

**SEVTAP YÜCE**



# TURKISH FLAVOURS

**RECIPES FROM A SEASIDE CAFÉ**



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# FROM ANKARA TO ANGOURIE

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## GROWING UP IN TURKEY

My father moved to Ankara to work when he was sixteen, and I was born there. As a little girl, I used to follow my mother, *anne*, around the kitchen watching everything she did, and first started cooking when I was about six years old. When she made flatbread, I would steal pieces of the dough and try to make a small loaf out of them. When she made biscuits, I would try to make a few on each tray. My father, *baba*, would come home from work and say, 'Are you still making biscuits?', which we made all the time.

There were four children in my family, and we were very poor. Despite this we always ate very well. Two hundred and fifty grams of mince would last our family for four days. I remember being sent to the butcher to buy mince for the family when I was seven years old. I noticed the butcher ran the meat through the mincer twice, and when I asked why, he explained that it was to hide the fat. To this day, I closely watch the butcher to make sure he's not running the meat through twice.



Most people in Turkey were poor when I was a child; we didn't know anything different. My family are Alevi Muslim. We don't fast during Ramadan, we fast at a different time, *Muharrem Ayi*. During this time we would fast for two weeks. At the end of the fasting, families would slaughter a sheep or a rooster, depending on how wealthy they were, and then take the best portions to share with the poorest neighbours.

At this time everyone would hold a feast for their family. If we had a sheep, Anne would smoke the legs and the head of the sheep to remove the hair, then clean and boil them, and make a soup with fresh garlic. Every part of the animal would be eaten. We would fry the sheep's testicles, the kidney and liver. The brains would be made into a salad, drizzled with lemon juice and olive oil.

When I was a small child my father sold fruit and vegetables, similar to a wholesaler. Later he opened a café, or *kahvane*. Only men were allowed in the *kahvane*, where they would play cards or backgammon and drink tea all day. There was no food in the *kahvane*, just coffee, tea and apple tarts (*tarçin*). I would dress up as a boy and serve cups of tea. I was paid five cents a day for this work, but my brother and his friends worked there too, and they were paid fifteen cents a day.

We didn't have access to clean running water from the tap – we had plumbing, but the water would freeze solid in winter. An old man would deliver our water on a donkey every couple of days. He seemed very old to me, and I felt sorry for him riding along in the cold on his donkey. One day I saw him at my father's *kahvane*, so I took the donkey home to deliver our water myself and save the old man a trip. On my way I was stopped by a neighbour, who asked if this was the new owner of the *kahvane*. I said, 'No uncle, he's our new neighbour!'



The women in Turkey spent hours cooking, because everything was made from scratch – even the filo pastry. My grandparents grew wheat, and my uncle grew vine leaves, and when they harvested were given bags of this produce to last us through the winter.

I remember Anne making baklava. First she would soak the wheat for a couple of days, and the sediment would collect underneath. She would keep this sediment, which was very fine like cornflour, then dry it, and sprinkle it over each sheet of the pastry. The best baklava is still made this way; it's a hundred times better than mine.

We made flatbread in summer to be used during the winter. The breads were stored in stacks to dry out, and then when winter came we would sprinkle them with water and heat them through to eat.

When I was about seven or eight years old, I started cutting out recipes from the newspaper and pasting them into a book. I filled the book with recipes and carried it with me for many years, even to Australia. But when my house in Leichhardt burned down, the book burned with it. I was so sad.

My grandparents all lived about four hours away in a little village near Çorum called Karkin Koyu.

I called my mother's stepfather Buýuk baba. He sold animals for a living. One day when he came home with buffaloes, I was so scared that I hid. My grandmother, Anneanne, would milk the buffaloes brought home and make yoghurt from the milk. She would boil the milk, then cool it. When she tested the milk with her little finger and it held for five seconds without burning her finger, it was ready. Next she would take a bit of the old yoghurt and mix it with the hot milk, then pour it back into the pot, stir it and put a lid on it. She would cover the pot with all the blankets and jumpers we had, for about eight hours, then uncover it and cut out the yoghurt with a knife.



