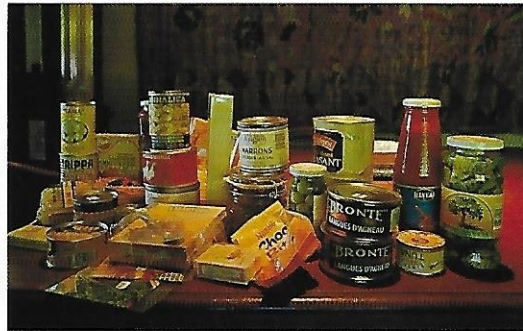


A L f R E S C O



Challenging the maxim that fresh is best, George Freedman wields his can opener and creates a decidedly appetising, no-fuss lunch.

The Tin Man

Interior designer George Freedman's response to the brief was typically novel. "Don't expect anything trumped up or tricky," he said when *Belle* asked him to prepare a weekend lunch at his country house outside Sydney. "I think everything should be very simple. In fact, wouldn't it be interesting, a challenge... to see what could be done with cans and jars and packets?"

Mmm. Canned ingredients hardly seem to match Freedman's reputation as a creative cook, whose dinner guests often include professionals who run the best restaurants around.

Cooking professionals these days preach the maxim "fresh is best", but Freedman rarely minds flouting convention.

And so, one Friday, he came to be combing the shelves of *Al Dieci Alimentari* in Norton St, Leichhardt, and David Jones' food hall for good things in containers.

When *Belle's* team arrived at his farm late Saturday morning, most of his shopping was still unopened, though lunch was to be served in less than one hour. "There's very little to do," said Freedman. "That is the point."

On the table were some fascinating packages: glass jars of mouth-watering Italian

preserves, a collection of cans ranging from Campbell's tomato soup to Bronte langues d'agneau, and various packets. Two were prepared mixes: one from West Germany for potato pancakes, the other from Italy for the classic dessert semifreddo. "I was seduced by the semifreddo packet," said our host. "It comes with a spoon."

Seductive, too, are the charms of Freedman's hideaway. The house, built in the 1860s, is surrounded by a garden of fruit trees, roses, camellia and hydrangea, herbs and salad greens. Garlic grows wild in an adjacent paddock, yabbies are caught in

A fine setting on the verandah, above, with sweeping views of the property, for a lunch fashioned out of canned goods. George Freedman, right, gets to work to prepare the repast. "There's very little to do," he says. "That is the point."

PHOTOGRAPHY: RODNEY WIEDLAND PRODUCED BY DAVINA JACKSON



the dam.

The pastures are best appreciated from the sanctuary of an old planter's chair on the wide verandah. Reach up to pluck a grape from the vines growing along the roofline. Sip one of Freedman's favourite Negroni cocktails (equal thirds of gin, sweet vermouth and campari with ice) as Vivaldi and gentle breezes drift through the air. (Thanks to thoughtful siting on a hillside, the house is sheltered in strong winds.)

After two Negronis, lunch is served at one end of the verandah. First course is a platter of antipasto straight from jars and cans: wild onions, red peppers, sun-dried tomatoes, artichokes, quail eggs and a blend of anchovies and chillies. They're accompanied by a surprisingly delicious cold mixture of tinned tuna and canned fagioli cannolini – white beans. The taste of this salad is sharpened by one fresh ingredient, thinly sliced Spanish onion. Freedman admits that's

"cheating a little" but notes the dressing comes from bottles.

Next, a platter of warm Baxter's roast pheasant with the packet-mix potato pancakes is served. The pancakes were cooked in a frypan on Freedman's Everhot wood stove but he used a portable convection oven – "more control" – to bake the pheasant. Both attract compliments, but Freedman mutters that next time he'll reduce the 40 minute cooking time recommended on the Baxter's can.

Dessert is a contest between two almost identical dishes. One is frozen semifreddo from the packet mix. The other is chocolate ice-cream made to a recipe Freedman clipped from the *New York Times* when he was living there in 1961. "Okay, which is which?" asks Freedman. "The winner gets the spoon from the semifreddo pack." The *Times* recipe is darker in colour and tastes richer. It was made with cream; the semifreddo with milk.



Antipasto platter includes quail eggs, artichokes, anchovies and wild onions.

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As the afternoon drifts toward evening, Freedman arrives with a tray of coffee and a large red tin of Italian amaretti biscuits. "Do you know that trick with the wrappers?" he is asked. A demonstration is urged. So Freedman gathers several wrappers, rolls each into a cylinder and stands them on end in a row. *Belle's* photographer focuses his camera for what promises to be some spectacular shots. As the lighted papers shoot upward in flames, the sky darkens and a storm breaks. Lunch concludes at 6.30pm.

