

A PASSION FOR PRECISION



Designer George Freedman cooks in the same way he colours his interiors: with an almost religious attention to the combinations



One of the brighter sparks among the international set of designers working in Australia now is George Freedman of Marsh Freedman Associates, Sydney. He has put his inimitable stamp on well-known Sydney landmarks like the State

Bank, the Powerhouse museum and Bilson's Restaurant by playing on their architectural lines with his artist's palette of colours.

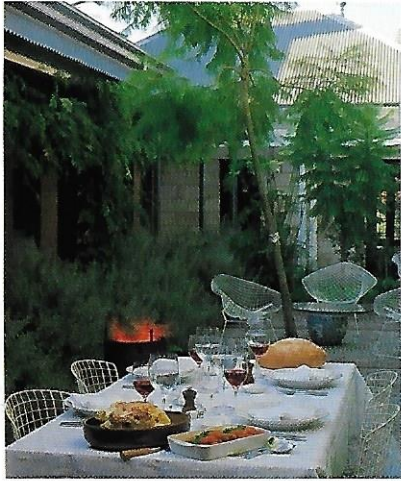
Who would have thought to emphasise the post-modern entrance to the Powerhouse in vivid yellow with accents of mulberry, and turquoise trim? Who would have made a chic city restaurant like Bilson's shimmer with shades of cadmium

lemon and chrome yellow, Venetian and Indian red, burnt sienna, cobalt blue and green? Who else but George Freedman.

As a designer and colourist, Freedman is a modernist. In furniture he is currently prescribing designs by Gerrit Rietveld, Bertoia, Noguchi and Charles Eames while his taste runs to Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier at home. While other designers are talking about introducing brighter colours to interiors, Freedman predicts a new opulence and an even greater intensity of colours. It is, of course, no surprise that his approach to cooking is also individualistic.

Unlike most of us who have gravitated willingly toward simpler styles of cooking because they are lighter and less time consuming, Freedman has not. His first heroine of the kitchen is Alice B Toklas, whose food is full of eggs, cream, flour and sugar. "It takes a long time to prepare

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Braised Chicken Stuffed with Noodles; Alice B Toklas, Freedman's first heroine of the kitchen; Filbert Torte; a courtyard setting. **CLOCKWISE OPPOSITE:** modernist nuances in a Georgian setting; garden tranquillity; Chicken Liver Custard.



and has nothing to do with cholesterol-conscious people or the Diet Coke syndrome," he says.

The fact that this modern designer is attracted to what appears to be old-fashioned food is not as contrary as it first seems. Toklas, in the twenties, cut quite a swathe as an idiosyncratic character who liked to cook and as the lifelong companion

of writer Gertrude Stein. Just as Freedman has a definite point of view when it comes to design, Alice B Toklas was fond of making statements on the subject of cooking.