*Babaanne and Dede, my paternal grandparents, around 1980*

Babaanne and Dede were my father's parents. Babaanne would make yoghurt from cow's milk or sheep's milk, then put it into a *yayik*, a wooden cask with a lid and a little hole. The cask would hang from the ceiling like a swing. Babaanne would sit on one end and I would sit on the other, and we would rock it backwards and forwards until the butter formed on top. She would scoop out the butter, then wash it. We would have the butter on our bread, and drink the juice from the yoghurt.

I remember one day when I was a child and we were having a picnic, Dede took a watermelon, cut out the pulp and made shepherd's salad. It's made with tomatoes, cucumbers, green capsicum (peppers) and olive oil. He tossed all the salad together and then piled it back into the watermelon shell. That was the only time I ever saw my grandfather cook.

Dede had a *seten*, a big rock and wheel, used for husking the grain from wheat after harvesting. He would roll and smoke his cigarettes, then draw the horse through the fields. All the villagers would bring their grain to him, and he would grind it with the *seten*, to make cracked wheat.

There's a black and white photo of Babaanne and Dede hanging on the wall at Beachwood. It was taken around 1980, and it tells a lot about life and people in Turkey even then. Babaanne is holding one of her pots of yoghurt, and Dede is smoking one of his roll-up cigarettes. They are dressed in coats, standing near a whitewashed house with a wooden doorframe. Dede is in front, scowling at the camera with a lined face and a bushy moustache. Babaanne has a headscarf and is wearing shoes and stockings.

with a beautiful wide smile on her face.

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## THE TURKISH MARKETPLACE

Good Turkish cooking is all about the ingredients. When I was a girl, there was a little grower marketplace in our neighbourhood every Monday or Wednesday. My sister and I would walk from one end of the market to the other, chatting with the stall holders and buying our food for the next few days. One stall holder sold eggplants (aubergines), one sold potatoes, one had a stall with all the green beans and tomatoes, another a stall with peaches, and so on. At the end of the line of fresh produce stalls were the spice stalls, then sardines and watermelons.

Every neighbourhood in Ankara had a market. One day it would be at Maltepe, then the next day it would be in Etlik, and then the next in Ingirli. In Turkey, each area is famous for certain products. Çorum is famous for chickpeas, Malatya for apricots, Kayseri for pastrami, Bursa for chestnuts, Rize for tea, and Izmir for grapes. Growers travelled around to each of the areas selling their produce, so you could get a little of everything in each neighbourhood.

I have a photo of a man selling his chillies on the road outside the markets, because he couldn't afford a stall. He is in his seventies, and his chillies are lined up on the ground on a cloth. This is the best way to buy chillies – fresh from the market, from someone who has lovingly grown them. Turkish chillies, *biber*, grow about twenty centimetres long. There are different varieties, from sweet to mild to hot, in varying degrees of heat. Hot chillies are *açi* and sweet chillies are *tatli*. You can cook them on the barbecue, pan-fry them in olive oil, or eat them raw. They are a part of the daily diet in Turkey, and are eaten for breakfast, lunch and dinner. I come home from work some days and eat fresh chillies from my garden with tomatoes, parsley and feta. In Turkey there are maybe ten different kinds of feta, used for different dishes. I always eat Bulgarian feta in Australia, because it's the best.



## SETTLING IN AUSTRALIA

When I finished high school in Turkey, I worked in accounting because Baba thought I should study. Coming from a poorer family, he wanted me to make something out of my life. Accounting was good but I didn't have the ingredients I loved in front of me – the cucumber and the tomato, the onion and garlic weren't there.

Baba passed away when I was sixteen. That was just before I was found by the man who brought me to Australia through an arranged marriage. I came to Coburg in Melbourne with him in 1985, when I was just seventeen.