Antipasto

685g jar country-style artichokes

500g jar anchovies

500g jar chillies

550g jar wild onions in vegetable oil

520g jar red peppers in slices

180g jar sun-dried tomatoes

285g can quail eggs

Baxter's canned roast pheasant and red wine jelly is served with crispy potato pancakes from a packet mix.



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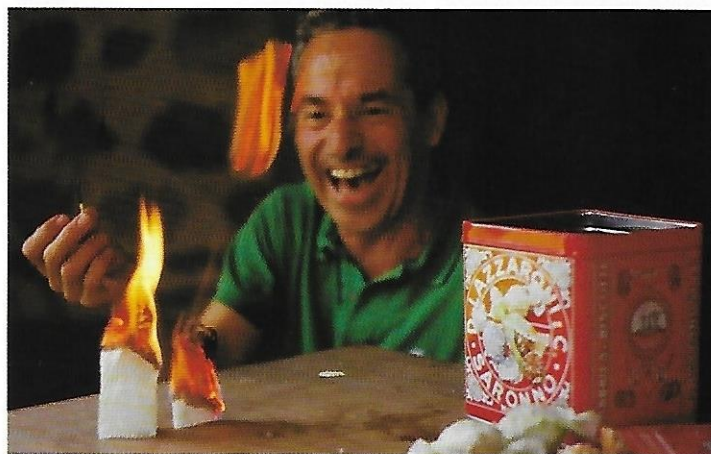
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Look alikes: packet semifreddo and Craig Claiborne's ice-cream vie for honours.



George Freedman delights lunch guests with his flying amaretti wrappers.

Arrange contents of all jars and cans on a platter. The jar sizes, above, will give more than enough of each ingredient to serve six: for each person allow about 2-3 artichokes, 2-3 anchovies, chillies to taste, 3-4 onions, 1 pepper, 1-2 quail eggs, 2 tomatoes. Serve with crusty, country-style bread and Tuna and Bean Salad.

The sun-dried tomatoes and quail eggs are available at David Jones' Food Hall, Sydney. All other ingredients were from Al Dieci Alimentari, Norton St, Leichhardt, NSW.

Tuna and Bean Salad

600g canned fagioli cannolini white beans

½ Spanish (purple) onion, thinly sliced and soaked in water for 1 hour

200g canned tuna

5 tablespoons olive oil

2 teaspoons red wine vinegar or more to taste

salt and pepper to taste

Put drained beans and onion into a salad bowl. Add the drained tuna, breaking it into large flakes with a fork. Add oil, vinegar and seasonings. Toss thoroughly and serve. This recipe is from Marcella Hazan's *The Classic Italian Cookbook* (Macmillan).

Roast Pheasant and Potato Pancakes

1.36kg can Baxter's Whole Roast Pheasant with Red Wine Jelly

½ x 193g packet Panni potato pancake mix

1 egg to blend with pancake mix

Jenny's Schmalz (blended vegetable oil from kosher food shops)

Cook pheasant in casserole dish according to directions on can. Cook potato pancakes according to packet instructions, using Jenny's Schmalz as the frying agent. Slice pheasant into serving portions and place on a platter, surrounded by pancakes.

Semifreddo

½ x 90g packet semifreddo mix

1 cup milk

Make semifreddo according to instructions and freeze in 4-cup ice-cream tray. The semifreddo mix is from Al Dieci Alimentari, Norton St, Leichhardt, NSW.

Craig Claiborne's Ice-cream

¼ cup sugar

½ cup water

185g chocolate chips

3 egg yolks

1½ cups cream

Boil sugar and water for 3 minutes. Pour over chocolate chips in a blender. Cover blender with lid and process on high for 6 seconds. Add yolks to the mixture. Cover and continue blending on high until smooth. Stop blending to stir mixture down, if necessary.

Separately, beat cream until it stands in peaks. Using a rubber spatula, gently fold the chocolate mixture into the whipped cream. Spoon the mixture into a 4-cup ice-cream tray. Cover with foil and set in freezer for 2-3 hours. Recipe from *New York Times Magazine* 1961.

Amaretti Trick

Lazzaroni amaretti biscuits
matches

Unwrap and eat biscuits. Roll wrappers into cylinders and stand on end. Light the top rim of each cylinder. As the flame spreads, the wrappers will fly into the air and then disintegrate. □

