

Çiya

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Çiya

"Çiya", creates its menu from the "kitchen memories" of forgotten dishes, lost tastes and of wiped-off-cultures which have been carried from hand to hand and from taste to taste ...

"Çiya", travels the vast lands from Mesopotamia to Ottoman lands, from Balkans to Caucasia, from Asia to Arabia...

Not being contented with this "Çiya" scans the horizons; wants to be the table of the forgotten tastes of "the world's food culture"; wants to know them, to understand them and to serve people to taste them.

"Çiya", is not the result of a coincidence but the realization of a dream seen for long years... Turkish food culture had such a strong and deep researching spirit first with "Çiya"...

"Çiya", started out with "Kebap and Lahmacun" in 1987; in 1998 "Sofra" was opened. It continues to serve "tastes worth to be discovered" with the immense knowledge and experience it acquired through all these years...

"Çiya" serves the intellectuals and all the members of families regardless of generation differences...



Master Chef of Turkey

Istanbul's Musa Dagdeviren is a chef's chef known internationally for his outstanding Turkish cuisine. Here are seven of his best and simplest recipes, from vibrant salads to juicy kebabs. By Paula Wolfert and Ayfer T. Ünsal

I've been writing about the foods of Turkey for the past 15 years without learning much of the language. But one word I managed to pick up is *esprili*, which means very clever, witty and fun. I mention this word because it perfectly describes Musa Dagdeviren, the brilliant 43-year-old chef at Çiya in Istanbul. Working with him has been one of the most fascinating experiences of my career.

I met Musa last year in Napa, during a festival at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone. I was immediately attracted by the foods he'd set out at one of the tastings, an array as intricate as a Turkish carpet. I'd never seen, much less tried, these dishes before: fresh cheese made from milk fermented with fresh figs, a recipe Musa discovered in the Black Sea town of Samsun; yogurt layered with dried fruits and nuts, a popular mid-Anatolian dessert that Musa tweaks by sautéing the fruits and nuts in brown butter.

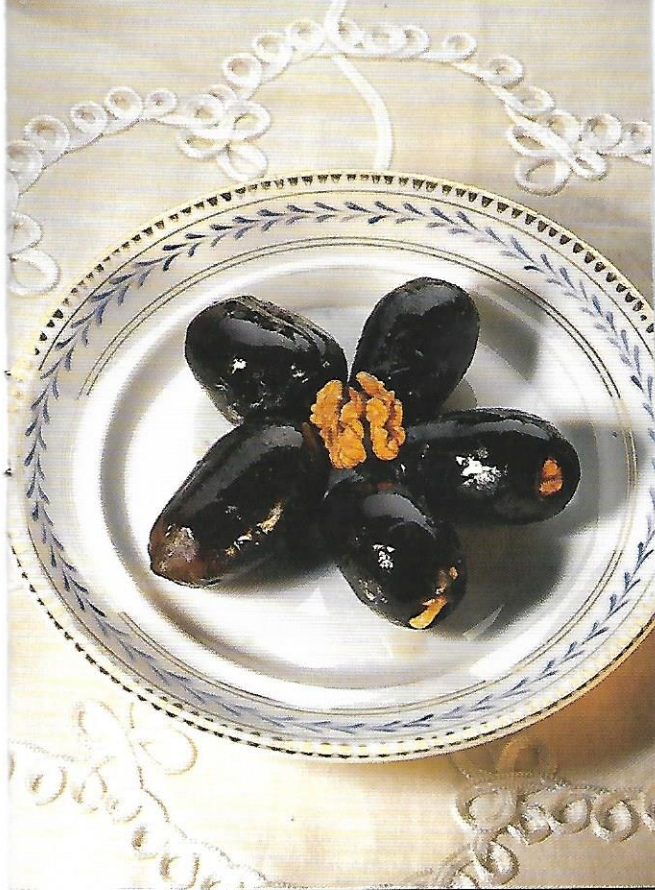
Musa's vision, I learned, is vast and multicultural. He's a pioneer in what I've come to call the new Anatolian cooking; it focuses on regional dishes from all over Turkey but also jumps geographic boundaries to include Greece, Armenia, Iran, Iraq, the Balkans, the Caucasus and beyond. Musa is fascinated by the ethnic



influences—Kurdish, Arab and Jewish, among others—on regional cuisine. He is part chef, part culinary anthropologist. "I am trying to preserve the best of the forgotten foods from the countryside," he says, and his genius is knowing when to leave these recipes intact and when to add a twist of his own. I yearned to learn more. So I went to Istanbul.

Çiya is in Kadıköy, on the Asian side of the city. It is actually a cluster of three small restaurants: two kebab (or bread-and-meat) köftecis and one sofrası, with salads, soups and stews. Hardly any of the dishes can be found elsewhere in Istanbul. Virtually all have their origins in regional peasant cooking—an approach that astounds many Istanbulis, who consider only Ottoman palace-style food worthy of critical praise.

"I'm interested in the food of real people," Musa told me through my interpreter and good friend, the Turkish cookbook author and *Sofra* magazine columnist Ayfer Ünsal. Perhaps because he is a "real person" himself: Half Kurdish, half Turkish, he began his career at three, straddling the racks at his mother's family bakery to sweep excess flour from the loaves. At five, too heavy for straddling, he crushed tomatoes with his feet. At six he hauled barrows of the olive pits used to heat the bakery ovens. Musa talks in a pleasantly conspiratorial manner, leaning forward and speaking softly. "I travel all over the country to cook with people in their homes and also study old books to find new leads," he said. "I get very excited when I discover new poor people's dishes, because I believe only poor people can create great food. If a man has money, he can buy anything, but a person who has nothing must create beauty from within." Musa truly believes this; during our conversation he spent an hour de-



scribing the many miraculous (his word) uses for stale bread: served in a gravy of preserved meat, garlic, tomato and pepper (as in his hometown of Nizip, in southeastern Turkey), say, or soaked in lamb broth and eaten in an olive-oil sauce with scrambled eggs (as in the town of Senkoy, near the city of Antakya). By the time he finished talking, I was dazzled and exhausted. Musa offers more than a thousand dishes at Çiya each year, all prepared with the best seasonal ingredients from specially chosen purveyors and the market nearby. He makes 50 types of meat kebabs grilled with such additions as shallots, apples, eggplant or quinces, or stewed with sour cherries, or served on a smoky tomato sauce. He prepares dozens of stuffed leaves and stewed vegetable dishes like eggplant with lentils and pomegranate molasses, and zucchini with chickpeas and fresh tomatoes. There are hundreds of soups in his repertory. Once you sample a dish, there is little chance you will find it again. But you'll never be disappointed.

On my last night in Istanbul, Musa gave a monumental dinner party with 26 different dishes. When most of the guests had left, he offered to read my coffee grounds. After saying all the usual nice things, he suddenly leaned forward, in his usual conspiratorial manner: Two people were plotting against me! I must stop them.

"Quick, spit on the grinds," he commanded. So I did. And that's when I committed to memory the word *esprili*.

*Paula Wolfert, July 2004
Food and Wine*