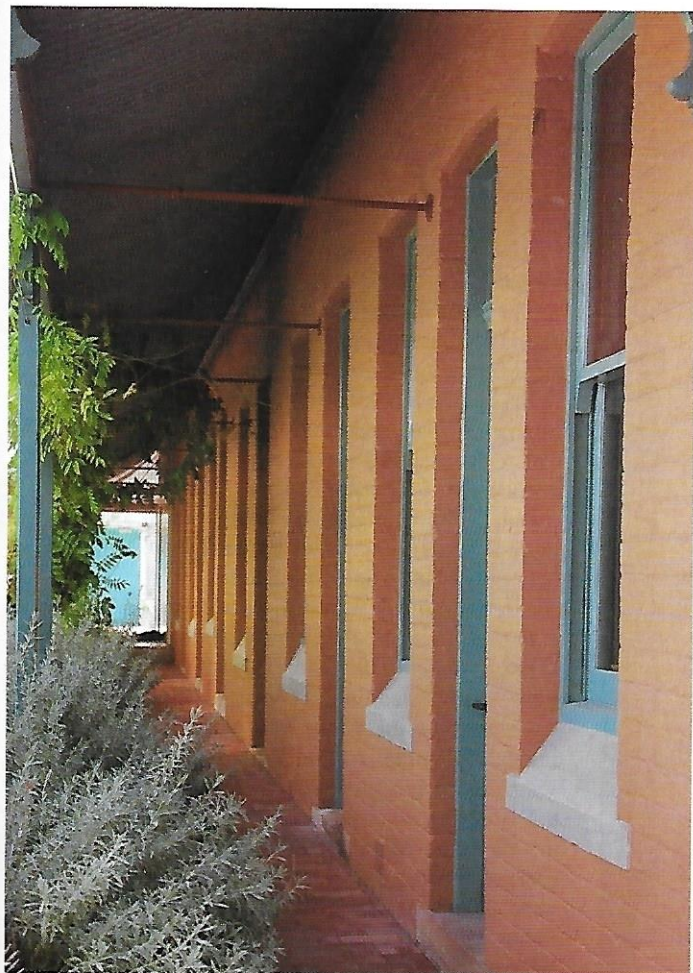
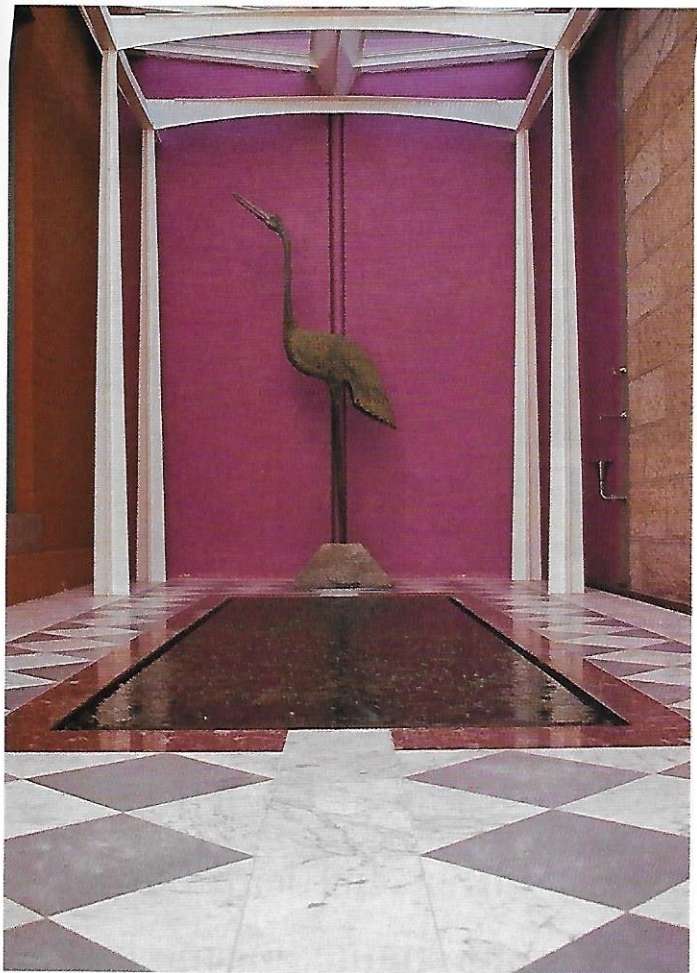
Her cookbook, first published in 1953 and reprinted several times since then, was given to Freedman by a friend in 1959. "The whole book is a fantasy, filled with marvellous stories about food. It is more a series of recollections and anecdotes about the life of Toklas and Stein and their charmed circle of friends, than a straight recipe book. It not only describes the food (which is delicious) and how it was cooked, but the whole context in which it was presented down to who was at the table, the china, the silver and the flowers.

"In chapter two, called Food in French Homes, the scene is set for a lunch party hosted by a young woman who has inherited her father's famous wine cellar. The author has explained how in France, men not women were expected to set the standards in matters of taste. During lunch, the maître d'hôtel is described bringing out various dishes. When he comes to serve an aspic of foie gras, she examines it and then brushes it aside without a word. This young woman's quest for perfection (against convention) intrigued me."

From the eccentric world of Alice B Toklas and her elaborate and delicious recipes, Freedman has since cooked his way through classic cookbooks such as Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* and Giuliano Bugialli's *Classic Techniques of Italian Cooking*. More recently he says he has been inspired by English cook Jeremiah Tower and by Alice Waters of the acclaimed restaurant Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California. "I read cookbooks like some people read novels," says Freedman.

Rather than improvise when cooking, George religiously follows recipes. It appeals to his desire for perfection and his sense of precision.





CHICKEN LIVER CUSTARD

BRAISED CHICKEN STUFFED WITH NOODLES

FILBERT TORTE

WINE SUGGESTIONS

Mitchelton 1988 Rhine Riesling

Schinus Molle 1988 Pinot Noir

Woodstock 1988 Sweet White

*Dishes were presented simply;
“just straight onto the
plates, without adornment”*

“I’m quite strict when it comes to following recipes.”

