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Samin Nosrat Makes Herself at Home



By Katja Vujić, a writer at The Cut covering culture, news, wellness, and style.

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Illustration: Lauren Tamaki

The runaway success of *Salt Fat Acid Heat* sent Californian Samin Nosrat around the world. Although the chef and cookbook author has seen and sampled a lot, her curiosity and enthusiasm are undiluted by her experience; she maintains her signature full-body zeal for every bite and her spongelike approach to every morsel of information. And wherever she travels, she finds something familiar: her favorite childhood cookies, intricate textiles like the ones she surrounds herself with at home, and anything flavored with Persian sour cherries.

When she finds something *really* good — the perfect popcorn recipe, a deliciously zingy dressing, a cherished community to plan weekly dinners with — she doesn’t tire of it. Her new cookbook, *Good Things*, is devoted to such everyday gems. During her latest trip to New York, she spent her days coping with heat, humidity, and delicious but heavy meals. “Last night, I had a Pepto-Bismol and a Popsicle for dinner,” she told me without a trace of sarcasm. When we met, she said she wanted to create an itinerary that encompasses more than just her culinary side. “My life revolves around all sorts of creative things. I’m more than an eater and a food-maker,” she said. “I’m trying to return to a state of porousness.”

With that in mind, Nosrat decided to start our tour with one of her longtime New York favorites: the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. From there, planning the day was easy; like all of ours, her Google Maps is packed with bookmarks. But her process is a tad more discerning. Nosrat has always enjoyed researching new spots to try in various cities, cross-checking articles and reviews until she feels confident enough to hit “Save.” As she prepares for more travel with the release of *Good Things*, Nosrat visited Brooklyn to show us how to craft a perfectly sentimental afternoon on the road.



Illustration: Lauren Tamaki

Radio Bakery (186 Underhill Avenue, Prospect Heights)



Lucia Tonelli; Photo: Lucia Tonelli.

The first stop of the day was Prospect Heights’s most popular bakery, where the fast-moving line stretches to the laundromat three doors down. We were escorted through the pristine kitchen, where bakers tweezed minuscule flowers onto blueberry tarts and prepared bubbly focaccia dough for the oven; Nosrat pointed out the team’s clever use of rectangular pizza pans instead of sheet pans. At Radio Bakery, the spread consisted of a smoked-salmon sandwich on focaccia with everything-bagel seasoning, an heirloom-tomato croissant, a cheesy pretzel bear claw, a Darjeeling-cardamom morning bun, a seasonal-special blackberry-lavender-goat cheese croissant, and, of course, the bakery’s famous cinnamon roll, which Nosrat described as the idealized emoji of a cinnamon roll.

What makes it so perfect? “It has a lot of cinnamon, frankly,” she explained. “The sugar is treated in different ways, so there’s a dry part of the icing, a creamy part of the icing, and then this caramelized bottom. It really feels like a caricature of a cinnamon roll in the best way, exaggerating all of the qualities of a cinnamon roll. It’s sweet with an exclamation point on top on purpose.”

Sofreh Cafe (216 Flatbush Avenue, Prospect Heights)



Lucia Tonelli; Photo: Lucia Tonelli.

Last year, Nosrat’s favorite Persian restaurant in the city, Sofreh, opened a daytime offshoot, Sofreh Cafe. When she’s here, she has to get the Persian classics: refreshing sharbats in cucumber and sour-cherry flavors, kuku sabzi, nan keshmeshi (“the only cookies in my house as a kid,” Nosrat remembered), and her favorite childhood bread, noon barbari. “At some point, I realized it’s kind of the Persian version of focaccia,” she said. “My mom did a really good job of instilling a pride in me and my brothers around our food and a love for it. That became an anchor around which I contextualize everything else.”

More recommendations include the pistachio-lemon shirmal bun and the popular rose-custard Persian doughnut. “It’s such a specific Persian taste,” Nosrat said to Sofreh chef Nasim Alikhani. “People have such a one-dimensional idea of what we are and who we are. I feel like I’ve spent my whole life watching people from all different cultures interpret their ancestral cuisine in a modern lens.”

