salad sports a bright Southeast Asian profile from little more than sweet chile sauce and a showering of fresh herbs and



Isa Chandra Moskowitz offers up some canny substitutions.



adzuki beans. Portobello mushroom caps marinate in liquid smoke, molasses, and onion and emerge as Korean barbecue burgers to pair with kimchi. Though the caps are juicy and the flavors are forward, there's no pretending it's a substitute for the low, slow, smoky taste of real barbecue.

An eggless coconut French toast introduces me to the idea of pressing shredded coconut into the sides of the bread. Although you won't convince me to give up egg for a cornstarch thickened almond milk batter, the toasty coconut crust is so good I'm never making French toast without it again. And chewy coconut-date bars get relief from the usual brick-like density of granola bars thanks to some puffed rice cereal, another idea I've now permanently airlifted into my repertoire.

If you're not already vegetarian or vegan, will "Isa Does It" cause you to forsake forever the joys of bacon and butter? Probably not. But for those who consider veganism a creed of abstinence and austerity, these joyous, vivid recipes are a persuasive argument to the contrary.

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Isa Does It

Author: Isa Chandra Moskowitz

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