For this menu, Freedman chose favourite Alice Toklas dishes, plus others. Her chicken liver custard cooked in a mould and served with a tomato sauce flavoured with black olives forms a rich and delicious first course.

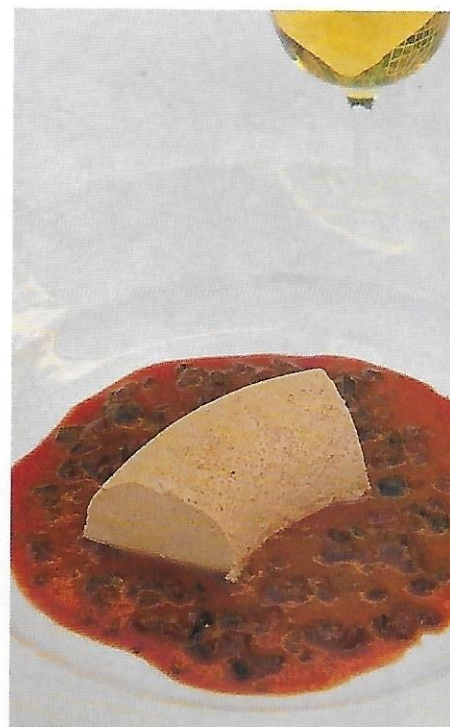
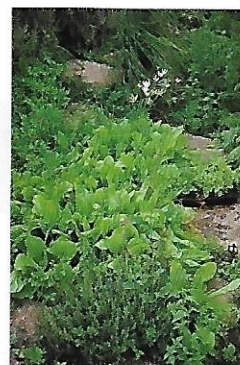
A tasty Toklas braised chicken filled with noodles, mushrooms, Swiss and parmesan cheese and cream, and served with a cheese-flavoured bechamel sauce follows. Using a technique inspired by Bugialli, Freedman prepared carrots to complement the chicken by soaking them in cold water before and after boiling. This enhanced their sweet, full flavour.

A creamy Filbert Torte, based on a recipe Freedman found many years ago in *The New York Times*, provided a sumptuous dessert.

The dishes were presented simply, “just straight onto the plates, without adornment”. His views on the presentation of the food are as definite as those on the food itself.

When it came to the wine to serve with the food, Freedman’s preference was for red. “I like red wine, so I drink red wine.” Guests on the other hand would be offered white wine as well.

The setting for the meal was an open-air garden courtyard enclosed by the Georgian stone cottage where Freedman lives. Covered with white chip marble and filled with greenery, it makes an exquisite dining area. The furniture used for dining in these surrounds is, of course, simple and striking: all white. (*Recipes last pages.*)



Remove the ends and any tough outer skins from the asparagus. Steam stems in a large steamer in a little fast boiling water with the salt and sugar. Remove immediately when only just cooked and place in a colander under cold running water to arrest the cooking. Leave to dry on a kitchen towel and then place flat on doubled kitchen paper in an airtight container until required. As close as possible to serving time, separate the prosciutto slices and roll them loosely. Heat the oil in a wide shallow pan. Fry the prosciutto rolls until just crisp. Drain on crushed kitchen paper towels. Put the asparagus onto a serving dish, grind over some fresh black pepper and garnish with the prosciutto rolls.

Fried Eggplant

(Serves 6)

3-4 medium size eggplants
salt

1 cup flour

2 eggs, lightly beaten

1-1½ cups dry breadcrumbs

freshly ground black pepper

6-12 slices provolone cheese,
.5cm thick

200g butter

Cut the eggplants into 1cm slices. Place in a colander in layers salting each layer lightly. Stand for about 1 hour to disgorge the liquid, wash and pat dry. Flour slices, dip in beaten egg and coat with breadcrumbs and a little black pepper. Heat the butter until frothy and fry the slices until golden brown. Cover each slice with a piece of provolone and cook under a hot griller until cheese has melted. Serve hot or cold.

Tomato Salad

(Serves 6)

2 punnets small tomatoes

2 Spanish onions, peeled and sliced
thinly

a sprig of fresh oregano, leaves
only

¼ bunch of basil, leaves only

30ml balsamic vinegar

½ cup extra virgin olive oil

salt and freshly ground black pepper

Halve the tomatoes and mix them together with the onion in a bowl. Sprinkle with the oregano and toss

with the basil leaves. Whisk together the vinegar and the oil, drizzle over the salad and season to taste. Toss gently and serve as soon as possible.

