

Levana Cooks Dairy-Free! - "Stepping beyond necessity ... into luxury"

It seems in recent years that quality has been suffering in so many areas, including publishing. Putting cost cutting first, many publishers forgo the overall appeal of a cookbook, tossing together a poorly edited publication with a mini-booklet of ten or so photos tossed into the middle of the book. To be honest, I would prefer that they omit the pictures altogether, rather than me trying to fish through the cookbook to find the recipes that these photos go to.

But just when I had given up hope, I discovered this cookbook … beautiful, thorough, proofread, and believe it or not, dairy-free. *Levana Cooks Dairy-Free!* contains a full color photo with every recipe. Plus, Levana respects the fact that some of us get a bit cross-eyed when more than one recipe is featured on a page. She follows the neat and tidy one recipe, one photo approach for most of the cookbook, a look that never fails to lure me in.

Levana is all about good food, and it really shows. She cuts to the chase, heading straight into the recipes on page 1. Tips, notes, and substitutions are generously and strategically placed within the cookbook to offer ideas and assistance while actually creating each recipe.

As for the recipes themselves, they are all quite doable. As I slowly worked my way through, earmarking numerous recipes to trial, I felt as though Levana was personally inviting me to think like a chef, pairing shitakes and portobellos with thyme and tarragon in a rich mushroom sauce and laying the apples just so to create an easily elegant apple tart. Yet, she still recognized my cravings for comfort food with simplistic recipes for homemade crepes, chocolate chip cookies, roasted tomato soup, and really, what would a dairy-free cookbook be without lasagna?

It should be noted that Levana does not shy away from dairy substitutes, nor does she depend on them. She uses them where most appropriate, but also exercises her right to use simple whole foods whenever best.

Personally, I rarely use dairy subs, such as vegan cheeses or sour cream, so I naturally gravitated toward certain recipes in *Levana Cooks Dairy-Free*, namely the smoothies, brunch dishes, and soups, which seem to be my latest addictions. For each recipe, I have found that I will need a quick trip to the store for one ingredient or another that I don't readily stock (i.e. miso paste or escarole), but I have scouted around, and none seem to be hard to find.

For a brief synopsis on the vitals, I would estimate that this cookbook contains around 100 recipes. The chapters include (with sample recipes noted) Breakfast and Brunch Dishes (i.e. blueberry scones and eggs Benedict), Soups (i.e. vichyssoise and French onion soup), Main Courses (i.e. pizza puttanesca and chicken tandoori), Desserts (i.e. tiramisu and chocolate truffles), Dips and Spreads (i.e. green goddess sauce and smoked salmon spread), and A Few Favorite Drinks (i.e. iced mocha).

To date, I would have to say that *Levana Cooks Dairy-Free!* is one of the most well thought out and executed cookbooks I have viewed, and with a very nice range of recipes. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to anyone who is lactose intolerant, or otherwise seeking luxurious and delicious dairy-free recipes. Oh yes, and as you may have guessed, it is perfect for entertaining.