Brooklyn Botanic Garden (990 Washington Avenue, Prospect Park)



Lucia Tonelli; Photo: Katja Vujic.

After getting stuffed to the brim with pastries, Nosrat brought me to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, the place that inspired this cultural crawl through the borough: “I kind of wanted to see what you guys have blooming right now — so different than what we have in California.” Nosrat’s own garden, which she shares in a courtyard with her neighbors, features a bean trellis, a 60-year-old fig tree, a variety of tomato plants, and 50-year-old rosebushes (including one with Persian roses Nosrat makes good use of: “I make my own rosewater and try and remember how my grandmother taught me to do it.”).

It’s no surprise that gardening has become a pastime of Nosrat’s — it’s also what helped her realize that her love of food has been with her since childhood. “Every time my grandma would come visit when I was little, she’d put avocado pits and things in her bag and take home cuttings to grow things,” she said. She recounted a visit to a family friend’s orchards in Iran when she was 14. “So much of what I’ve learned has been in western restaurants in Italy, in western culture. So for a long time I believed everything I learned came from Chez Panisse or Italy,” she said. “But things that I believed for my whole life that came from Chez Panisse and from Italy were already inside of me. My grandmothers were gardeners and had orchards. When I garden now, I understand it as a relationship to my past and my ancestors.”

Lisbonata (619 St. Johns Place, Crown Heights)



Katja Vujic; Photo: Katja Vujic.

The day wouldn't be complete without getting one more pastry: the pastéis de nata served up by baker George Kaya and his partner and co-founder, Kamila Śliwińska. “This is such an interesting dessert because it shows up almost identically on the opposite ends of the earth,” Nosrat said, adding that Singaporean author Kevin Kwan taught her about the dessert’s history of being passed through Macau to China via Portuguese colonists. What makes Lisbonata special, she added, is the use of butter rather than the traditional shortening. “It’s a flaky, custard-filled treat. Why wouldn’t you love it?” she asked.

Blue: the Tatter Textile Library (505 Carroll Street, No. 2B, Gowanus)



Katja Vujic; Photo: Katja Vujic.

A folk-arts obsessive, Nosrat took inspiration from her favorite textile artist, Aboubakar Fofana, whose recent workshop alerted her to the cerulean-drenched utopia of Tatter Library. “You should see the amount of these kinds of projects I’ve saved — it’s like they took my Pinterest board and made a couch,” Nosrat said.

She eyed some fabrics made by Fofana and flipped through a book called *Bread and Salt: Iranian Tribal Spreads and Salt Bags*. “There’s just something I’ve always appreciated about embroidered things,” she said. “You just know somebody by hand did all of that stuff. I’ve been thinking a lot about that. That’s why I’m so drawn to folk arts as opposed to capital-A art: this relationship to making in everyday life that very much is similar to food.”

Sawa (75 Fifth Avenue, Park Slope)



Lucia Tonelli; Photo: Lucia Tonelli.



At Sawa — a high priority on Nosrat’s list — owner Samaya Boueri Ziade mixed up a Sawa Temple, a seasonal mocktail topped with sour cherry. Nosrat takes a sip before going straight for the garnish. “I never met a sour cherry I didn’t like,” she says. “That cherry is delicious.” For our final meal of the day, we’re going all out, starting with the fluffiest pita I’ve ever torn into and all the classic Lebanese dips, many of them drizzled with silky olive oil: hummus, labneh, muhammara, and baba ghanouj.

“Lebanese food is so much more than shawarma and falafel,” Nosrat adds, as we dig into the mains and sides: an elevated shish taouk (a chicken skewer served on pita) with za’atar French fries, rakakat (“cheese cigars” wrapped in crispy phyllo), and two salads, the Little Gem and the snap peas. It’s a reminder of Nosrat’s favorite Palestinian restaurant back home, Lulu. “You go in there and it feels young and vibrant and fresh and cool,” she says. “That was how I felt coming in here, too. So much of the experience people have of Middle Eastern stuff is so staid and limited, so there’s a way we’re creating a space and a freshness and that we can have this, too. It is so special.”

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