I returned to Turkey in 1986 and then came back to settle in Sydney in November 1986. I worked in Marrickville and Newtown, and worked for Ellea Burneau, who ran a patisserie called Little Devotions and Temptations. She also taught me how to speak English.

I worked as a waitress in a café in Darlinghurst called Dov from 1990 to 1993. A friend suggested to me that I become a chef. I started studying commercial cookery, and within six months I was running the café. I never finished the commercial cookery course.

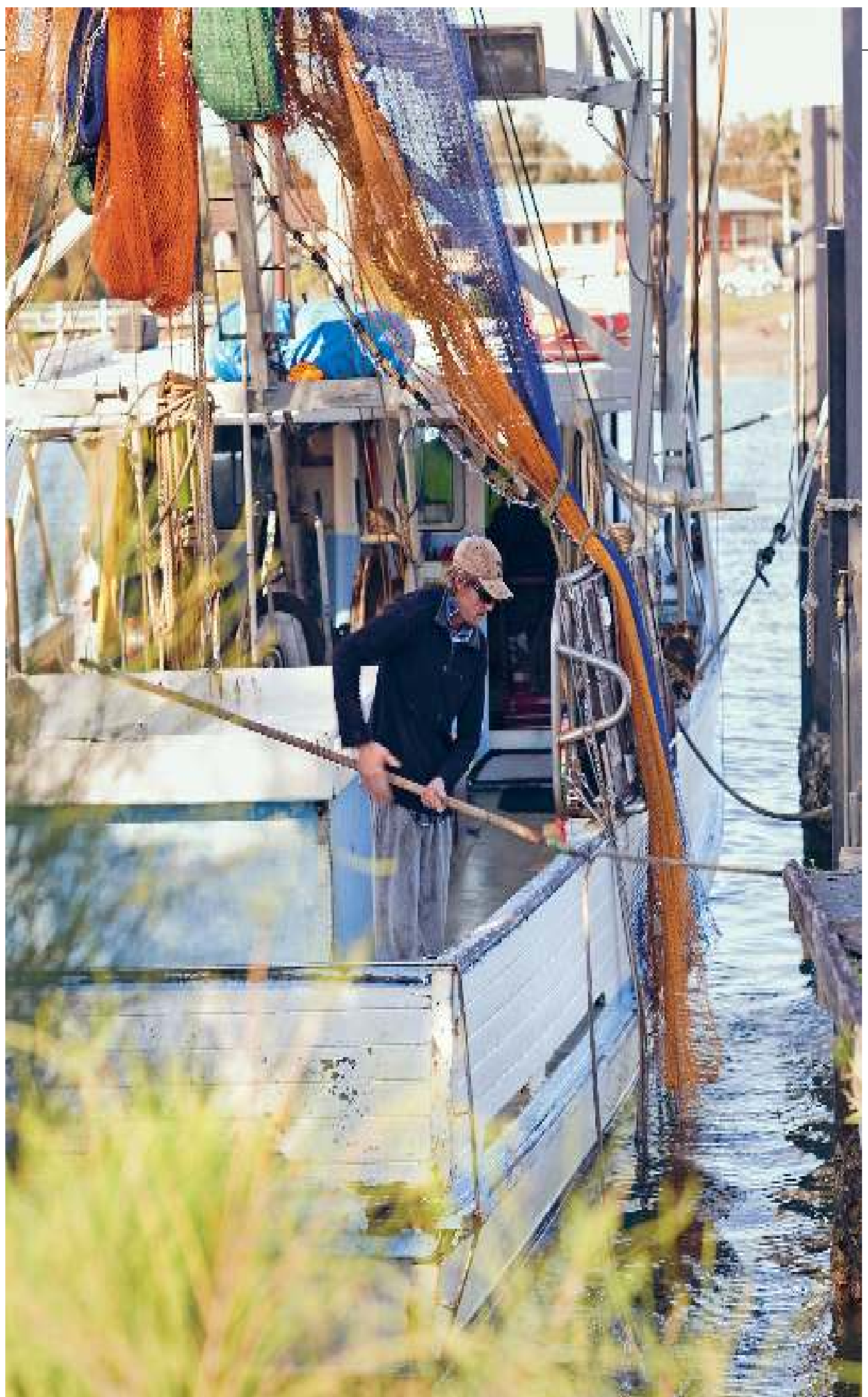
In 1994 I was working in Bill Granger's café in Sydney. When we were walking along William Street one day, I told him I had a plan to move to Angourie for a sea change and open a restaurant. He asked me about Angourie, and I said, 'It's beachy and there's lots of wood', and he said, 'What about "Beachwood"?' So that's how my restaurant got its name.