Chocolate and Almond Cake with Strawberry Sauce

(Serves 8-10)

Cake:

185g dark cooking chocolate

185g unsalted butter

¾ cup raw sugar

6 eggs, separated

185g ground almonds

pinch of salt

pinch of cream of tartar

Icing:

200-250g dark cooking chocolate

50g copha

Garnish:

icing sugar

fresh strawberries and/or

strawberry sauce

Strawberry sauce:

1 punnet small strawberries

1-2 tablespoon apricot jam

½ cup water

To make the chocolate cake: melt the chocolate over hot water and set aside to cool a little. Butter a 23cm spring-form tin, line the base with buttered greaseproof paper, dust the tin lightly and knock out the excess. Cream the butter, add the sugar and beat until light and fluffy. Add the yolks, one at a time, beating after each addition until thoroughly incorporated. Beat in the cooled chocolate and, on a low speed, gradually add the almonds. Preheat the oven to 190°C.

Beat the eggwhites with a pinch of salt and the cream of tartar until they hold stiff peaks but are not dry. Stir a large spoonful of eggwhite into the chocolate mixture and then gradually fold in the remainder, taking care not to reduce the volume. Pour the mixture into the prepared tin and level gently. Bake on the centre shelf for 20 minutes at 190°C. Reduce temperature to 180°C and cook for an additional 40 minutes.

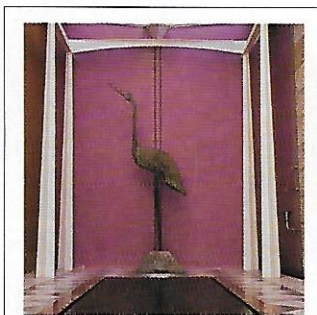
The cake should be moist and soft to the touch when cooked. Wet a kitchen towel, wring out and drape over a cooling rack. Turn out the cake and allow to cool. Peel off the paper.

To make the icing: melt the

chocolate with the copha until an easy spreadable consistency. Using a broad spatula spread it generously over the cake.

To make the sauce: remove the stems from the strawberries and place in a pan with the jam and water. Cook very slowly until the berries are soft but will still hold their shape. Cool and reserve until required.

To serve: dust cake with icing sugar and serve with strawberry sauce or fresh berries.



GEORGE FREEDMAN
page 92

5. Add 3 yolks of eggs. Beat the whites and pour all this into a well-buttered mould.

6. Put in a bain-marie in a medium oven for ½ hour.

7. Prepare a hot tomato sauce with black olives and chopped mushrooms.

8. Remove custard from the mould and cover it with sauce.

9. Serve hot.

© *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book* (Harper & Row)

Tomato Sauce

Tomato sauce is made by heating 4 tablespoons puree of tomatoes with 2 cups dry white wine. When hot pour slowly into 4 tablespoons melted butter that has been mixed over medium heat with 1 tablespoon flour. Stir until smooth and about to boil. Then add ½ teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, a pinch of cayenne, of cloves and of nutmeg and 1 tablespoon onion juice. Add ¾ cup chopped black olives.

© *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book* (Harper & Row)

Braised Chicken Stuffed with Noodles

Poach for 6 minutes in boiling salted water 1½ cups noodle cut in narrow strips. Remove from flame, drain, place under cold water tap and drain again. Place in a bowl, and, mixing lightly with fork, add to them ½ cup grated parmesan, ½ cup grated Swiss cheese and ¾ cup heavy cream. Add ¾ cup small mushroom caps, salt and pepper. Mix well. Stuff the chicken with this dressing. Skewer or sew the opening together. Skewer legs and wings to keep in place during cooking. Put 4 tablespoons butter in enamel-lined pot over medium flame. Brown the chicken lightly in the butter. Add 1 cup hot chicken bouillon. Cover the pot and lower the flame. Simmer for 1 hour, basting from time to time. Prepare a sauce mornay, which is a bechamel to which grated cheese has been added. For this chicken the proportions are 2½ tablespoons butter, 2 tablespoons flour, 2 cups milk, ¼ teaspoon salt. Simmer for ½ hour. Stir with a wooden spoon frequently to prevent burning. ▶

Chicken Liver Custard

Pound in a mortar 2 or 3 chicken livers, add 4 or 5 eggs, 2 cups milk. Mix thoroughly, salt and pepper. Strain through a fine sieve. Pour into an oiled mould. Cook in the oven, the mould standing in a pan of hot water. Serve with a tomato sauce.

© *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book* (Harper & Row)

Liver Custard

1. Prepare a fairly thick bechamel sauce.
2. 125g chicken livers.
3. Chop fine: parsley, a clove of garlic.
4. Mix these together.