## BEACHWOOD

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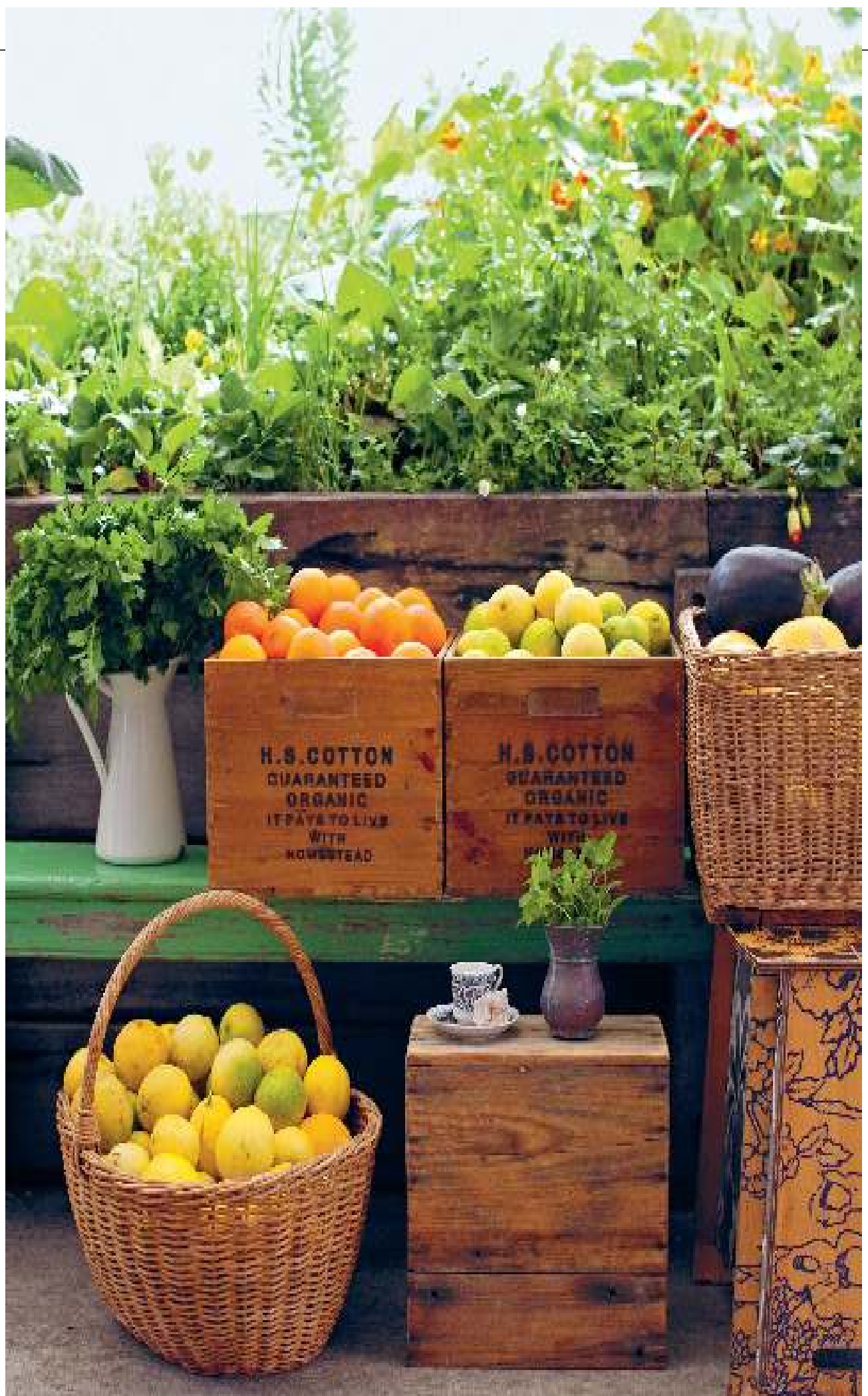
I opened Beachwood at Angourie in 1994, in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales. Angourie is on the surfing pilgrimage route, a favourite with surfers daring enough to throw themselves into its huge and unpredictable wave sets, and with tourists who come for the beaches, the national park and the glorious views. I bought my little house at Angourie in 1997, and love to sit watching the kangaroos at dusk.













I had Beachwood in Angourie until 1998, when I moved it to Yamba, initially on the top of the hill up the road from where it is now. It seated around one hundred people, much larger than today's café.

Beachwood won the best new restaurant award in 1998. Sometimes I am asked why I haven't moved the business to Sydney or Melbourne, but this is home for me. If I lived in Sydney I could never peel enough broad beans to feed all those people. I live here for the lifestyle and the people, and being part of the community.

I sold Beachwood on the top of the hill in 2002, and went to live in Holland for a few years, but I always knew I would return. This place is home to me now.

I opened Beachwood again in High Street, Yamba, in November 2006, and have been there ever since. The High Street café has a tiny kitchen, just four metres by four metres, and ten tables comfortably seating about thirty people. It's a vibrant little café, and I love getting to know each of the people who come here, whether they're tourists or locals.

Every day at Beachwood we get fresh produce from local growers. Doug the fisherman rings me at six o'clock every morning and tells me how last night's catch went. Maybe he's got a haul of crabs and prawns, and then my challenge is to figure out how to prepare them for lunch.

Yamba is situated at the mouth of the Clarence River, where the river meets the Pacific Ocean. We are spoilt with delicious seafood fresh from its natural habitat, caught by local fishermen.

Kim comes into the café every Friday with no shoes on, and brings me fresh eggs from her chickens, along with lemons, chillies, eggplants (aubergines), parsley and broad beans. Bob brings fresh sardines from Iluka, and Ben brings chickpeas. There are others who grow tomatoes and cauliflower, and produce their own honey. This means that we can prepare so much of our menu right here at the restaurant, from my kofte to baklava, cakes and even the honeycomb in Baba's honeycomb butter recipe.

The main reason I love to live and work here is the wonderful connection with the people, local farmers and local produce. The food is connected to a face and a story. My customers can see for themselves how fresh and beautiful the local produce is, and then they understand why it tastes so good.

## THE KITCHEN GARDEN

When I was young, Baba would dig the garden and Anne would plant it out. I remember coming home from school, starving, when I was seven or eight years old. I would grab bread out of the cupboard and run out to the garden. There would be *tere* (similar to watercress), spring onions, flat-leaf parsley, mint, dill and green chillies. I would put these in my bread and this would be my snack after school. In our garden there were also tomatoes, cucumbers, cauliflowers, grapes, sour cherries, apricots and plums.

For me, growing my own food is the most rewarding, most important thing – eating out of the earth as you might say. When I first moved to Angourie and couldn't buy what I wanted, I gave a man seeds from Jerusalem artichokes, coriander, chilli and rocket. I said to him, 'If you can grow this for me I will buy it from you.' He took the seeds and one day he rang me, excited because he had a box of rocket.



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